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Letter from the editor

This special issue of *Workers of the World – International Journal on Strikes and Social Conflicts* is entirely dedicated to global labour history.

To prepare this special issue, we've invited as guest editor Christian G. De Vito. Christian graduated in History from the University of Florence and obtained his PhD in Contemporary History at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa. He is an honorary fellow at the International Institute of Social History (IISG), member of the editorial board of the International Social History Association (ISHA) newsletter, co-chair of the Labour Network of the European Social Science History Conference (ESSHC) and member of the board of the Società Italiana di Storia del Lavoro (SISLAV). As you will see, he did a terrific job as editor of this issue. You are invited to read his introduction, "New perspectives on global labour history".

This third issue of *Workers of the World* is completed with an interview with Nicolás Iñigo Carrera and Maria Celia Cotarelo, two Argentinian researchers from PIMSA – Program of Investigation about the Movement of Argentinian Society, about the *piqueteros* movement, who mobilized the unemployed in Argentina.

Workers of the World is an academic journal with peer review published in English, for which original manuscripts may be submitted in Spanish, French, English, Italian and Portuguese. It publishes original articles, interviews and book reviews in the field of labour history and social conflicts in an interdisciplinary, global, long term historical and non Eurocentric perspective.

Articles should be sent, according to the Editorial and publishing rules that you may find in our site (<http://workersoftheworldjournal.net/>), to the executive editor at workersoftheworld2012@yahoo.co.uk.

António Simões do Paço
Executive Editor

New perspectives on global labour history. Introduction

*Christian G. De Vito*¹

This introductory article is divided into two parts. Part 1 sketches a general picture of the origins and key concepts of *Global labour history*. Part 2 discusses the “new perspectives” proposed in the special issue – namely, a more dynamic methodological frame for “the global” and a broader chronological scope going back before 1500 – and highlights the impact they might have on the study of key themes in *Global labour history* such as

¹ A draft of this article was discussed on 19 March 2013 in a meeting of the research department at the IISH. I wish to thank the following colleagues for their comments and suggestions: Touraj Atabaki, Rossana Barragán, Karin Hofmeester, Marcel van der Linden, Huub Sanders and Anushay Malik. Stefano Agnoletto and Andrea Caracausi also provided useful feedback on an earlier draft of the article. I wish to thank all the authors that have contributed to this special issue, the anonymous referees that have reviewed the articles, Antonio Simões do Paço and Raquel Varela for inviting me to act as guest editor, and Sean Purdy for the language editing. Part 1 of the article is a re-elaboration of the following articles (in Italian): DE VITO, C.G., “La proposta della Global labour history nell’era della ‘globalizzazione’”, *Passato e Presente*, 30, 85, pp. 177-188, 2012; DE VITO, C.G., “Introduzione”. In: DE VITO, C.G. ed., *Global labour history. La storia del lavoro al tempo della ‘globalizzazione’*. Verona: Ombre Corte, 2012, pp. 7-17. Besides the sources quoted in the footnotes, it is based on the interviews done at the International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, with Marcel van der Linden (20.1.2011), Jan Lucassen (7.2.2011) and Lex Heerma van Voss (10.2.2011), on the written reply by Amarjit Kaur (University of New England, Australia) to my questionnaire, and an interview on Skype with Rana P. Behal (University of Delhi, India).

the role of (free and unfree) labour relations in the process of labour commodification and the conceptualization of work and labour. The contribution of each article to the general discussion is briefly outlined.

Part 1. What is Global labour history?

The end of labour history?

In the early 1980s, the new social and labour history that had developed in the previous two decades entered a deep crisis. Its main cause was the end of the cycle of social conflict that had begun in the mid-1960s, backed by world economic restructuring. Ten years later, changes in the international political context after the fall of the Berlin wall and the USSR furthered the crisis and threatened the very legitimacy of a social and labour history that had been traditionally associated with the socialist, communist, anarchist and social democratic movements. As a result, a tendency emerged among many historians to shift their research interests towards other approaches – especially gender studies, cultural history and business history – and a general fragmentation of the historiographical field took place.²

Investigating the origins and developments of *Global labour history* means describing a different way out of that crisis – one that led to the radical re-thinking of labour history, rather than to its abandonment, and to a new synthesis between theory and empirical research, rather than to disciplinary and epistemological fragmentation.

The place where this process was set in motion is the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam, one of the global symbols of working-class historiography because of the collections it has hosted since

² For recent examples of this broad discussion, see for instance MALATESTA, M. ed., *Le metamorfosi della storia sociale, Memoria e Ricerca*, Special issue, no. 10, 2002; CHARLE, C. “Contemporary French Social History: Crisis or Hidden Renewal?”, *Journal of Social History*, 37, 1, pp. 57-68, 2003; KIRK, N. “Challenge, Crisis, and Renewal? Themes in the Labour History of Britain, 1960-2010”, *Labour History Review*, vol. 75 (2010), 2, pp. 162-180; PARTNER, N. and FOOT, S. eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory*, London: Sage, 2013 (esp. Chapter 14: LEWIS, B. The Newest Social History: Crisis and Renewal).

its creation in 1935.³ Ever since the foundation in 1993 of the research department directed by Jan Lucassen, a double expansion of the historiographical perspective has taken place: on the one hand, a thematic expansion has meant addressing class, gender, religious and ethnic working class identities; on the other hand, the spatial expansion has liberated the imagination from Eurocentric and methodologically nationalist prejudices.

Lucassen and Marcel van der Linden's publications in the 1990s help us in mapping the new themes.⁴ They paid attention to forms of organizations and conflicts different than those stemming from party and union experience. Guilds, cooperatives, self-help associations were addressed, as well as revolts, luddism and consumers' movements. Moreover, they investigated the everyday life of working-men and women, stressed the importance of households, gender, religion and ethnicity, of private and public strategies, personal communities and vertical relations such as patronage.

The spatial expansion stemmed from the dissatisfaction with the Eurocentric approach, both when this led to the complete remotion of the history of non-Western countries and when it assumed the more subtle form of "methodological nationalism", that is, the analysis of the history of "the South" as a never-ending pursuit of the European and US "model" of development. This was an approach that the IISH researchers observed even in the work of the founder of "new social history", E.P. Thompson, notwithstanding his familiarity with Indian culture and history and his fundamental internationalist commitment.⁵

The reaction to this approach first led to a mere expansion of previously elaborated issues and methods to new geographical areas (esp. Russia/USSR and the Ottoman Empire/Turkey). Since the mid-1990s, however, a deeper

³ Information on the IISH can be found in the internet site: www.iisg.nl. On the origins and early history of the IISH see HUNINK, M. *De papieren revolutie. Het Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis 1935-1947*, Amsterdam: Stichting IISG, 1986. Also published in Italian as *Le carte della rivoluzione: l'Istituto Internazionale di Storia Sociale di Amsterdam Nascita e sviluppo dal 1935 al 1947*. Milano: Pantarei, 1988.

⁴ See VAN DER LINDEN, M. and ROJAHN, J. eds., *The formation of the Labour Movements, 1870-1914: An International Perspective*. Brill: Leiden 1990, 2 vols.; VAN DER LINDEN, M. ed., *The end of Labour History?*, *International Review of Social History*, special issue, 38, 1993; VAN DER LINDEN, M. and LUCASSEN, L., eds., *Working on Labor. Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

⁵ VAN DER LINDEN, M. and LUCASSEN, J. *Prolegomena for a Global Labour History*. Amsterdam: IISH, 1999.

encounter took place with the historiographical perspectives stemming from the “Global South”, the turning point being the exchanges with Indian historians that culminated in December 1996 with a joint conference in New Delhi and the foundation of the Association of Indian Labour Historians.⁶

The outcomes of that intellectual encounter are visible in the late 1990s works of the IISH researchers.⁷ While in a 1993 conference the key question was still the possible end of labour history, in a provocative 1999 paper Van der Linden could “announce” the “close end of national history [*vaderlandse geschiedenis*]”. In that same year, in a brief paper entitled *Prolegomena for a Global Labour History*, the new research field officially got its name and in 2000 it was presented to the public for the first time during a conference organized in Amsterdam, with the participation of scholars from all over the world, besides those of the IISH.

Rethinking concepts, building the network

“We should re-examine all the schemas we were educated in on their merits” – wrote Van der Linden in 2003,⁸ two years after he had replaced Lucassen as head of the IISH research department. The process started in the 1990s has gone far beyond a mere expansion of the themes and spaces addressed. It has fostered the need to rethink key concepts in labour history. In particular, the reconceptualization of the “working class” beyond wage labour symbolizes the transformation achieved by *Global labour history*, that addresses the history of commodified labour and seeks to investigate all its forms on a global scale:⁹ wage labour, but also serfdom and slavery, self-

⁶ For an important publication of Indian labour history, see BEHAL, R.P. and VAN DER LINDEN, M. eds., *Coolies, Capital, and Colonialism: Studies in Indian Labour History*, *International review of social history*, special issue, 51, 2006.

⁷ VAN DER LINDEN, M. *Het naderende einde van de vaderlandse geschiedenis en de toekomstige studie der sociale bewegingen*. Amsterdam: IISH, 1999; VAN DER LINDEN, M. and LUCASSEN, J. *Prolegomena*. The proceedings of the conference “Global Labour History in the Twenty-First Century” (Amsterdam, 23th-25th November 2000) published in LUCASSEN, J. ed., *Global Labour History. A State of the Art*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2006.

⁸ VAN DER LINDEN, M. “Refuting Labour History’s Occidentalism”. In: DAS, A.N. and VAN DER LINDEN, M. eds., *Work and Social Change in Asia: Essays in Honour of Jan Breman*. Delhi: Manohar, 2003, p. 261.

⁹ See esp.: AMIN, S. and VAN DER LINDEN, M. eds., “‘Peripheral’ Labour? Studies in the History of Partial Proletarianization”, *International Review of Social History*, 41, 1996;

employed, domestic and “reproductive” labour and the various forms of subsistence and cooperative labour.¹⁰ Furthermore, global labour historians are aware of the fact that these forms have often co-existed within the same place and in the experiences of the very same individuals, as was the case for many peasant-workers and lumpenproletarians, for the slaves who worked as sharecroppers in eighteenth-century Jamaica and for a Simon Gray, a slave owned by the Natchez shipping business, who worked as captain of a crew made up of wage labourers and slaves in the southern US between 1845 and 1862.

In order to make sense of these multiple experiences, global labour historians deconstruct the traditional interpretation that links the advent of capitalism to the process of proletarianization and stigmatizes labour relations different from wage labour as “unfinished” development and “backwardness”. They question the “free/unfree labour” divide and the very idea of “peripheral labour”, and show the (eventually conflictual) ways by which pre-existent productive, cultural and household forms actively take part in the process of labour commodification. To the static idea of an “Industrial revolution” that took place in the late eighteenth-century England and was later “exported” to the rest of the world, these scholars counterpose an “industrious revolution” made up of diffuse transformations of work that took place in hundreds of households in various parts of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Western Europe and in eighteenth-century East Asia.¹¹ This, in turn, leads them to chronologically expand the

BRASS, T. and VAN DER LINDEN, M. eds., *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1997.

¹⁰ For the examples in the text: HOERDER, D. “Capitalization of Agriculture, 1850s to 1960s: Rural Migrations in a Global Perspective”. In: VAN DER LINDEN, M. and HIMMELSTOSS, E. eds., *Labour History Beyond Borders. Concepts and Explorations*. Wien: ITH, 2009, pp. 157-176; VAN DER LINDEN, M. *Workers of the World. Essays Toward a Global Labour History*. Brill, Leiden 2008, pp. 26-27.

¹¹ The concept of “industrious revolution” stems from de VRIES, J. *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behaviour and the Household economy, 1650 to the present*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. On the “industrious revolution” in East Asia see ARRIGHI, G. *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-first Century*. London: Verso, 1997. The debate on “industrial” vs “industrious” revolution is also mirrored in the “great divergence” debate. Consult BIN WONG, R. *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997; POMERANZ, K., *The Great Divergence. China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. For a recent pathbreaking article (in two parts) see LUCASSEN, J. “Working at the Ichapur Gunpowder Factory in the 1790s (Part I)”, *Indian Historical Review*, 39, 1, 2012, pp. 19-56 and LUCASSEN, J.

research field of *Global labour history*, going back at least to the early modern period.

Each of these issues is openly debated among global labour historians. A fundamental discussion takes place for instance on the very reconceptualization of the working class and results in categories such as those of “labouring poor” and “subaltern workers”, respectively proposed by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and by Van der Linden. Moreover, the peculiarly Marxist approach of the latter, although influential on the work of many scholars, has been explicitly criticized from various perspectives: on the one hand, from a more “orthodox” Marxist approach, Bryan D. Palmer has pointed to the fact that deconstructing the centrality of wage labour might imply a risk of theoretical and political fragmentation; conversely, Willem van Schendel has wished for the overcoming of any interpretation based on Marxism and has stressed the importance of the autonomy of cultural factors, partly following the *Subaltern Studies* approach.¹²

Global labour history is not conceived as a “school”, but rather as an “area of interest”; it is not a vertical organization, but a network continuously assembling and breaking up in relation to specific research projects; it does not aim for a new “grand narrative”, but rather to partial syntheses based on multiple empirical research and various intellectual interpretations. This pragmatic attitude makes it difficult for historians to clearly define the borders of *Global labour history*, but it makes it possible for this area of interest to embrace new contributions and new critiques. It also stimulates scholars to organize their work cooperatively across geo-political, linguistic, cultural and disciplinary borders, such as is the case of the *Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations* project, that seeks to “gather statistical data on the occurrence of all types of labour relations in

“Working at the Ichapur Gunpowder Factory in the 1790s (Part II)”, *Indian Historical Review*, 39, 2, 2012, pp. 251-271.

¹² PALMER, B.D., review of *Workers of the World, Labour/Le Travail*, 65, 2010; VAN SCHENDEL, W. “Stretching Labour Historiography”. In: Behal and van der Linden, *Coolies, Capital, and Colonialism*, *op.cit.*, p. 260; BHATTACHARYA, S. “Introduction”. In *Ibid.*, pp. 7-19; VANDER LINDEN, M. *Workers of the World. op.cit.* For broad discussions, see especially VAN DER LINDEN, M. and ROTH, K.. 1, 2, January 2013, dossier on “Who is the Working class?”, pp. 7-104.

all parts of the world during five cross-sections in time, i.e. 1500, 1650, 1800, 1900 and 2000” and involves more than fifty scholars from all over the world in a complex network of international workshops.¹³

The publications that directly stem from the collective projects provide useful information on the expansion of the network of *Global labour history*, as well as on its present limitations.¹⁴ For instance, they show the shortage of contacts with scholars in certain areas – especially the Arabic world and China – and highlight the crucial position the IISH still holds within the global network, particularly in terms of project, coordination and fund-raising. However, in order to support a process of decentralization, since 1994 the Sephis programme – first hosted at the IISH and now moving to São Paulo – fosters systematical South-South exchange.¹⁵ Furthermore, the restructuration of the collection department of the IISH, through the creation of regional desks of the Institute in every continent, will advance this process further.

Since the early 2000s, a growing autonomy of scholars and research centres from the Global South is visible within the *Global labour history* network.¹⁶ This is especially true for a number of economically developing countries, as the conferences held in Pakistan (December 1999) and South Korea (June 2001) suggest and is particularly clear with the Indian AILH conferences, the activities of the South African *History Workshop* and the foundation in 2001 of the working group *Mundos do Trabalho* within the Brazilian *Associação Nacional de História* (ANPUH).

¹³ <https://collab.iisg.nl/web/LabourRelations/>

¹⁴ DAVIES, S. et. al. eds., *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History, 1790-1970*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2000; HEERMA VAN VOSS, L., HIEMSTAR-KUPERUS, E., VAN NEDERVEEN MEERKERK, E. eds., *The Ashgate Companion to the History of Textile Workers 1650-2000*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010; ZÜRCHER, E.-J. ed., *Fighting for a Living. A Comparative History of Military Labour 1500-2000*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013. For the ongoing projects on prostitution and shipbuilding, see the IISH website. Beyond these publications, some important “places” of Global labour history are the journal *International Review of Social History*, the *European Social Science History Conference* and the *International Social History Association* (ISHA).

¹⁵ www.sephis.org/ [all websites quoted in this article have been accessed on 3 April 2013].

¹⁶ VAN DER LINDEN, M. Speaking Globally, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 75 (2009), pp. 184-188. For the websites mentioned in the text: www.ifch.unicamp.br/mundosdotrabalho/; <http://www.indialabourarchives.org/ailh.htm>; <http://www.ialhi.org/>; <http://www.iassc-mshdijon.fr/?lang=en>; <http://storialavoro.wordpress.com/tag/sislav/>

In the last months *Global labour history* has received growing attention in “the West” as well.¹⁷ Special issues have been published in the German open-access journal *Sozial.Geschichte Online* (October 2012) and in the French journal *Le Mouvement Social* (October-December 2012). Relationship with Southern European labour historians have become more systematic as a consequence of the creation of the International Association of Strikes and Social Conflicts – whose official journal is *Workers of the World* – and thanks to the dialogue initiated with new national labour history associations, such as is the case with the *Società italiana di storia del lavoro* (SisLav) created in May 2012. Moreover, a collection of essays by global labour historians has been translated into Italian, a *Global labour history* programme will start at the Central European University in Budapest, and individual scholars from Belgium, Austria, Sweden and England show growing interest. Finally, the publication of Van der Linden’s article entitled *The Promise and Challenges of Global Labor History* in the journal *International Labor and Working-Class History* (Fall 2012) opens up new possibilities for debate in the US as well.

Part 2. New perspectives on global labour history

In which directions can *Global labour history* further expand? The articles in this special issue suggest two new perspectives: new visions on the way “the global” is understood, and the expansion of the chronology before 1500. Both approaches aim to strengthen the critique of Eurocentrism and methodological nationalism and to explore further two of the key issues proposed by global labour historians so far: on the one hand, the analysis of the multiple forms of labour relations implicated in the process of commodification of labour; on the other hand, the study of the way work and labour have been conceptualized across time and space.

¹⁷ For some of the initiatives mentioned in the text see VAN DER LINDEN et. Al. special issue on “Travail et mondialisations”, 241, 4, October-December 2012, pp. 3-29; DE VITO. “Global labour history”. *op.cit.*, ; VAN DER LINDEN, M. ed., *The Promise and Challenges of Global Labor History*, *International Labor and Working-Class History* (New York), No. 82, Fall 2012; *Sozial.geschichte* on line: <http://duepublico.uni-duisburg-essen.de/servlets/DocumentServlet?id=29891>; International Association “Strikes and Social Conflicts” <http://iassc-mshdijon.in2p3.fr/?lang=en> ; Società italiana di storia del lavoro (SisLav) <http://storialavoro.wordpress.com/>

New visions of “the global”

Collective research projects such as the *Global Collaboratory* and the studies on dock workers, textile workers, shipbuilding labour and prostitutes reflect the macro-analytical approach that has been hegemonic in *Global labour history* since its inception, influenced by social science history approaches and transnational comparative history.¹⁸ The related “collective research model” entails gathering data on a national basis according to a common frame and then to compare them in order to understand interactions among patterns and factors.¹⁹ Its goal is, potentially at least, to “cover the world”.

This model of research organization has fostered cooperation among scholars worldwide and has contributed to the very creation of the network of *Global labour history*. Its macro-approach continues to produce innovative insights, e.g. on multiple labour relations in different temporal and spatial contexts and on the intertwinings between workers’ class, gender and ethnic identities. However, its exclusive use in the collective projects reflects and, in turn, accentuates the limited debate on spatiality that has taken place among global labour historians so far. The overall impression is

¹⁸ For some fundamental overviews of the different tendencies within *Global History* and *World History* see *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, special issue edited by E. Anheim, R. Bertrand, A. Lilti, S. Sawyer on “Une histoire à l’échelle globale”, 56, 1, 2001; MANNING, P., *Navigating World History. Historians Create a Global Past*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003; BUDDE, G., CONRAD, S., JANZ, O. eds, *Transnationale Geschichte. Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006; ORTEGA Lopez, T.M. ed. *Historia global. El debate historiográfico en los últimos tiempos*. Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2007; TESTOT, L. ed., *Histoire globale: un autre regard sur le monde*. Paris: Science Humaines Editions, 2008; DI FIORE, L., MERIGGI, M., *World History. Le nuove rotte della storia*. Roma: Laterza, 2011; MAUREL, C. ed., *Essai d’histoire globale*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2013; BERG, M. ed., *Writing the History of the Global. Challenges for the Twenty-First Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press and British Academy, 2013. On the debate on comparative and transnational history: HAUPT, H.-G., KOCKA, J., *Comparative and Transnational History. Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*. Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2012.

¹⁹ For a detailed description of the *Collective Research Model* consult VAN NEDERVEEN MEERKERK, E., *Covering the World: Textile Workers and Globalization, 1650-2000. Experiences and Results of a Collective Research Project*. In: VAN DER LINDEN and HIMMELSTOSS. *Labour History Beyond Borders, op.cit.*, pp. 111-138. A variation of this methodology is used by Jan Lucassen in some of his diachronical comparative studies. See for instance: LUCASSEN, J., “Brickmakers in Western Europe (1700-1900) and Northern India (1800-2000): Some Comparisons”. In: LUCASSEN. *Global Labour History. A State of the Art, op.cit.*, pp. 513-572.

that, while the thematic and geographical expansion of research interests has produced qualitative change in the conceptualization of key issues, it has had much less influence on the way space and connections are understood. As a matter of fact, in *Global labour history* as in some branches of *world history* and *global history*, there has been and there still is a tendency to merely equate “the global” with the world, to marginalize “the local” to the rank of “case study” and to address the connections within global space mostly through comparisons among structural patterns.

In a recent article published in the French journal *Le Mouvement Social* Van der Linden has explicitly addressed this issue.²⁰ He has defined the object of global history as “the description and analysis of the growing (or declining) connections (interactions, influences, transferts) between different regions of the world, as well as the economic, political, social and cultural networks, institutions and media that have played a role”. Furthermore, he has affirmed that “global history... should not necessary deal with the big-scale; it can include micro-history as well” and has consequently pointed to the strategy of “following the traces we are interested in, whatever the direction they lead us to: beyond political, geographical and disciplinary borders, temporal frames and territories”.

The articles in this special issue suggest that *Global labour history* can benefit from this more dynamic spatial perspective. During the last decades, significant strands within global history, as well as new approaches within the fields of geography, archaeology and anthropology, have systematically explored this field.²¹ The reconceptualization of space that has followed,

²⁰ All quotation in the text are taken from VAN DER LINDEN, M., “Éditorial. Enjeux pour une histoire mondiale du travail”, p.16. Translations (from French) are mine. The importance of “following the traces” had previously been stressed in VAN DER LINDEN, M., *Historia do trabalho: o Velho, o Novo e o Global*, *Revista Mundos do trabalho*, 1, 2009, pp. 11-26.

²¹ See especially: LEFEBVRE, H., *La production de l'espace*. Paris: Anthropos, 2000; HARVEY, D., *Spaces of Hope*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000; HARVEY, D., *Spaces of Capital. Towards a Critical Geography*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001; ESCOBAR, A., “Culture sits in places: reflections on globalism and subaltern strategies of localization”, *Political Geography*, 20, 2001, pp. 139-174. On the consequences of the “spatial turn” on historiography see the fundamental article MIDDELL, M. and NAUMANN, K., “Global history and the spatial turn: from the impact of area studies to the study of critical junctures of globalization”, *Journal of Global History*, 5, 2010, p. 149-170. On the debate about the relations between global and local

sometimes referred to as the “spatial turn”, has been presented in its arguably more complete way by the radical geographer Doreen Massey.²² Central to this is the idea of “the spatial” as “constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all scales”. Therefore, not only “the local” is understood as an open and dynamic space, whose specificity stems from the unfinished process of construction of interrelations at different scales rather than through bounded and self-referential “identities”. It is also imbricated in the construction of “the global” itself. Multiple globalities and globalizations thus appear, since “the global” is contained in each and every “local” articulation and is, at the same time, made by the multiplicity of their connections across different scales.

This conceptualization of space has major methodological implications for global labour historians. In this perspective, “the global” does not primarily refer to world-scale space, but rather to methodology.²³ It ceases to be a synonym for “world” and becomes a mind-set by which specific connections, transfers and movements of people, goods and ideas are visualized across space- and scale-boundaries. The traditional micro-macro divide is overcome and therefore the “global” approach does not result in a “flat history” of mere “horizontal” exchanges. Rather, historical complexity, power asymmetries, shifting identities, exploitation, violence and conflicts are addressed, the rhetoric of “progress” and “modernity” is challenged, and the role of the state (and the empire) is encompassed at the very same time

within global history see for instance HOPKINS, A.G. ed., *Global History: Interactions Between the Universal and the Local*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006; MANNING, P. ed., *World History: Global and Local Interactions*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2006; YUN CASALILLA, B., “‘Localism’, Global History and Transnational History. A Reflection from the Historian of Early Modern Europe”, *Historisk Tidskrift*, 127, 4, 2007, pp. 659-678; GERRITSEN, A., “Scales of a Local: The Place of Locality in a Globalizing World”. In: NORTHROP, D. ed., *A Companion to World History*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp. 213-226. A specific focus on the visualization of space and connections in historical research has been a key feature of The Spatial History Project initiated at the Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis (CESTA) at Stanford University: <http://www.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/index.php> The potential of employing the GIS technology in historical research has been stressed particularly in OWENS, J.B., Toward a Geographically-Integrated, Connected World History: Employing Geographic Information Systems (GIS), *History Compass*, 5/6, 2007, pp. 2014-2040.

²² See esp. the following volumes by MASSEY, Doreen. *Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984; *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994 (quotation p. 4); *For Space*. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Sage, 2005.

²³ For a similar point: DI FIORE and MERIGGI. *World History. op.cit.*, p. 123.

that the national framework is denied the exclusive status it held in traditional historiography.²⁴

Contributors to this special issue were asked to deal explicitly with the spatial implications of their methodological choices when presenting their empirical research. The result is not a catalogue of all possible ways of addressing “the global” in labour history, nor a denial of the fact that debates among proponents of the various approaches referred to here have resulted in interactions as much as in mutual critiques.²⁵ We rather seek to stimulate debate on spatiality within the field of *Global labour history* by presenting a series of empirical studies whose methodological and theoretical reflexivity resonates with major methodological strands and discussions in recent historiography. In particular, papers presented here pertain to the field Francesca Trivellato has named “global history on a small scale”²⁶, that is, not “a bird’s-eye view of oceans, continents, populations, and historical eras with the intent of capturing structural patterns of change over the centuries”, but rather the mapping of specific

²⁴ The need to integrate power asymmetries, and also to take the role of the State seriously, in global history has been particularly stressed in: BERG, ed., *Writing the History of the Global*, *op.cit.*, especially in the essays by Maxine Berg, David Washbrook, Jan de Vries, Jean-Frédéric Schaub and Peer Vries; BARCHIESI, F., “How Far from Africa’s Shore? A Response to Marcel van der Linden’s Map for Global Labor History”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 82, 2012, pp. 77-84. This approach explicitly counters other strands within global history and the debate on globalization that are influenced by the poststructuralist perspective which focus on the horizontality of the global connectedness and minimize the role of the nation state. See especially: APPADURAI, A., *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996; CASTELLS, M., *The Rise of the Network Society*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996. On the geography of power see SHARP, J.P., ROUTLEDGE, P., PHILO, C. and PADDISON, R. eds., *Entanglements of power. Geographies of domination/resistance*. London: Routledge, 2000. For an interesting discussion on the “rescaling of Statehood”, see BRENNER, N. *New State Spaces. Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

²⁵ For some clear examples of these debate and conflicts: LÜDTKE, A. ed., *The History of Everyday Life. Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989; REVEL, J. ed., *Giochi di scala. La microstoria alla prova dell’esperienza*. Rome: Viella, 2006 (extended and reviewed edition of the original French edition: REVEL, J. ed., *Jeux d’échelle. La micro-analyse à l’expérience*. Paris: EHESS, 1996; HAUPT and KOCKA. “Comparative and Transnational History”, *op.cit.*

²⁶ TRIVELLATTO, F. *The Familiarity of Strangers. The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2009, p. 7.

relations and connections that are co-extensive with the historical phenomenon at stake and with the author's perspective.

Elise van Nederveen Meerkkerk focuses in her article on connections established through broad social and economic features affecting household labour and consumption both at micro and macro levels. By so doing, her article resonates with debates on “connected histories” and “histoire croisée”.²⁷ Moreover, as she traces the *mutual* influences between the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies across four centuries, she explicitly refers to Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper's *Tensions of Empire* and echoes one of the fundamental argument carried on by scholars of the “New Imperial Histories”.²⁸ Furthermore, the author highlights how these links across the globe shaped *different* work-related ideologies in the Netherlands and in the Netherlands Indies and how they stemmed from and impacted on *specific* women's and children's work activities and the time allocation of household.

Other authors point to different kinds of connections, i.e. those produced by groups and individuals as they moved across the globe. Their perspectives

²⁷ On connected history see esp. SUBRAHMANYAN, S., Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia, *Modern Asian Studies*, 31, 3, 1997, pp. 735-762; SUBRAHMANYAN, S., *Explorations in connected history. From the Tagus to the Ganges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. On histoire croisée see WERNER, M., ZIMMERMAN, B. eds., *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée*. Paris: Seuil, 2004; WERNER, M., ZIMMERMAN, B., Beyond comparison: histoire croisée and the challenge of reflexivity, *History and Theory*, 45, pp. 30-50, February 2006. For a discussion of the relation between comparative and entangled histories see HAUPT and Kocka, “Comparative and Transnational History”, *op.cit.*

²⁸ COOPER, F., STOLER, A.L. eds., *Tensions of Empire. Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997. On the New Imperial Histories see esp LESTER, A., Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire, *History Compass*, 4/1, 2006; WARD, K., *Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008; HOWE, S. ed., *The New Imperial Histories Reader*. London: Routledge, 2009. See also GRUZINKI, S. *Les quatre parties du monde. Histoire d'une mondialisation*. Paris: Éditions de la Martinière, 2004. Similar arguments on the impact of colonialism in Europe have been advanced in other contexts. For example, JOHNSON, M., “The Tide Reversed: Prospects and Potentials for a Postcolonial Archaeology of Europe”. In: HALL, M., SILLIMAN, S.W. eds., *Historical Archaeology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, pp. 313-331; MÜHLHAHN, K., The Concentration Camp in Global Historical Perspective, *History Compass*, 8:6, 2010, pp. 543-561. All these studies, however, have not specifically focused on labour history, as it is also the case of comparative studies of empires, such as FIBIGER BANG, P. and BAYLY, C.A. eds., *Tributary Empires in Global History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

resonate with key arguments put forward by scholars of Global migration history, cross-cultural studies, and transnational and trans-local exchanges.²⁹ Maya Shatzmiller and Nagendra Rao make explicit reference to the artisans' mobility in the context of, respectively, the Middle East and southwestern India in the early middle ages; Stefano Bellucci looks at the transnational migration of workers within the Italian colonial system of the mid-1930s; the article by Fabiane Santana Previtali, Sérgio Paulo Morais and Cilson César Fagiani investigates the intertwining between global commodity chains, relocalization of production and changes in migration processes, using the notion of "transitional movement of workers" to fully understand

²⁹ For an example of Global migration history: GABACCIA, D.R. and HOERDER, D. eds., *Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims*. Leiden: Brill, 2011. On cross-cultural trade studies: CURTIN, P.D. *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984; LOPEZ, R.S. *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World*. Columbia University Press, 2001; TRIVELLATO. *The Familiarity of Strangers*. op.cit.; ASLANIAN, S.D. *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa*, University of California Press, Ewing, 2011.; GOLDBERG, J.L. *Trade and Institutions in the Medieval Mediterranean: The Geniza Merchants and their Business World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. On translocality see esp. FREITAG, U. and VON OPPEN, A. eds, *Translocality: The Study of Globalising Processes from a Southern Perspective*. Leiden: Brill, 2010; BRICKELL, K., DATTA, A. eds., *Translocal Geographies. Spaces, Places, Connections*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009. Ethnographic use of the concept of "multi-sitedness" shows similarity: MARCUS, G. E., *Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography*, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, 1995, pp. 95-117; FALZON, M.-A., *Multi-sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009; COLEMAN, S. and VON HELLERMAN, P. eds., *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Problems and Possibilities in the Translocation of Research Methods*. New York: Routledge, 2011. Similar debates take place in the field of historical archeology: see esp. HALL and SILLIMAN. *Historical Archaeology*. op.cit. Other approaches have sought to trace chains of commodities and "teleconnections". See for instance: MINTZ, S.W., *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking, 1985; TOPIK, S.C., WELLS, A., "Commodity Chains in a Global Economy". In: ROSENBERG, E.S. ed., *A World Connecting. 1870-1945*. Cambridge (Ma) and London: Harvard University Press and C.H. Beck Verlag, 2012, pp.593-812; HOFMEESTER, K. Hofmeester, Le diamants, de la mine à la bague: pour une histoire globale du travail au moyen d'un article de luxe, *Le Mouvement Social*, special issue on "Travail et mondialisations", 241, 4, October-December 2012, pp. 85-108; SEVILLANO-LOPEZ, D. and SOUTAR MORONI, D., Comercio de perlas entre los siglos II a.C. y X d.C., *Boletín Geológico y Minero*, 123, 2, 2012, pp. 139-155. For a theoretical discussion on entanglements between things and humans, consult HODDER, I., *Entangled. An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things*. Oxford: Wiley and Blackwell, 2012. The term "teleconnections" was used in VAN DER LINDEN. *Workers of the World*. op.cit., pp. 372-378.

the economic and social impact of the on-going seasonal migrations to specific areas in Brazil.

The focus on specific places provides yet another vantage perspective to visualize connections in labour history so far as, again with Massey, we view each place as a “a particular articulation of social interrelations at all scales”.³⁰ Here, Nigel Penn explicitly deals with methodological issues related to this approach in his study of the changing role of the Cape within different “Networks of Empire” during different decades, namely in the context of the slave trade, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century VOC hard labour system for *bandieten*, and the nineteenth-century British convict labour system. Moreover, the focus on the latter allows the author to show the intertwinings of trans-oceanic, regional and local connections.

The importance of the micro-historical approach for global history has been discussed by Trivellato in a recent article.³¹ She sees the specificity of Italian *microstoria* – developed since the late 1970s by, among others, Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi – in that it did not simply seek to uncover detailed narratives of everyday life in specific places, but rather “employ[ed] the micro-scale of analysis in order to test the validity of macro-scale explanatory paradigms”.³² In the special issue, Henrique Espada Lima provides a micro-historical perspective on slavery in Brazil,

³⁰ MASSEY. *Space, place and gender. op.cit.*, p. 5. Examples of this approach are in LOMBARD, D., *Le carrefour javanais: essai d'histoire globale*. Paris: Editions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1990, 3 vols.; SAPTARI, R. “Studying Asian Domestic Labour Within Global Processes: Comparisons and Connections”. In: LUCASSEN. *Global Labour History. A State of the Art. op.cit.*, pp. 479-512; PUTNAM, L. “To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World”, *Journal of Social History*, 39, no. 3 (Spring 2006).

³¹ TRIVELLATO, F., “Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?”, *California Italian Studies*, 2, 1, 2011, pp. 1-26. Trivellato points to the difference of this approach with that of the French *histoire de la vie privée* and of the German *Alltagsgeschichte*, as well as with more recent research that have equated the micro-historical approach with commitment to narration, in the wake of post-structuralist influences. For recent debates on micro-history see also DE VIVO, F., Prospect or Refuge, Microhistory: History on the Large Scale, *Cultural and Social History*, 7, 2010, pp. 387-397; REVEL. *Giochi di scala. op.cit.*; LANARO, P. ed., *Microstoria. A venticinque anni da L'eredità immateriale*. Roma. Franco Angeli: 2011. As the essays in Revel's volume reveal, two general perspectives exist on microhistory: on the one hand, some authors see micro-analysis as one of the possible levels in a scale-game where all scales have the same heuristic potentialities (Revel, Lepetit); other scholars point to the fact that macro- and micro-analysis derives from different models of causality and temporality (Griboaudi) and that “the micro generates the macro” (Rosental).

³² TRIVELLATO. “Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory”, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

explicitly discussing the relationship between “little things and global labour history”. His article, centered on the story of Augusto, an *Africano libre* who lived in mid-nineteenth century southern Brazil, also resonates with those strands of the literature that have sought to follow “the individuals’ own connections”.³³ Conversely, Laura Cerasi focuses on the industrial area of Porto Marghera in Italy to address the issue of the impact of particular production sites on the construction of the memory of work and labour.³⁴

On a different scale, other essays point to the significance of “spatial divisions of labour” *within* the national/imperial level.³⁵ Rao focuses on a specific region in medieval and early-modern southwestern India, South Kanara, and explores the way global maritime trade, regional migration fluxes and local social dynamics impacted on multiple labour relations. Sanne Deckwitz highlights the way the interplay of ideological and economic motivations shaped the geography of the gulag and laogai and how spatial factors, in turn, created the conditions for the fulfilment or failure of the centralist plans of the Soviet and Chinese governments, as much as they favoured or limited the prisoners’ agency. Dasten Julián sheds light on the ongoing changes in the geography of labour by focusing on a region in southern Chile, and discusses their relations with the local and global scale and the role played by the state in these transformations.

Stretching back in time

The potential for a chronological expansion of the field of *Global labour history* is rooted in the centrality it assigns to the process of

³³ ROTSCCHILD, E., *The Inner Life of Empire: An Eighteenth-Century Story*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 7. See also ZEMON DAVIS, N., *Trickster Travels: In Search of Leo Africanus, A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2006; COLLEY, L., *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh. A Woman in World History*. London: Anchor, 2006; ANDERSON, C., *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

³⁴ On the significance of the history of specific work-places see esp. MURPHY, K., *Revolution and Counterrevolution. Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory*. Oxford and New York: Berghahn, 2005.

³⁵ The expression “spatial divisions of labour” is in MASSEY. *Spatial Divisions of Labour*. *op.cit.* For the importance of the sub-national scale, consult TORRE, A., *Luoghi. La produzione di località in età moderna e contemporanea*. Rome: Donzelli, 2011.

commodification of labour and to the multiple labour relations by which it takes place historically. As we have observed, this approach has already led to stretch the research back beyond the (for “old” and “new” labour history alike) seemingly impassable barrier of the Industrial Revolution. The need for a further investigation back into labour before the pre-1500 period has also been pointed to by Van der Linden, but has remained virtually unexplored up to this point.

However, there are at least three reasons to undertake this step, besides the simple observation that the study of labour history in the pre-1500 period is significant in its own right, i.e. without any teleological concession to later events and phenomena.³⁶

In the first place, the very concept of “the global” takes on a fundamentally different meaning in periods when the interlocking of various regional systems was not co-extensive with the world itself – an issue that has been stressed, for instance, during recent conferences and workshops at the Global History and Culture Centre at the University of Warwick and at the Oxford Centre for Global History at Oxford University.³⁷ This reinforces the argument made in the previous section, regarding the need to view “the global” as a mind-set and a methodology, a flexible concept corresponding to the practice of following the traces left by people, goods, ideas and representations. As Anne Gerritsen has put it: “the local clearly exists in ever-larger circles of contexts, and both the boundary of the local and the extent of the connections with the wider contextual circles that surround it change, depending on historical circumstances”.³⁸ Three recent path-breaking volumes, and the publications linked to the platform *Topography of Entanglement. Mapping Medieval Networks* based at the Austrian

³⁶ This path has already been explored in bordering areas of interests that are also linked to the IISG, such as Global Economic History and Global Migration History: www.iisg.nl/research/gmhp.php;

www2.lse.ac.uk/economicHistory/Research/GEHN/Home.aspx. See for instance also the following publications: VAN DER SPEK, R.J., VAN LEEUWEN, B., VAN ZANDEN, J.L. *A history of Market Performance from Ancient Babylonia to the Modern World*, London: Routledge [forthcoming, September 2013]; HOERDER, D., *Cultures in Contact. World Migrations in the Second Millennium*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002; LUCASSEN, J., LUCASSEN, L. and MANNING, P. eds., *Migration History in World History*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

³⁷ See: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/ghcc/> and http://global.history.ox.ac.uk/?page_id=663

³⁸ GERRITSEN. “Scales of a Local”. *op.cit.* p. 10.

Academy of Sciences, have convincingly put forward similar arguments, although they have not specifically addressed labour.³⁹

In the second place, recent developments in the historiography of the ancient empires seem to converge with arguments put forward by global labour historians for the early modern and modern periods, regarding the multiple forms by which the commodification of labour is achieved. Studies on labour history in the ancient Near-East have been abundant since the late 1980s, have extensively problematized the ‘free’-‘unfree’ divide and have addressed the connections between various forms of labour relations.⁴⁰ Even more striking arguments have been advanced in the field of ancient Roman labour history. The traditional view of the Roman society as a “slave society” has been questioned in the last decade, the coexistence of free, freed, slave and convict labour has been demonstrated for some workplaces, and the MIT economist Peter Temin, in an article published in 2001, has

³⁹ LABIANCA, O.S. and SCHAM, S.A. eds., *Connectivity in Antiquity. Globalization as a Long-Term Historical Process*. London and Oakville: Equinox, 2006; ALCOCK, S.E., BODEL, J. and TALBERT, R.J.A. eds., *Highways, Byways, and Road Systems in the Pre-Modern World*. Bognor Regis: Wiley, 2012; SCOTT, M., *Space and Society in the Greek and Roman Worlds*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. The former volume is explicitly based on, and represents a considerable expansion of, Manuel Castells’ network society model proposed in his trilogy: *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996; *The Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997; *The End of the Millennium: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. On the project based at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, see: <http://oeaw.academia.edu/TopographiesofEntanglements> Another, highly interdisciplinary strand in the literature has explored the issue of the perception of space in Antiquity and, more generally, in “pre-modern” societies: TALBERT, R.J.A. and BRODERSEN, K., *Space in the Roman World: its Perception and Presentation*. Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004; RAAFLAUB, K.A. and TALBERT, R.J.A., *Geography and Ethnography: Perceptions of the World in Pre-Modern Societies*. Bognor Regis: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010; GEUS, K. and RATHMANN, M. eds, *Vermessung der Oikumene*. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013.

⁴⁰ See especially POWELL, M. *Labor in the Ancient Near East*. New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1987; BAKER, H.D. and JURSA, M. eds., *Approaching the Babylonian Economy. Proceedings of the Start Project Symposium held in Vienna, 1-3 July 2004*. Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2005; KLEBER, K. *Tempel und Palast*. Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2008; JURSA, M. ed., *Aspects of the Economic History of Babylonia in the First Millennium BC*. Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2010; TENNEY, J.S. *Life at the bottom of Babylonian Society: Servile Laborers at Nippur in the 14th and 13th centuries BC*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011; CULBERTSON, L. ed., *Slaves and Household in the Near East*. Chicago: The Oriental Institut of the University of Chicago, 2011.

argued for the existence of an “integrated labour market” in the early Roman empire.⁴¹ The international group of scholars involved in the project “Work, Labour and Professions in the Roman World” now seeks to critically work out these new insights⁴², and one of its members, Arjan Zuiderhoek, surveys in this special issue the main academic perspectives on labour in the Greco-Roman world, and proposes an alternative approach based on the suggestions of the New Institutional Economics (NIE).

In the third place, the study of the pre-1500 period provides global labour historians with a privileged position to strengthen their arguments against Eurocentrism. In fact, while taking a non-Eurocentric perspective on early modern and modern labour history implies showing the mutual connections between supposed “core” and ‘peripheries’ *within the context of* European political and military hegemony, a global view of the late Middle Ages, for instance, addresses the *multi-polar* world-system that came into existence in the twelfth century, one within which it was eventually Asia, and not Europe, that played a pivotal role.⁴³ This imposes a non-Eurocentric perspective and, in turn, forces scholars of the post-1500 period to question their Eurocentric prejudicial assumptions on “modernity”.

⁴¹ TEMIN, P. The labour market of the early Roman empire, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 34, 4, Spring 2004, pp. 513-538.

⁴² http://www.rsrc.ugent.be/work_labor_professions The integrated study of literary, epigraphic and material sources appears to be one of the most important developments behind the new insight in labour history both for the ancient and the medieval period.

⁴³ See for instance ABU-LUGHOD J.L. *Before European Hegemony. The World System A.D. 1250-1350*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989; JACKSON, P. *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410*. Harlow: Pearson, 2005; ROSSABI, M. *The Mongols and Global History*. New York: Norton and Company, 2010 (collections of original documents); PARKER, C.H. *Global Interactions in the Early Modern Age, 1400-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 (esp. the introduction); SALLMANN, J.-M. *Le grand désenclavement du monde 1200-1600*. Paris: Payot, 2011; BERNARDINI, M. and GUIDA, D., *I mongoli. Espansione, imperi, eredità*. Torino: Einaudi, 2012; WONG, R. Bin, *China Before Capitalism*, 2013 [paper presented at the seminar of the research group Social and Economic History of the University of Utrecht, 18 March 2013: <http://vkclibrary.uu.nl/vkc/seh/research/Pages/Seminars.aspx>]. For an interpretation of the early modern age as the “Asian Age” see FRANK, A.G., *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998. On global connections and world-systems in the Antiquity see BEUJARD, P. “From Three Possible Iron-Age World-Systems to a Single Afro-Eurasian World-System”, *Journal of World History*, 21, 1, March 2010, pp. 1-43; FITZPATRICK, M.P. “Provincializing Rome: The Indian Ocean Trade Network and Roman Imperialism”, *Journal of World History*, 22, 1, March 2011, pp. 27-54.

To paraphrase the title of Janet Abu-Lughod's pathbreaking volume, global labour historians might ask themselves what work, labour and labour relations were "before European hegemony". Much remains to be done in this field, but recent studies in medieval labour history show encouraging signs of interest in this area of research. This special issue explores some possible strategies to move further.

To begin with, similarly to what has happened for the early modern and modern period, the labour history of areas outside Europe can be specifically addressed. An outstanding example in this direction is Shatzmiller's *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World*, that situates labour in the Islamic economy, examines the division of labour and discusses the way it was conceptualized by Muslim theologians, philosophers and mystics.⁴⁴ The author brings forth this perspective in this special issue as well, through an article that shows the role of labour in the economic growth which took place in the Middle East during the 7th-11th centuries, by focusing on the rise in human capital through education and training, in the context of a "guildless" society.

Moreover, work and labour in medieval Europe itself can be reframed by overcoming nation-centred history and by pointing to connections within and beyond Europe. This is what the editors of the two-volume publication *The Archeology of Medieval Europe* have explicitly suggested, and what a group of archaeologists have argued in their chapters regarding manufacture, production and trade.⁴⁵ It is also what Chris Wickham has argued in his studies on "the inheritance of Rome", by looking at all territories previously included in the Roman empire.⁴⁶ Participants in the

⁴⁴ SHATZMILLER, M. *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World*. Leiden: Brill, 1994.

⁴⁵ GRAHAM-CAMPBELL, J. and VALOR, M., eds. *The Archaeology of Medieval Europe*. vol. 1. Copenhagen: Aarhus University Press, 2007 (esp. the introduction and the chapters 7, 9 and 10); CARVER, M. and KLAPŠTĚ, J., eds. *The Archaeology of Medieval Europe* vol. 2. Copenhagen: Aarhus University Press, 2011 (esp. the introduction and the chapters 7 and 8).

⁴⁶ WICKHAM, C. *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; WICKHAM, C., *The Inheritance of Rome. A History of Europe from 400 to 1000*. London: Penguin, 2010. On the early Middle Ages see also ULMSCHEIDER, K., PESTELL, T. eds., *Markets in Early Medieval Europe: Trading and Productive Sites, 650-850*. 2nd revised edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

recent conference on “Transcultural Perspectives on Late Medieval and Early Modern Slavery in the Mediterranean” have taken a similar perspective, by assuming the Mediterranean as their scale of reference.⁴⁷ Within this framework, Mathieu Arnoux shows in this special issue that the history of work and labour in medieval Europe can be framed globally at the very same time when its specific features are addressed. Similarly to what Shatzmiller argues on economic growth in the early medieval Islamic world, he traces the origins of the European economic and demographic growth of the tenth to the thirteenth centuries back into a medieval “industrious revolution”, in this case mirrored in the ideological scheme of the “Three orders”. Moreover, he points to the connections among the new social status that the *ordo laboratorum* acquired within that scheme, the disappearance of slavery, and the emergence of other forms of non-freedom in late medieval North Western Europe.

Yet another strategy is addressed in this special issue that develops medieval labour history and shows its significance for *Global labour history*. Especially Rao’s article captures the earliest contact of southwestern Indian populations with Europeans, and refers to the continuities and changes that these encounters brought in labour relations and in the way work and labour were conceptualized. This approach might be multiplied for all cultural (and colonial) contacts in world history, but appears especially significant when applied to the encounter with European powers at the beginning of the early modern period, in order to question Eurocentric perspectives directly.

As we see it, the chronological expansion proposed in the special issue might prepare the ground for a radical rethinking of chronology in the global history of work and labour. As a matter of fact, from a global perspective the traditional division of history into ancient, medieval, early modern and modern periods represents one of the most visible legacies of the Eurocentric approach we aim to overcome. Only once this step is taken, alternative chronologies will emerge, and continuities and discontinuities be

⁴⁷ http://www.hist.uzh.ch/fachbereiche/mittelalter/oberassistentierende/schiel/activities/Slavery_Conference2012.html On the different kinds of slavery, see ROTMAN, Y., *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009; *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 [3 vols]; BUGGEIN, M. “Were Concentration Camp Prisoners Slaves?: The Possibilities and Limits of Comparative History and Global Historical Perspectives”, *International Review of Social History*, 53, 2008, pp. 101-129.

drawn, that stem from empirical research on specific issues rather than from a prejudicial vision that makes European “modernity” the ultimate measure of history.

Thematic focus on labour relations and on the conceptualization and perception of work and labour

The methodological and chronological perspectives presented above provide new approaches for the study of themes and issues in *Global labour history*. Cutting across all essays, two topics that have already played a key role in *Global labour history* so far are especially addressed in this special issue: on the one hand, the multiplicity of (free and unfree) labour relations by which the process of commodification of labour takes place; on the other hand, the conceptualization, perception, representation and memory of work and labour.

As we have seen, the first topic possibly represents the single most important contribution of *Global labour history* to the renewal of labour history. Observed through a methodologically and chronologically expanded frame, the commodification of labour appears an ubiquitous phenomenon and this, in turn, fundamentally questions the teleological scheme of “modernization” and calls for the need to rediscuss key-concepts in labour and economic history, such as those of “working class” and “capitalism”.

Moreover, the awareness of the multiplicity of labour relations by which the commodification of labour takes place offers a unique visibility for labour relations that have long been marginalized in the labour history narrative. Within this context, Nigel Penn’s and Sanne Deckwitz’ essays specifically explore convict labour. As in some recent research initiatives carried on at the IISH⁴⁸, they seek to integrate it in the broader frame of free and unfree labour relations, while pointing to the specific process of definition of

⁴⁸ A conference on “Global convict labour” was held at the IISH on 13-14 June 2012. Stemming from it are two publications: DE VITO, C.G. and LICHTENSTEIN, A., “Writing a Global History of Convict Labour”, *International Review of Social History*, 58, 2, 2013 [in print]; DE VITO, C.G. and LICHTENSTEIN, A., *Global Convict Labour*. Leiden: Brill [forthcoming].

convict labour itself. The complexity of the latter also offers new insights on broader issues such as the Cape colonial relations and networks and the hitherto scarcely researched comparison between Soviet gulags and Chinese *laogai*.

The process of conceptualization of work and labour is located at the very crossroads of politics, economy and culture and proves therefore a fundamental way to contextualise labour history in the broader field of social history. As such, it has already received a considerable attention in labour history, for instance through research on guilds and institutions of poor relief, and has been addressed in a recent special issue of the *International Review of Social History* edited by Karin Hofmeester and Christine Moll-Murata.⁴⁹ Following the example of Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly's studies,⁵⁰ the essays in this special issue deal with this complex and intriguing topic through a long-term perspective and across the world – virtually from the Roman Empire to contemporary Latin America.

Moreover, the study of the conceptualization of work and labour benefits from the methodological approach used by some of the contributors in the special issue. The focus on connections between places highlights locally-bounded differentiations in the definition of work, while at the same time pointing to the influence of translocal exchanges – this is, for instance, the case with the articles of van Nederveen Meerkerk and Rao. At the same time, connected and micro-scale approaches make it visible how historical actors actively construct the representation of work and underline gender, ethnic and class differentiation within each place, as in Arnoux and Shatzmiller's contributions. Finally, especially in Cerasi's essay, the issue of the memory of work and labour is addressed.⁵¹

⁴⁹ HOFMEESTER, K. and MOLL-MURATA, C. *International Review of Social History*, special issue on "The Joy and Pain of Work: Global Attitudes and Valuations, 1500-1650", 19, 2012. On the guilds see for instance EPSTEIN, S.A., *Wage Labour and Guilds in Medieval Europe*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991; LUCASSEN, J., DE MOOR, T. and LUITEN VAN ZANDEN, J. eds., Return of the Guilds, *International Review of Social History*, 52, supplement 16, 2008.

⁵⁰ LIS, C. and EHMER, J. eds., *The Idea of Work in Europe from Antiquity to Modern Times*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009; LIS, C. and SOLY, H., *Worthy Efforts. Attitude to Work and Workers in Pre-Industrial Europe*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

⁵¹ For a comparable approach see JAMES, D., *Doña María's Story. Life, History, Memory and Political Identity*. Durham-London: Duke University Press, 2000; LOBATO, M. *La vida en las fabricas. Trabajo, protesta y politica en una comunidad obrera, Berisso (1904-1970)*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros-Entrepasados, 2001.

The focus on both labour relations and the conceptualization of labour shows that the relevance of *Global labour history* goes far beyond the academy, in this sense continuing the tradition of social and political engagement among labour historians.⁵² Globalization, economic and financial crisis, delocalisation, precarisation, migration, the organization of work and labour conditions: these are some of the main issues in the world we live in and this is the raw material *Global labour history* is made of. Global labour historians address key topics in contemporary political and social debates, framing them within historical complexity rather than accepting the short-cuts of Eurocentrism, nationalism and the teleology of “progress”. They deal with globalization by framing it in the cyclical transformation of capitalism, as the last of a series of “waves of globalization” rather than a sudden break with no history.⁵³ They explore past and present migrations by deconstructing the racist rethoric that dominates the so-called “receiving countries” and by focusing on the experience of migrant men and women, constantly caught between the constraints of the labour market and their own hopes, between (invented, but influential) traditions and new visions of the world. Aware of the importance of individual and collective resistances, they observe the multiform social movements in human history and show their process of formation through utopias, horizontal networks and organizational needs, moving beyond the top-down approach of the “old” labour history and away from the “a-historical theory of the so-called ‘new social movements’”.⁵⁴

⁵² This background of social and political activism crosses the biographies of virtually all scholars involved in Global labour history. On this aspect, besides the interviews I made with Lex Heerma van Voss, Marcel van der Linden e Jan Lucassen, see also the interviews in NOORDEGRAAF, L. ed., *Waarover spraken zij? Economische geschiedbeoefening in Nederland omstreeks het jaar 2000*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Aksant, 2006, respectively at pp. 127-135, 193-202 and 213-221.

⁵³ On the concept of “waves of globalization” see esp. HEERMAN VAN VOSS, L. “Dock Work as a Global Occupation, 1790-1970”. In: LUCASSEN, J. *Global Labour History*. op.cit. p. 593-597. For a similar conceptualization: Berger, L., “Épilogue. Capitalisme et mondialisation. De l'autonomie des trajectoires locales à l'interdépendance systémique globale”. In: *Histoire globale, mondialisations et capitalisme*. Paris: La Découverte, 2009, pp. 421-467.

⁵⁴ VAN DER LINDEN, M. *Het Naderende*. op. cit., p. 26.

This special issue mirrors this feature of *Global labour history*.⁵⁵ Virtually all the articles underline the role of workers' agency and, whilst revealing the reality of labour exploitation, they understand work also as a potential instrument of individual and social emancipation. Moreover, the last three articles specifically highlight the two sides of recent processes of relocalization of production: on the one hand, Cerasi investigates the divided memory of factory work in an area that has experienced sustained deindustrialization; on the other hand, Julián's essay and Previtali, Morais and Fagiani's article address the "other face" of "advanced" capitalism in areas of recent industrialization, by pointing, respectively, to the exploitation of the workforce in the transnational aquaculture industry in Chile and to unfree labour relations in the sector of ethanol production in Brazil.

⁵⁵ For three recent examples of ethnological research on work and labour see Ngai, P., *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace*. Durham, London, Hong Kong: Duke University Press, 2005; Hewamanne, S., *Stitching Identities in a Free Trade Zone. Gender and Politics in Sri Lanka*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010; Breman, J., *Outcast Labour in Asia. Circulation and Informalization of the Workforce at the Bottom of the Economy*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Workers of the ancient world: analyzing labour in classical antiquity

Arjan Zuiderhoek

In How do we approach the subject of labour in the Greco-Roman world? As in all pre-modern societies, the primary source of most of the energy expended in the production of goods and services in the ancient Greek and Roman economies was human and animal muscle power, with some additions derived from the harnessing of wind and water and the burning of wood and wood-derived fuel sources. The ancient world, then, was very much a world of work, and hard work at that. Greek and Roman farming populations (and their work animals) as well as urban workers, manufacturers and service providers had to toil long and hard, day-in, day-out, to produce the surplus that made possible the impressive material achievements (in terms of urbanisation, infrastructure, art and architecture) and the luxurious lifestyle of the elites of their respective societies. Labour productivity in agriculture was low, which necessitated the employment of the vast majority of the ancient world's populations in the production of primary foodstuffs, and condemned the vast majority of individuals making up those agrarian populations (as well as a sizeable element of the urban inhabitants) to a standard of living not much above subsistence.¹ In all this, the ancient world did not differ much from other complex pre-industrial societies. The question which we might then ask is: how were the production of goods and services and the extraction of surplus specifically organised in the Greco-Roman world? How, in other words, was labour employed and exploited in the ancient economy, what was distinctive, comparatively speaking, about the way it was employed, and who drew the primary benefit from the method(s) of employment and exploitation that we find?

¹ For an excellent recent overview of the economic history of the ancient world see SCHEIDEL, Walter; MORRIS, Ian and SALLER, Richard. eds. *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007.

Attempts to answer such questions have not been scarce. In what follows, I will draw a necessarily highly schematic overview of some of the main theories, or approaches to, labour in the Greco-Roman world that can be found in the scholarly literature. These approaches for the most part do not focus on labour as such, but are actually larger interpretative models of the ancient economy, in which labour naturally and necessarily occupies a central place. I shall discuss some of the advantages and disadvantages of these existing models in helping us to understand and explain ancient labour, after which I will sketch the outlines of an alternative approach, which might help us overcome some of the disadvantages of these existing models without forcing us to abandon their most productive insights. I start, however, with a brief discussion of concepts related to the notions of “work” and “labour” in antiquity, and of the various categories of working people that we come across, to provide some necessary background for the ensuing argument.

Anthropologists have pointed out that the concept of work may well be a modern western invention. As Erik Schwimmer notes: “Work as a concept is based on the assumption that (...) all economically useful activities are fully comparable by a yardstick transcending their diversity”. This “yardstick” he identifies as the notion that “labour has become a commodity”.² Ancient elite authors, whose views figure most prominently in our extant sources, primarily considered types of work and workers in moral and political terms. Concepts like *ponos* and *labor* were associated with drudgery, manual work was seen as degrading, and a person who had to perform manual labour to ensure his livelihood could never be truly free: he had no free time (*scholē, otium*) in which to pursue those activities truly worthy of a citizen: politics, culture, philosophical debate. Craftsmen, manual labourers (*banausoi, sordidi*) and especially wage-workers, whose position was likened to that of slaves, should therefore not be given citizen status, or, if that could not be avoided, should at least not be permitted full political rights. This was the upshot of such arguments generally formulated by elite citizens and aristocrats weary of the participative, democratic

² SCHWIMMER, Erik. “The self and the product: concepts of work in comparative perspective”. In: WALLMAN, Sandra. ed. *The social anthropology of work*. London: Academic Press, 1979, p. 287, as cited by VAN DER LINDEN, Marcel and LUCASSEN, Jan. *Prolegomena for a Global Labour History*. Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History, 1999, p. 8.

political tendencies in the ancient city-states, particularly classical Athens and Republican Rome. In other contexts, often no less political, hard work could be praised, and idleness condemned. From Hesiod to Xenophon to Cicero and beyond, working hard on one's farm, whether with one's own hands as a sturdy peasant proprietor or as a dedicated gentleman-farmer directing the labour of others, was uniformly praised. Equally, the diligence, skill and devotion of the craftsman to his trade could be held up as a moral example, while even the wholesale merchant and long-distance trader might be evaluated positively, as providing many necessary and useful goods to the community (e.g. Cic. *Off.* 1.151). The pivotal concerns, throughout antiquity, with regard to work seem to have been, first, wealth, its origin, but above all, its proper use – not (solely) to maximize personal profit, but for the benefit of the community – and second, freedom, defined as economic autarky, as a lack of dependence on others for gaining one's livelihood.³ To be sure, these were ideals, which, moreover, emanate mainly from a literature written by upper class authors: the voices of working people themselves are harder to discern. But when we do hear them, in inscriptions on vases, sculpture, and funerary steles, or in depictions which the wealthier among them offer us in reliefs on their grave monuments, the message conveyed is one of great pride in work and skills, and a strong sense of occupational identity.⁴ Still, it seems unwise not to assume some overlap, however tenuous, with the attitudes we find expressed in texts produced by the elite: on the funerary reliefs of Roman craftsmen and shopkeepers, for instance, the frequently loving and detailed depiction of the workshop, its workers and their tools of trade suggest a concern to emphasize that those commemorated had earned their living and gained their wealth (if any) the *right* way: through hard, honest and diligent work.

Even if, as has been argued (and as the quote from Schwimmer also suggests), abstract, unified concepts of work, labour, or labour power did

³ For the classic analysis see FINLEY, Moses. *The ancient economy*. Updated edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999 [first published 1973], esp. chapters I and II. On craftsmen see BURFORD, Alison. *Craftsmen in Greek and Roman society*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1972. On trade and traders, see MORLEY, Neville. *Trade in classical antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007. For a recent thoughtful analysis of ancient attitudes to work and workers see LIS, Catharina and SOLY, Hugo. *Worthy efforts: attitudes to work and workers in pre-industrial Europe*. Leiden: Brill 2012, chapters 1 and 2.

⁴ For a large collection of reliefs (mainly funerary) with work scenes from the Roman world see ZIMMER, Gerhard. *Römische Berufsdarstellungen*. Berlin: Mann, 1982.

not exist in antiquity, labour, or, to be more precise, *labourers* certainly were a commodity in the ancient world. That is, one could go to a marketplace and buy labourers, in the form of slaves, who then became one's possession, or hire labourers, either for a specific period of time, or to perform a specific task. Roman legal terminology literally speaks of the "leasing" of labour (*locatio conductio operarum*), generally for a specific period of time, which should be differentiated from a contract for the completion of a specific task (*locatio conductio operis faciendi*), and from the leasing out of a slave one owned as a labourer, which fell under the contract for the leasing out of things (*locatio conductio rei*). Day labourers would gather in the city market at a specific location, which in Athens was called the *kolonos misthios*, where they offered themselves for hire (see also the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20:1-16, where the procedure is well described).

Thus, in the ancient marketplace, we immediately come across two types of labourers, the slave and the free wage worker.⁵ In fact, however, the variety of different labour situations in antiquity was very great. Full chattel slaves were found in many households throughout Greco-Roman antiquity, in the cities and on the land, but there existed numerous other categories of dependent or semi-dependent labourers, from serf-like peasant groups to debt-bondsmen to populations "enslaved" to a particular state, like the helots of Sparta, who were "between slavery and freedom"⁶, to public slaves, working in government functions, to freed slaves who were still legally obliged to render some services to their former masters. Free labourers also came in various shapes and sizes, from peasant-proprietors who worked their own land together with their wives and children to tenant farmers, working their landlords' estates, to skilled artisans, owning or renting their own workshop, which they worked with their families, slaves, apprentices and/or employees, to skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled labourers,

⁵ For non-slave labour see GARNSEY, Peter. ed. *Non-slave labour in the Greco-Roman world*. Cambridge Philological Society, Supplementary Volume no. 6. Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society and more recently KEHOE, Dennis. "Contract labor". In: SCHEIDEL, Walter. ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 114-130.

⁶ This is the title of a famous essay on slavery and dependent labour in the ancient world by Moses Finley, see "Between slavery and freedom". In: FINLEY, Moses. *Economy and society in ancient Greece*. SHAW, Brent and SALLER, Richard. eds. New York: The Viking Press, 1981, pp. 116-132.

working for a wage or contracted to do a particular job, as we just saw. And the list could go on. This complexity, which is only aggravated by regional differences, differential developments over time between various regions, and overlap between several categories of labour, has made it difficult for social and economic historians of antiquity to formulate any general conclusions about ancient labour. Various attempts have been made to overcome this difficulty, which I will discuss under the headings of “oversocialization” and “undersocialization” (what I mean by these terms will become clear during the course of my discussion).⁷ I start with the latter.

II

What we might call an “undersocialized” approach to ancient labour can be found in market-based analyses of the ancient economy. Late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century ancient historians such as Eduard Meyer, Tenney Frank and Michael Rostovtzeff analyzed the Greek and Roman economies in strongly modernising terms, attributing modern market economic motives to ancient individuals, institutions and states.⁸ These were highly empiricist scholars, who distrusted the theories and models developed by sociologists and economists, so their market economics remained largely implicit, in the form of “common sense” assumptions about economic behaviour derived from their own educational background and the socio-economic context of their day and age. Thus they could discuss the rise of ancient slavery as the consequence of the development of a capitalist market economy in Classical Greece and Late Republican Rome, could speak of Greek and Roman professional associations as if they were modern labour unions and describe free wage labourers as an urban

⁷ I borrow these terms from Ian Morris’s introduction to the 1999 updated edition of Finley, *Ancient economy*, where he uses them to characterize different categories of critical responses to Finley’s work on the ancient economy. They derive ultimately from Granovetter’s famous discussion of the embeddedness of economic action. See GRANOVETTER, Mark. “Economic action and social structure: the problem of embeddedness”. *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 91 (1985), pp. 481-93.

⁸ See e.g. Meyer’s essays “Die Sklaverei im Altertum” and “Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung des Altertums”, both in MEYER, Eduard. *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichtstheorie und zur wirtschaftlichen und politischen Geschichte des Altertums*. Halle: Niemeyer, 1910; FRANK, Tenney. *An economic history of Rome*. Second edition. London: Jonathan Cape, 1927; ROSTOVTZEFF, Michael. *The social and economic history of the Roman Empire*. Second edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957.

proletariat crowded out of the rural and urban labour markets by the availability of cheap slaves. In recent decades, however, various scholars have developed a much more theoretically sophisticated market-based approach to antiquity.⁹ Particularly the work of the economist and economic historian Peter Temin on the Roman empire stands out in this respect.¹⁰ Formulating his analysis in explicitly neo-classical terms, Temin has argued that the Roman empire was in fact an integrated market economy, with a unified labour market. Wage-labour was widespread, according to Temin, while wages for work requiring comparable levels of skill were fairly equal across the empire. Slaves and free workers, moreover, were part of the same labour market, not just because they often performed the same jobs interchangeably, but also because Roman slaves, with their *peculium* or working capital that they could manage and amass, and with which they might eventually buy their freedom, were in fact sort of long-term employees.¹¹

Marxist analyses of the Greco-Roman world supply yet another “undersocialized” take on ancient labour. As the *Communist Manifesto* famously declared in 1848: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Free man and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another...”¹² Marx and Engels’ implicit conceptualisation of antiquity as a “slave economy” or “slave society” (note also *Capital* Vol. 1, p. 719: “The Roman slave was held by chains; the wage labourer is bound to his owner by invisible threads”¹³) has given historians of antiquity, both the Marxists and the non-Marxists among them, considerable headaches. This is so for two reasons: first, because apart from various summary statements here and there, Marx did not provide a systematic analysis of the ancient economy (since his primary subject was modern capitalism), and second, probably partly due to

⁹ See e.g. RATHBONE, Dominic. *Economic rationalism and rural society in third century A.D. Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991; COHEN, Edward. *Athenian economy and society: a banking perspective*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

¹⁰ See most recently TEMIN, Peter. *The Roman market economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

¹¹ TEMIN, Peter. “The labor market of the early Roman Empire”. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 34, n.4, 2004, pp. 513–538.

¹² MARX, Karl and ENGELS, Frederick. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. In: *Selected Works in One Volume*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1968, pp. 35–36

¹³ MARX, Karl. *Capital Vol. I*. Trans. B. Fowkes. London: New Left Books, 1976.

the first reason, because the actual, systematic application of Marxist concepts, particularly “class” and “class struggle”, to ancient society proved fairly difficult in practice.

The work which, in the English-speaking world at least, rose most heroically to this formidable challenge was G.E.M. de Ste. Croix’s *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (which, despite its title, covers the entirety of ancient history, Greek, Roman and late Roman/early Byzantine).¹⁴ This is a difficult work to summarize, both because of its wide-ranging discussion of many different topics and because of the long time-span it covers. Nonetheless, de Ste. Croix’s main contention is that in the ancient world a landowning propertied class was dependent for its wealth on the expropriation of the agrarian surplus produced by a class of more or less dependent labourers composed of chattel slaves where possible (i.e. where supply was sufficient), and, where not, of various categories of serfs (among whom he includes tenant-farmers), debt-bondsmen, hired labourers and so forth. In the case of free peasant farmers and other free workers, exploitation was, throughout most of antiquity, effected by the state (Hellenistic kingdoms, Roman Republic and empire), which represented the interest of the propertied classes, via taxation, military conscription, *corvée* labour and suchlike. The tension which all this exploitation produced de Ste. Croix understands as the ancient class struggle, which represents the primary law of motion of Greco-Roman history.¹⁵

Both these approaches, the market model (as represented by Temin), and the Marxist model (as represented by de Ste. Croix), can be criticized on their own terms. For instance, Temin’s idea of Roman slavery as some sort of long-term labour contract ignores the crucial fact that in antiquity slaves were in fact regarded, by law and in practice, as property. In neo-classical terms, slaves were capital goods, valuable assets over which owners exercised full property rights just as they did in case of other capital goods such as land, farm buildings, workshops etc. In de Ste. Croix’s analysis, even from a Marxist perspective the ancient class struggle looks decidedly

¹⁴ de STE. CROIX, Geoffrey. *The class struggle in the ancient Greek world: from the Archaic age to the Arab conquest*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.

¹⁵ For good discussion of de Ste. Croix’s views see the reviews by Paul Cartledge in *The English Historical Review*, vol. 99, 1984, pp. 566-569, 1984 and John Crook in *The Classical Review*, New Series 33:1, 1983, pp. 71-71.

one-sided, consisting mostly of the exploitation visited by the propertied class upon their dependent labourers. There were, throughout antiquity, very few uprisings by slaves or other categories of dependent workers (though it should be noted that those controlling dependent labour put a lot of effort in preventing resistance or rebellion), and those that occurred happened in very specific contexts and were not aimed at abolishing slavery or other forms of dependence as institutions.¹⁶

My main problem with both these models as analyses of ancient labour, however, is that they tend, in a surprisingly similar way, to minimize or (partially) ignore the great diversity and socio-political complexity characteristic of the Greek and Roman labour situation, which is why I have dubbed them “undersocialized”. The market model, in Temin’s version, whilst offering a seductively logical analysis on its own terms, not only lumps freeborn workers, freedmen and slaves together, minimizing the importance of the considerable social, legal and political differences between these categories of individuals, but also does not pay much attention to differences between these and yet other types of labourers (e.g. different forms of often serf-like tenancy, especially in the eastern provinces of the Roman empire, debt-bondage, forced labour, public slavery). In his Marxist analysis, de Ste. Croix, in his effort to present the dependent labourers of the ancient world as one single class of exploited workers, despite his deep knowledge of the ancient sources is similarly prone to minimizing the overall importance of real legal, social and economic differences between various categories of (rural) labourers (slaves, tenant-farmers, serfs, debt-bondsmen and so on). Despite the theoretical sophistication on display in both Temin’s and de Ste. Croix’s analyses, one is left with the feeling that precisely that which makes the ancient world historically interesting, that is, the institutional, legal, social and cultural specificities and idiosyncrasies of ancient Greece and Rome, is often smoothed over or judged to be of secondary importance only, all for the benefit of the overall model.

This brings us to a third and, to this day, most influential account of the Greco-Roman economy, one that was born precisely from impatience with

¹⁶ See SHAW, Brent. *Spartacus and the slave wars: a brief history with documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001 for a brief overview of the Roman Republican slave uprisings, with much primary source material (in translation).

the generalisations of (an earlier generation of) “modernising” market-focussed historians (chiefly Rostovtzeff and Meyer) as well as those of orthodox Marxists, namely Moses Finley’s model of “the ancient economy”. Inspired by Max Weber, Finley argued that social status, in which class position was subsumed, was the ordering principle of ancient society. Ancient man was a *homo politicus* instead of a *homo economicus*. The accumulation of wealth was not an end in itself; it served, and was in its shape and substance constrained by, the acquirement of status.¹⁷ In tune with his overall discussion of ancient economic behaviour, Finley suggested that, when analyzing ancient labour, we should take into account “a spectrum of statuses with the free citizen at one end and the slave at the other, and with a considerable number of shades of dependence in between”.¹⁸ Greeks and Romans, Finley suggested, citing the views of ancient authors mentioned at the beginning of this paper, evaluated the various categories of labourers primarily in moral terms, related to status. Since wage labourers and craftsmen were likened to slaves, their situation was unbecoming of the freeborn citizen. Due to such ideological considerations, Finley argued, citizens were generally unavailable as labourers, and slaves and other unfree groups (e.g. the helots at Sparta) or semi-free groups such as freedmen often took their place. Consequently, no proper labour market, in the modern sense, ever developed.

Finley’s status-based approach allows us to take proper account of the social, legal and political complexities of the ancient labour situation. However, it has its own problems. I mention two. First, precisely because Finley’s status-based methodology is so sensitive to specific social context, it might make us lose sight of broader patterns of labour relations of precisely the sort which Temin and de Ste. Croix each in their own way strive to bring to light. Finley himself tried to remedy this problem by focussing much of his research on the Greek Classical and Roman Republican periods, during which the division between free citizen and slave was most clearly demarcated, often citing views expressed in sources from these periods as representative of antiquity as a whole, whilst steering clear, for the most part (though certainly not entirely), of the more complex

¹⁷ FINLEY. *Ancient economy. op.cit.*

¹⁸ FINLEY, Moses. “Was Greek civilization based on slave labour?” In: FINLEY, Moses. *Economy and Society in ancient Greece. op.cit.* pp. 97-115, at p. 98; FINLEY. *Ancient economy. op.cit.* pp. 67-68.

status structures of the Greek Archaic, Hellenistic and High Roman imperial periods.

Second, and most importantly, just as neo-classical or Marxist-inspired historians might be accused of “undersocialization”, so it is possible to accuse Finley of “oversocializing” the ancient economy, including ancient labour, and, as Ian Morris points out in his introduction to the 1999 edition of Finley’s *Ancient Economy*, many critics have done just that (though without using the term). Finley, it can be argued, takes the moralizing strictures expressed in elite-produced literary texts too much at face value. Xenophon or Cicero were engaged in ideological polemics, and whatever they said, in reality some (many?) citizens did work as wage labourers, some (many?) freedmen and even slaves might function relatively independently, become well-off or even rich, and cities did need their grain, wine and oil, peasants their manufactured products, and elites their luxuries, so there were lots of possibilities to make a good profit as a merchant, and even elites were not averse to some involvement in this kind of money-making. Evidence to back up all such statements has been brought to light in increasing quantities in recent years, especially for the Hellenistic and Roman economies¹⁹, and this is all well and good as far as it goes, but there is perhaps a more important argument to be made concerning Finley’s supposed “oversocialization”.

Finley, in line with the views of substantivist anthropologists such as Karl Polanyi, regarded ancient economic behaviour as “embedded” in social, political and ideological institutions and morals. In the pre-industrial world, according to Polanyi, the economy did not develop into a clearly demarcated social sphere, separated from moral considerations and social and political institutions. Capitalism, with its disembedded, price-setting markets, impersonal exchange and contractual wage-labour, and, consequently (in this line of thinking), economic growth, only became dominant features of western society around 1800 or so.²⁰ Anyone, therefore, who wished to argue for a market economy or even economic growth in classical antiquity did well to steer clear from this model of an “embedded” or “socialized” economy, while Finley, in turn, used it

¹⁹ The bibliography is enormous, and growing. It is best to consult SCHEIDEL, MORRIS, SALLER. *Cambridge Economic History*. *op. cit.*

²⁰ POLANYI, Karl. *The great transformation: the political and economic origins of our time*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944.

precisely to argue against what he regarded as the anachronistic market-economic modernising of ancient historians like Rostovtzeff and Meyer. In Finley's view, the ancient economy was a relatively static structure without much development or *per capita* economic growth. In the absence of significant technological developments (due to a non-productive mentality), labour served to produce the means of subsistence, or, in its dependent forms, as a subject of exploitation.

In recent decades, however, economic sociologists and economists have pointed with increasing frequency to the role played by mentalities, institutions and organisations in structuring economic behaviour. The crux of these arguments is that every economy is, to some extent, embedded in social structures. As economists associated with the New Institutional Economics (NIE) have particularly pointed out, institutions, if anything, determine the incentive structure in any given society, and hence economic outcomes.²¹ If we follow this line of thinking, we can only conclude that Finley was right to attach pivotal importance to Greek and Roman social structures, mentalities and institutions in his analysis of the ancient economy. At the same time, however, we can no longer be so certain as he was that such institutional embeddedness necessarily prevented any form of economic dynamism or growth. It is increasingly acknowledged that economies in different periods and cultures have their own internal dynamics, their own "bounded" forms of rationality or efficiency, all stimulated by their particular institutional set-ups. Now, and this is the question which concerns me here, what happens when we look at ancient labour relations through such institutional lenses?

III

An institutional analysis of ancient labour might, I would argue, well provide a solution to some of the problems associated with the analyses sketched above (i.e. the oversimplifying abstractions of the market- and Marxist models, and the overly complex status-based analysis of Finley), without, however, in the process doing away with their chief merits: alerting

²¹ GRANOVETTER, Mark. "Economic action and social structure". *op.cit.*; NORTH, Douglass. *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; NORTH, Douglass. *Understanding the process of economic change*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

us to the presence of markets and exploitation respectively in the case of Temin and de Ste. Croix, and to the importance of social structure in case of Finley. In terms of the NIE, every society produces its own institutions (formal legal rules, informal norms, i.e. “the rules of the game”) which are shaped by its prevailing world view (a shared mental model). Organisations, i.e. groups of people bound to achieve some common objectives, can then be conceived of as “the players of the game”, responding to the incentive structures created by the institutional framework. In practice, the line between institutions and organisation is fuzzy at best, and the two often appear to overlap. Hence in what follows I will generally speak of institutions/organisations.

Focussing on institutions/organisations allows us to bring some analytical order to the great variety of different categories of labour and types of labourers which we come across in ancient sources. This is so because institutions/organisations functioned as structuring actors, that might simultaneously “consume”, i.e. buy/hire and employ, and supply labour to third parties. Thus, they in effect operated as allocation mechanisms (or channels) via which labour and labour power were distributed in ancient society. An institutional/organisational focus, moreover, can also provide us with some rationale for the great diversity of labour statuses which we encounter in antiquity, since within a given institutional/organisational context, different status positions and the specific labour relations associated with them might well serve to reduce costs of oversight, transaction and information so as to maximise “efficiency”, in terms of output, profit or, indeed, exploitation (rent-seeking, predation).

By way of example, I shall very briefly discuss three instances of such institutions/organisations in Greco-Roman society: the household (*oikos/familia*), the association (*collegium*), and the city (*polis/civitas*), though others can easily be thought of (e.g. the temple, the court). I should point out that some of what follows here is still partly hypothetical, the subject of ongoing research by various scholars: I present these examples merely as suggestions towards what I think could be a fruitful new line of research in the study of ancient labour.

The Greek or Roman household (*oikos/familia*), comprising the core family (parents and children) as well as slaves, freedmen and sometimes other dependents, is a prime example of an organisational structure that served as a mechanism for the allocation of labour, buying it, employing it, and also supplying it to others. Households might be small, just a farmer or manufacturer in his workshop, with his family members, apprentices, and a few slaves or freedmen, or large, like an elite *oikos*, comprising many

individuals, and having both an urban (city villa) and rural base (estates), or even several of either of these. As units of production, both for home consumption and for sale on the market, households bought labour, in the form of slaves, for a multitude of tasks, ranging from secretarial duties or educating the children to hard manual labour on the estates. They also hired labour, mostly in the form of low-skilled casual wage-workers, in Republican Italy, for instance, primarily to assist the slave workforce on the estates during peak periods in the agricultural year (harvest primarily).²² To be able to function at all, the household always needed a basic or core workforce, to accomplish the necessary tasks. Slaves, being the property of the household, and hence totally dependent on it, legally, socially and economically, were the obvious choice here. They could be fully controlled, and were always available. For similar reasons, slaves, as well as freedmen who, by law, custom and/or economic necessity, were generally still tied to their former masters, were also the ideal type of worker to serve as agents for the household in any trading, manufacturing and financial activities its core members might undertake. Especially important in this respect were freedmen who had served the household for a long time as slaves, which meant that their former masters knew them and their abilities well, and had had time to develop a relationship of trust with them that would have been hard to establish with outsiders.²³ Hired labourers the household needed only for short-term tasks, such as helping to gather in the harvest. Hence, there was no need for a similar level of control and building up of trust. Households might also lease (part of) their land to tenants, who were less expensive than a slave workforce in terms of costs of oversight.²⁴ Finally, households also supplied labour to third parties, in the form of slaves but

²² GARNSEY, Peter. "Non-slave labour in the Roman world". In: GARNSEY, Peter. *Cities, peasants and food in classical antiquity: essays in social and economic history*. Edited with addenda by SCHEIDEL, Walter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 134-150.

²³ In Classical Athens, for instance, citizens engaged in banking and financial activities often co-operated professionally with slaves in their household. See COHEN, *Athenian economy and society: a banking perspective. op.cit.* pp. 73-101. On the widespread use of freedmen as economic agents in the Roman world see MOURITSEN, Henrik. *The freedman in the Roman world*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 esp. pp. 213-216; BROEKAERT, Wim. "The demise of status. Freedmen and agency in Roman business". Forthcoming.

²⁴ In some places, such as Sparta, Thessaly and (parts of) Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor, due to specific regional socio-political conditions, households were able to make use of semi-servile native populations as labourers.

also freedmen who were hired out to others –probably often to individuals belonging to the household’s circle of friends and acquaintances.

Professional associations (which the Romans called *collegia*) flourished in Greek and Roman cities, chiefly during the Hellenistic and Roman imperial periods. Uniting members of the same or similar professions, they provide a window on a category of work that is often overlooked in studies of labour: that of the self-employed, the manufacturers and service providers in their workshops, supplying their specialized skills and products to the community. *Collegia* have long been regarded as primarily social clubs, not to be compared with early modern European guilds, but in recent years scholars have increasingly placed stress on various forms of economic co-operation between *collegia* members.²⁵ To protect their interests in the often highly volatile pre-industrial markets and also vis-à-vis the far wealthier and more powerful urban elites who dominated city politics, artisans and service providers banded together. *Collegia*, it has been argued, were trust groups, where sense of community was reinforced by the sociability provided by common meals, common festivities and common cults, and members were bound to help one another. As trust networks, *collegia* facilitated the provision of credit and the exchange of information among members at low transaction costs, and they also allowed members to present their skilled labour and its products to society at large on terms over which they exercised some level of control. Many members of *collegia* of artisans and craftsmen would have been workshop owners and consequently employers of (mostly only a few) skilled workers. Given that ancient labour markets for skilled workers in particular were often thin and fragmented, *collegia* likely served as networks co-ordinating the allocation of skilled labour among members (and between members of different *collegia*).²⁶ In addition, while *collegia* members themselves could be freeborn, freedmen, and sometimes even slaves, the *collegium* as a collective could also possess its own slaves, whom it bought, employed, and might manumit, in which case the *collegium*, as a collective, became the *patronus* of the now manumitted

²⁵ See VERBOVEN, Koenraad. “Professional *collegia*: guilds or social clubs?” *Ancient Society* 41, 2011, pp. 187-195 for a good discussion.

²⁶ See in particular HAWKINS, Cameron. “Manufacturing”. In: SCHEIDEL, Walter. ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 175-194. For *collegia* as trust groups consult BROEKAERT, Wim. “Partners in Business. Roman merchants and the advantages of being a *collegiatus*” *Ancient Society*, 41, 2011, pp. 219-254.

slaves.²⁷ Thus, in terms of an institutional analysis of labour, *collegia* might be regarded as institutional/organisational structures coordinating and facilitating the labour of various important categories of workers in the urban economy: the self-employed of various statuses (freeborn, *liberti*, slaves working fairly independently, with their workshops as their *peculium*), skilled wage-labourers, and (skilled) slaves.²⁸

I now turn to my third and final example, cities. The ancient world was a world of cities, and, for long periods of its history, also one of city-states (*poleis/civitates*). It was the city-states such as Athens, Sparta and particularly Rome that engaged in imperialist adventures which produced streams of war captives who could be employed or sold as slaves.²⁹ Cities too provided both the material infrastructure and organisational context for that most notorious of ancient “labour markets”, the slave trade.³⁰ In this most direct and immediate sense, cities certainly served as an important labour allocation mechanism. However, we can go further. The political structure of the ancient city, with its annually rotating amateur-magistrates and its mass citizen-councils and -assemblies, did not allow for the development of professional bureaucracies. A partial solution to this problem was found in the form of public slaves, owned by the city, to carry out important public tasks as a permanent workforce that could easily be monitored and controlled by the annually appointed magistrates.³¹ The slave status of these workers meant that they had virtually no bargaining power, so they could be employed at low transaction costs. Cities might also employ a number of free salaried officials who assisted the magistrates with

²⁷ LIU, Jinyu. *Collegia centonariorum: the guilds of textile dealers in the Roman west*. Leiden: Brill, 2009, pp. 176-178.

²⁸ Liu cites an example of a *collegia*-owned slave who was the association’s *arcarius*, or treasurer, a responsible post requiring specific skills. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

²⁹ For the classic analysis of the impact of Roman imperialism, including the import of massive numbers of war captives as slaves, on the Italian economy, see HOPKINS, Keith. *Conquerors and slaves. Sociological Studies in Roman History 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

³⁰ To give one well-known, if extreme, example, Strabo 14.5.2 reports that the slave market in late Hellenistic Delos had a turnover of ten thousand slaves a day.

³¹ During the Classical period, for example, the Athenian *polis* owned a group of Scythian archers as public slaves to keep order during meetings of the council and assembly. In addition, it employed public slaves (*demosioi*) for street cleaning, the repair of roads and a range of other tasks, including administrative ones. The imperial city of Rome, even though no longer a city-state in the original sense, still kept on public slave gangs for the upkeep of roads, public buildings and shrines, and the water supply system (aqueducts).

their official tasks – writers, clerks, heralds, *lictors* and so forth. Moreover, as a service to the citizenry, doctors, teachers, rhetoricians and philosophers might be publicly employed, that is, free intellectual specialists of a fairly high status. Last but certainly not least, cities also generated (and partly co-ordinated) employment for those with no or only marginal ties to the allocative institutions thus far described (elite households, *collegia*): free poor day labourers. Many such individuals were employed in civic public building, often on a temporary basis and generally via a whole series of subcontracts. Due to the periodic nature of public construction, it made little sense for urban communities or contractors to keep on a large permanent slave force for building projects.³² In this sphere, then, casual wage labour found one of its most important niches.³³ For poor urban workers, underemployment was a significant problem, especially when there were no major building projects going on (or, for rural wage workers, outside harvest periods), and many free urban poor would, in addition, have had recourse to informal street trading, as do the urban poor in developing countries today.³⁴

As I hope these brief examples indicate, an institutional analysis potentially has some advantages over the methodologies discussed earlier on in this essay. The prominent role played by trust groups and social network-type institutions/organisations (such as the *oikos/familia* or the *collegium*) in the allocation of labour suggests that ancient labour markets functioned less well than is sometimes supposed. Then again, the prominent role of these same institutions/organisations also suggests that the ancient labour situation cannot be reduced to a simple model of one class exploiting

³² The public slave workforces in imperial Rome, with its one million inhabitants at the time of Augustus, of course constitute a partial exception to this generalisation. See e.g. the 700 public slaves under the command of the *curator aquarum*, who were responsible for the upkeep of the water supply system, a permanent necessity, especially in such a large city: Frontinus, *On aqueducts* 116-117.

³³ BRUNT, Peter. "Free labour and public works at Rome". *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 70, 1980, pp. 81-100. DELAINE, Janet. "Building the Eternal City: the building industry of imperial Rome". In: COULSTON, Jon and DODGE, Hazel. eds. *Ancient Rome: the archaeology of the Eternal City*. Oxford: Oxford University School of Archaeology, 2000, pp. 119-141.

³⁴ HOLLERAN, Claire. "Migration and the urban economy of Rome". In: HOLLERAN, Claire and PUDSEY, April. eds. *Demography and the Graeco-Roman World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 155-180. It should be noted that urban and rural casual wage workers were often overlapping categories, since the urban poor might find temporary employment on neighbouring estates during harvest time, and the rural poor might find occasional employment in cities (where, however, they might subsequently stay put, attempting to scrape a living in the informal economy).

another. While the *oikos* or the *familia*, for instance, no doubt offered excellent opportunities to the head of household and his kin to exploit the household's dependent labourers (as evidenced e.g. by the harsh lot of chattel slaves working a household's landed estates), it should be understood that the household's diverse status composition also allowed the development of close bonds of trust between members that were beneficial to its operation as an economic unit and which could in turn strongly, and positively, affect actual labour relations within the household.

Overall, an institutional approach to ancient labour offers at least an indication that the ancient status structure did not necessarily have a negative impact on economic outcomes in the Greco-Roman world: rather, it might facilitate economic processes since it helped individuals to co-ordinate their activities in order to navigate a harsh, volatile world of insecurity, high risk and fragmented, imperfect markets. Finally, an institutional analysis of labour such as proposed here seems to fit in well with the methodological preoccupations of Global Labour History (GLH) to which this issue of *Workers of the World* is devoted. As an approach to labour, institutional economic analysis does not abstract from culture-specific idiosyncrasies of ideology, class and status, rather, it makes these central to the analysis, but in such a way as to facilitate and encourage rather than obstruct cross-cultural comparisons. This seems to suit the diachronic and trans-cultural agenda of GLH, whose proponents are actively engaged in developing comparative and trans-cultural models themselves.³⁵ As will be apparent from this essay, I think that the study of ancient labour relations can certainly make an important contribution to this trend.

³⁵ See VAN DER LINDEN and LUCASSEN.. *Prolegomena for a Global Labour History. op.cit.*

Human capital formation in medieval Islam

Maya Shatzmiller

Introduction

In their call for contributions, the organizers of this issue urged us to address the question “what is the relevancy of pre-1500 labour history to labour history”? In the case of Medieval Islamic labour history, the answer lies in the role labour played in the economic growth which took place in the Middle East during the seventh to the eleventh centuries. While periods of economic growth in historical societies, better described as “efflorescences”,¹ are usually difficult to establish, there is evidence that one took place in the Middle East during the early medieval period. A preliminary exploration of a series of diagnostic indicators, one of them labour, makes it possible to argue that this was indeed the case.² The role of labour in improving the productivity of the Islamic economy in the eighth to the fifteenth centuries, was demonstrated through the increased division of labour and specialization, described in a study of the occupational classification in Islamic cities in the medieval period.³ During the initial growth, from the eighth to the eleventh centuries, there were 418 unique

¹GOLDSTONE, Jack A. “Efflorescences and economic growth in world history: Rethinking the “Rise of the West” and the Industrial Revolution”. *Journal of World History*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2002, pp. 323-389.

² SHATZMILLER, Maya. “Economic Performance and Economic Growth in the Early Islamic World”. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 54(2011): 132-184. A book manuscript on the subject is currently under preparation

³ SHATZMILLER, Maya. *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994; Idem., “L’Organisation du travail urbain et les métiers”. In: GARCIN, Jean-Claude e BALIVET, Michel. eds. *Etats, Sociétés et Cultures du Monde Musulman Médiéval X^e-XV^e siècles*, T. 2: *Sociétés et Cultures*, Nouvelle Cléo, *L’histoire et ses problèmes*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000, pp. 199-219; Idem., “Artisans. Pre-1500”. In: FLEET, Kate; KRÄMER, Gudrun; MATRINGE, Denis; NAWAS, John; ROWSON, Everett. eds. *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third Edition*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

occupations in the manufacturing sector and 522 in the service sector.⁴ The highest degree of division of labour and specialization occurred in the textile, food, building and metal industries, which had the highest concentration of labour in the cities. No such extensive division of labour was shown in any contemporary economy, including Western Europe. The division of labour in the service sector occupations corresponded with the expansion in commerce, trade, and administration. In addition to this expanding division of labour, the rise in labour productivity in the medieval Islamic cities was paralleled by a rise in human capital. The purpose of this paper is to determine the existence of this human capital factor in medieval Islam by placing its formation on a solid empirical basis.

Human capital and economic growth: methodological context

Economists define human capital as “the improvement in labour created by education and knowledge embodied in the workforce”, and economic theory links human capital through technological progress directly to economic growth today.⁵ In the economic history of pre-modern Europe, human capital constitutes the origin and foundation of the rise to prosperity. Human mastering of technology and technological innovation were investigated by Joel Mokyr, who concluded that human capital played a critical role, pushing the limits of labour productivity to new heights and aiding economic growth.⁶ The mechanisms linking rising productivity to human capital formation, such as an increase in per capita income, rising living standards, more discretionary income to spend on education, also lie behind the “Smithian growth” linked to the finer division of labour, which Mokyr highlighted as one the four technology-related processes leading to growth.⁷ The other component of human capital formation was literacy and numeracy, which made possible the implementation of technological innovation. As Reis argued “the unprecedented rise in literacy” beginning in

⁴ SHATZMILLER, *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World*, *op.cit.* p.170. There are no other quantitative studies of occupational classification for medieval societies. See *Ibid.*, pp. 11-33 for references.

⁵ KRUGMAN, Paul and WELLS, Robin. *Economics*, 3rd ed. New York, Worth Publishers, 2013, p. 532.

⁶ MOKYR, Joel. *The Lever of Riches. Technological Creativity and Economic Progress*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, p 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5

the seventeenth century was fundamental to the economic growth of Western Europe.⁸ What makes both the studies of Mokyr and Reis linking human capital and historical economic growth, methodologically solid is the statistical evidence they provide us on wages and standards of living in the prelude to the Industrial Revolution.⁹ Even if real wages in Great Britain and Holland did not rise decisively above medieval levels before 1870, the link between human capital and economic growth remains unchallenged.¹⁰ While the studies may throw the precise moment of this rise in productivity into doubt, they do not question the dynamics of the process of human capital formation, and its relevancy.

The economic growth detected in the early medieval Islamic Near East from 750-1000 AD, was not sustained over the long-term; nevertheless it was real enough to produce such diagnostic indicators of growth as literacy, skills acquisition, and technological innovation.¹¹ Most importantly, the significance of the methodology used by European economic historians to validate economic growth is now available to us.¹² We now have statistical evidence that standards of living in the medieval Middle East were substantially higher than subsistence level and higher than those in other societies for most of the medieval period.¹³

The goal of this paper is to put human capital formation in medieval Islam on a solid empirical basis by providing historical evidence from a large spectrum of Arabic sources on education, training, and the dissemination of knowledge. I will review three main mediums, through which skills were transmitted in the medieval Islamic period: apprenticeship, specialized manuals, and the mobility of artisans. The contextual setting of each

⁸ REIS, Jaime. "Economic Growth, Human Capital Formation and Consumption in Western Europe Before 1800". In: ALLEN, R. C., BENGTTSSON, T., and DRIBE, M. *Living Standards in the Past. New Perspectives on Well-Being in Asia and Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp.195-225.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 196- 200; MOKYR. *The Lever of Riches. op.cit.*, pp. 288-289.

¹⁰ ALLEN, Robert C. "The Great Divergence in European Wages and Prices from the Middle Ages to the First World War." *Explorations in Economic History*, vol. 38, 2001, p. 430.

¹¹ SHATZMILLER. "Economic Performance and Economic Growth in the Early Islamic World". *op.cit.*; GOLDSTONE. "Efflorescences and economic growth". *op.cit.*

¹² PAMUK, Ş evket and SHATZMILLER, Maya. "Prices, Wages and GDP per capita in the Islamic Middle East, 700-1500". *Journal of Economic History*. Forthcoming.

¹³ As in the case of division of labour in medieval societies, there are no comparable studies on real wages and standards of living for Europe or Asia, but there are studies on Babylonian, Roman and Byzantine standards of living.

medium, institutions and related historical conditions, will also be reviewed: How Islamic law affected apprenticeship, how the rise in income and standards of living resulted in the growth of literacy of the workforce, and how the Islamic patterns of urbanization and demographics were linked to the mobility of artisans.

An earlier publication on human capital formation in Islam should be mentioned in this context.¹⁴ Eric Chaney upholds the view that Islam as a religion was intolerant towards and incompatible with reason and science and that this caused the absence of human capital and blocked human capital formation in medieval Islam. While there is no evidence on human capital formation provided in the paper, Chaney argues for the lack of Islamic medieval human capital by relating it to the state of Islamic countries of today. He either overlooks, or discounts, opinions to the contrary from scholars who studied Islamic technology and applied sciences.¹⁵

A “guildless” universe

Craft guilds were the single most important tool of professional education in premodern Europe, and guilds of some sort are known to have existed in classical and Roman periods, so the absence of craft guilds in medieval Islam surprises economic historians. How could labour organization and especially human capital formation take place without this efficient institution? Indeed. Yet, European craft guilds did not come into existence before the 12th century with the rise of the cities in Europe. By this time, labour productivity and human capital formation in the Islamic world had been in evidence for over five hundred years, and had remarkable material achievements to their name. Furthermore, the reputation of the European craft guilds as efficient institutions was tarnished by accusations that they blocked technological innovation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; something which the recent attempt to exonerate them has done nothing to

¹⁴ See CHANEY, Eric. “Islam and Human Capital Formation: Evidence from Premodern Muslim Science”. In: McLEARY, Rachel M. ed. *The Oxford Handbook of the Economics of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp.81-92.

¹⁵ Al-HASSAN, A. and HILL, D. R. Hill. *Islamic Technology. An illustrated history*. Cambridge: University Press, 1986, pp. 7-8 on the role of religion.

change.¹⁶ Anachronistic and Euro-centric, (how could comparison with England or Germany in the seventeenth century, be justified?) the required comparison with European craft guilds will be honoured only when relevant, useful or just inspiring.

A view of a fictitious Islamic guild dominated the historiography of medieval labour in Islam. The historical precedents, the Roman and Byzantine guilds, were mostly social organizations without a definitive economic role, and most likely did not exist in the Middle East when the Muslims arrived.¹⁷ The idea of an Islamic craft guild originated with Louis Massignon¹⁸ and Bernard Lewis¹⁹ who were inspired by a single Neo-Platonic Isma'ili text, the *Encyclopedia of the Pure Brethren*, which described a hierarchy of manual crafts, similar to the hierarchy of spheres or heavens.²⁰ The guild they analyzed was a very different institution from the late medieval European guild. It was not a mainframe, officially recognized institution of significant economic role, dominating the production of commodities by skilled trades. It was never depicted as playing a role in innovation, training, or any function related to human capital formation. Instead it was a secret association of members of the lower classes: holders of despised trades such as barbers and tanners, persecuted minorities like Jews, Christian and Persians, and heretics of all sorts. According to this theory, their premier reason for associating with each other was to redress their lowly social standing, not to regulate items, fix prices or deliver apprenticeship. Surprisingly, the entire early generation of Islamic economic historians accepted it. Scholars such as Cahen, who later recanted, Ashtor,

¹⁶ EPSTEIN, S. R. "Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship, and Technological Change in Preindustrial Europe". *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 58, no. 3, Sept. 1998, pp. 684-713. Sheilagh C Ogilvie argues quite convincingly in my opinion that the guilds were "unfriendly" to economic growth. "Rehabilitating the Guilds: A Reply". *Economic History Review*, vol. 61, 2008, pp. 175-182. Idem. *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds, 1000-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

¹⁷ On the Byzantine guilds, consult MANIATIS, George C. "The guild system in Byzantium and medieval Western Europe: a comparative analysis of organizational structures, regulatory mechanisms, and behavioral patterns". *Byzantion*, vol. 76, 2006, pp. 463-570.

¹⁸ MASSIGNON, Louis. "La Futuwwa ou pacte d'honneur artisanal entre les travailleurs Musulmans au Moyen Age". *La nouvelle Clio*, Bruxelles, 1952, pp. 171-198 and *Opera Minora*. Beirut, 1963, I, pp. 396-417, as well as his entries "Futuwwa", "Sinf" in the *EF*².

¹⁹ LEWIS, Bernard. "The Islamic Guilds". *Economic History Review*, 8, 1937, pp. 20-37.

²⁰ I have used this text for quantification in *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World*. *op.cit.* pp. 76-77.

who never reversed his position,²¹ and the Sourdels,²² Goblot,²³ Brunschvig,²⁴ Taeschner, and Makdisi, embraced the idea of this strange craft guild without doubt.

Nonetheless, within 50 years it became apparent that no one could suggest any historical facts for the existence of a craft guild; there were no documents showing its existence and no Arabic term for it. There was no information about apprenticeship, wages, and transmission of manufacturing skills or technology, old or new. Eventually it was Goitein who dismissed it outright: "There was no such term because guilds in the strict sense of the word had not yet come into being."²⁵ An attempt to name the para-military associations, *ayyārūn*, *ḥīyān*, *ahdāth*, *akhī*, and mystical orders *tarīqas*, which only appeared in the thirteenth century, as guilds, was equally denounced. Baer concluded, "Although the young men of the *Akhī* movement (thirteen and fourteenth century) were recruited mainly among craftsmen, the association as such was non-professional..."²⁶; they thus had no economic function. Finally, Cahen laid the idea of an Islamic craft guild to rest in a paper surveying the literature as well as explaining the historical conditions as to why guilds did not appear.²⁷

Why a fictitious Islamic guild came about in the first place is not clear and what could explain the emergence and persistence of the idea of an Islamic craft guild in the Islamic historiography of labour, in spite of a complete lack of historical evidence to its existence? Certainly the importance of the European guilds in the economic history of late medieval Europe had

²¹ ASHTOR, Eliyahu. *A social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, pp.190-191, 224.

²² SOURDEL, Dominique and Janine. *La civilisation de l'Islam classique*. Paris: Arthaud, 1968, pp. 455, 458.

²³ GOBLOT, Henri. *Les Qanat. Une technique d'acquisition de l'eau.*, Paris: Mouton, 1979, p. 45.

²⁴ BRUNSCHVIG, Robert. *La Berbérie orientale sous les Hafside*. Vol.2. Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1940-1947, pp. 202, 293-305.

²⁵ GOITEN, S. D. *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*. Vol.1. Los Angeles and Berkeley, University of California Press, 1967, pp. 81-83.

²⁶ BAER, Gabriel. "Guilds in Middle Eastern History". In: COOK, Michael A. ed. *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East. From the Rise of Islam to the Present Day*. London: Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 11-30.

²⁷ CAHEN, Claude. "Y a-t-il eu des corporations professionnelles dans le monde musulman classique?" HOURANI, A. H. and STERN, S. eds. *The Islamic City*. Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1970, pp.51-63.

something to do with it. The appearance of craft guilds in Middle Eastern cities after the Ottoman conquest also played a role. Massignon's troubled private and intellectual life is also sometimes evoked as being behind the esoteric, clandestine and mystical character of the institutions he described.²⁸ But in all fairness to Massignon we may acknowledge that the idea of an Islamic guild was inspired by the historical conditions surrounding labour in Europe at the time. His insistence that the Islamic craft guilds were primarily used as social support mechanisms may have been inspired by the social nature of the later Islamic guild. Moreover, socialism was on the rise in France in the beginning of the century, and questions of solidarity within the labour movement and the dignity of labour loomed large on the agenda. After all, the Roman and Byzantine guilds as well as the European ones shared these characteristics. But Massignon also spent many years in Morocco and Lebanon, and was associated with the colonial office. Both in North Africa and the Levant, but especially in the Maghreb, the bureau invested money in recording native industries and production techniques. This gave rise to the type of "administrator cum scholar", an entire generation of individuals including Massignon, who lived in the Muslim French colonies and wrote an entire body of literature on labour techniques.²⁹

Regardless, the persistence of the notion of Islamic guilds resulted in a lack of serious investigation into the most basic questions about how the transmission of techniques occurred, how the acquisition of skills took place or the mentoring and the formation of the young generation of craftsmen ensued. Until a more thorough study is conducted, this is what we know about the mediums of human capital formation, beginning with apprenticeship.

²⁸ GIBB, H. A. R. "Louis Massignon (1882–1962)". *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 95, 1963, pp. 119-121.

²⁹ Named "Les trois services d'artisanat de l'Afrique du Nord" it published the *Cahiers des Arts et Techniques d'Afrique du Nord* and *Bulletin de liaison des agents du service de l'artisanat*. These civil servants were charged with supervising the native industries. Among them were Boris Maslow on the Moroccan mosque, Yves on the wool industry in Morocco, R. Le Tourneau on gold spinning in Fez, P. Ricard on bookbinding, L. Brunot on milling, tannery, and shoe making, G. Chantreaux on weaving, V. Loubignac on wax makers, H. Basset on the wool making, A. Bel and P. Ricard on wool making, and J. Herber on potters.

Apprenticeship and labour law

Apprenticing with a family member, or in an artisan shop, was the most common method of transmission of techniques. References to apprenticeship with a father come from the individuals who wrote professional manuals. One such example is that of the eleventh century Tunisian ruler Tamīm b. al-Muʿizz b. Bādīs, who learned his bookbinding skills from his sultan father. In the fifteenth century Ibn Mājid wrote a navigation manual for skippers navigating in the Indian Ocean. He describes having studied with his father, who was a *muʿallim*, master, a hereditary title that his father and grandfather held before him. The epitaphs in the main cemetery in the city of Akhlat, in Anatolia, show that masonry was a hereditary trade in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.³⁰ Some suggest that in addition to apprenticing with the father, that "Craftsmen apprenticed their nephews, generally the man's sister's son and might eventually reveal their trade secrets only to them".³¹

Outside the family, apprenticeship took place on the artisan's shop floor. The large enterprises, such as state workshops, had a hierarchy of employees, headed by the masters, *muʿallims*, and followed by workers, *ummāls*, and apprentices, *mutaʿallims*. The masters believed that the hierarchy helped them to control the process and keep technological secrets under lock and key. In the fourteenth century al-Hakīm, the Marīnid mint director of Fez, explained in his minting manual: "the consensus among the masters in our time is that they do not let a stranger into the profession with them. If they do that, it is like inviting in the deterioration of the profession and loss of money".³² Art historians frequently comment on the diffusion of techniques in the decorating arts and their relationship to apprenticeship. A. L. Mayer thought that the hierarchy created an intellectual affinity among generations of artisans: "the master was linked to his teachers on whom he depends and his pupils in whom he instils his ideas".³³ O. Grabar showed

³⁰ ROGERS, J. M. "Calligraphy and Common Script: Epitaphs from Aswan and Akhlat". In: SOUCEK, P. ed. *Content and Context of Visual Art in the Islamic World*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University, 1988, p.113.

³¹ ZUHUR, Sherifa. "Of Milk-Mothers and Sacred Bonds: Islam, Patriarchy, and New Reproductive Technologies". *Creighton Law Review*, 25/3, 1991-92, p. 1728.

³² AL-HAKIM. *Al-Hakim, al-Dawha al-mushtabika fī dawābit dār al-sikka*. MU'NIS, H. ed. Madrid: 1960, p.57

³³ MAYER, A.L. *Islamic Woodcarvers And Their Works*. Geneva: A. Kundig, 1958, p. 13.

that one precise technique of decoration tended to predominate in each of the great monuments of the medieval Islamic world: mosaics in Damascus, stucco in the Ibn Tulūn mosque, stone and ceramics in Qairawan.³⁴ These examples from the decorating arts demonstrate how the apprenticeship system contributed and was part of the process of specialization and division of labour in the manufacturing sector. Two other groups visibly interacting in the great variety of decorative techniques, the contractors and supervisors, also took on apprentices.³⁵ There was no limit on the number of artisans who entered the trade through apprenticeship; the masters were only limited in the number of apprentices each could hire by the size of their clientele.

The state workshops, or factories, employed a large number of artisans in one spot, supervised and led by masters. They also played a role in the transmission of knowledge and skills, as well as in the increasing specialization and division of labour. Two examples of this are the royal textile workshops, the *tirāz* factories, located around the palace, and the professional schools for scribes and administrators, also located in or around the palace. Some schools for musicians may have functioned in a similar manner.³⁶ The textile workshops did not produce everyday items of clothing, but were reserved for the production of expensive and luxurious textiles, which were eventually given to dignitaries as present. There is no indication that the skills practiced in the royal workshops were kept secret. On the other hand, skilled labourers could be forced to work in the royal workshops, including the mint. Goitein found such conscription existing among the Jews of Fatimid Cairo and notes that although their wages may have been regular, the only way out was a personal petition to the Caliph.³⁷

In late medieval Europe, the hiring of an apprentice was regulated by a contract which determined the duration of the apprenticeship, the kind of instruction to be received, the apprentice's duties and remuneration, and signed by both the youngster's parents and the master. Admittedly, in our case, the limited data we have on the education of the apprentice does not

³⁴ GRABAR, Oleg. *The Formation of Islamic Art*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973, p.132

³⁵ MAYER. Woodcarvers. *op.cit.*, p.12

³⁶ SERJEANT, R. B. *Islamic Textiles. Material for a history up to the Mongol Conquest*. Beirut: Librairie Du Liban, 1972.

³⁷ GOITEN. *Mediterranean Society*. Vol.1. *op.cit.*, p. 82.

permit an elaboration of this aspect of apprenticeship and we are not sure how it operated. However, in contrast to the situation in medieval Europe, Islamic apprenticeship was controlled and regulated by the Islamic law of wage labour and the law of guardianship. Unlike medieval Europe, the early medieval Islamic universe experienced an early and wide-ranging labour law because of its extensive urbanization and manufacturing industries.

Apprenticeship contracts models from Roman Egypt have survived on papyri, but it is doubtful whether they could be considered as models for the Muslims.³⁸ A contract written on papyri from 871 AD Egypt, details the hiring of a youngster by his father to a butcher for a year in return for his food and clothing, though there is no mention of apprenticeship, but rather of service.³⁹ The *Genizah* contains apprenticeship contracts written according to Jewish law. In a contract signed in 1027 in Fustāt, Egypt, a father hired out his son to a weaver for four months, in return for the payment of 15 dirhams a month, after which the son would receive regular workman's wages. Both father and son made legally binding stipulations.⁴⁰ Another contract confirmed that teaching a son a trade involved payment from the parents.⁴¹ The *Genizah* documents also mention women "teachers", teaching little girls the art of embroidery and other needlework. Another document described a widow who was given two orphans to teach the craft of embroidery, but no contracts were signed.⁴² Limited references to the apprentices themselves is also available in the legal responses to questions submitted to jurists, the *fatwās*. An apprentice to a tanner (*muta'allim ma'ahu lahu*) mixed a putrid skin with the clean skins, thus spoiling them. What was the status of the skins? The mufti Ibn Lubāba, (tenth century), replied that while the apprentice did not enjoy the immunity given to an artisan, there was no damage; the act of dyeing the

³⁸ Examples of apprenticeship contracts from Roman Egypt in JOHNSON, Allan Chester. "Roman Egypt to the reign of Diocletian". In: FRANK, T. *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*. Vol. 2. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1936. For shorthand, see pp. 291-2, for weavers, metal workers, flute playing, including a girl, see pp. 388-391, 286-7, 306-10.

³⁹ DAVID-WEILL, J. "Contrat de travail au pair. Papyrus Louvre 7348". *Études d'Orientalisme dédiés à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962, pp. 509-515.

⁴⁰ GOITEN. *Mediterranean Society*. vol. 3. *op.cit.* p. 237.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vol.3. p. 218.

⁴² *Ibid.*, vol. 1. p. 128.

skins purified them.⁴³ By the fourteenth century, European-style apprenticeship contracts were written and used in the regions not far removed from the shores of Syria and Egypt, such as the island of Crete, but the practice never crossed over into the Islamic lands.⁴⁴

The use of apprenticeship contracts in the Islamic context was limited in comparison, and when a contract was used, it did not provide for systematic training. To the best of my knowledge no apprenticeship contracts have been found in the Islamic archives, beside the ones from the *Genizah*. Yet, notarial manuals offer model contracts, and a legal body of rules and regulations, which structured and normalized the hiring of wage labourers, including the hiring of an apprentice. The legal sources, *fiqh*, deal with hiring under several headings, the hiring of labour, *ijāra*, hiring of an object, *kirā'*, and hiring of an operation, *ju'l*.⁴⁵ A specific section is devoted to the hiring of artisans, *istis, nā'*, dealing with hiring craftsmen, *sunna'*, to work on manufacturing or repairing specific items under their care. These artisans enjoyed immunity, *tad, mīn al-sunna'*, if any items given to them were damaged during the process. Hiring, like sale, is a purely consensual contract. The contracting parties are not required to have reached their majority in order to contract out their labour, but the period of hiring must be stated. The notarial manuals, *shurūt*, *uqūd*, *wathā'iq*, provide numerous contract templates for the notary's use; among them a few contracts for hiring. Typically, these contracts are not generic ones for wage labour, but were to be used for a defined job, such as well digging,⁴⁶ or wet-nursing, so clearly they were not related to gender, but to the nature of the task involved.⁴⁷ Only three models for apprenticeship contract from Muslim Spain are known to me; two out of the three dealt with orphans and one was provided for a mother who needed to hire out her young son.⁴⁸

⁴³ AL-WANSHARISI. *Al-Mi'yār al-mu'rib wa 'l-jāmi' al-mughrib*, vol. 5 is devoted to hiring.

⁴⁴ SANTSCI, Elizabeth. "Contrat de travail et d'apprentissage en Crète vénitienne au XIV^e siècle d'après quelques notaires". *Revue Suisse d'histoire*, vol.19/1, 1969, pp. 33-74

⁴⁵ TYAN, E. "Idjāra", *IE*. *The Encyclopedia of Islam*. Leiden: Brill, 1964.

⁴⁶ IBN AL-ATTAR. *Formulario notarial Hispano-Árabe*. CHALMETA, P. and CORRIENTE, F. eds. Madrid: Academia, 1983, pp. 473-475.

⁴⁷ SHATZMILLER, Maya. *Her Day in Court. Women's Property Rights in Fifteenth-Century Granada*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007, pp.155-159.

⁴⁸ AL- Tulaytulī. *al-Muqni' fī 'lm al-shurūt*. AGUIRRE SÁDABA, F. J. ed. Madrid: Fuentes Árábico-. Hispanas, 1994, pp. 211-212.

Why was the use of an apprenticeship contract limited? To begin with, most hiring was done orally, without a written contract, but the reason behind the lack of apprenticeship contracts may have something to do with the legal status of the minor under guardianship. As mentioned earlier, in the Malikī apprentice contracts from Spain, two out of the three dealt with orphans, the other when there was no male guardian, which indicate that their existence is linked to the relationship between father, or mother, and son.⁴⁹ The law limited the parents' power to hire out their son or to force him to work and a father could never hire out his daughter. He had no right to force her to work, even if she had her own property and resources, and had to provide for her while she was in his charge, until she married and moved to her husband's house.⁵⁰ If she was divorced and had to return to her father's house, he was obligated to take her back, but according to the Malikī School, did not have to provide for her; she was expected to earn wages. When and whether male youngsters could be sent out to work, with or without wages, depended on the particular legal school. The capacity to earn a living, *qudra 'alā 'l-kasb*, was determined by puberty, *bulūgh*; once this was attained a youngster was expected to earn a living.⁵¹ All the Islamic legal schools, except for the Malikī School, fixed the age of puberty at 15, even if the signs of puberty had not yet appeared. A youngster could be employed before reaching the age of 15, earning income which could ease his father's expenses, even if it did not provide all his needs. Again, all schools except the Malikī agree that a father could force a boy to work before puberty if he was capable of it. In the Malikī School, a pre-pubertal boy could not be forced to work, and if there were no physical signs of puberty the working age was set at 18. If he earned a living before puberty, he was expected to live on his earnings.⁵² Only the Malikī law decreed that if young men were capable of earning a living, the parents had the right to force them to work. The Hanafī authors recommended that where possible parents should continue to support their male children while they completed

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 208-212.

⁵⁰ SHATZMILLER. *Her Day in Court. op.cit.*, pp. 19-92.

⁵¹ LINANT DE BELLEFONDS, Y. *Traité de droit musulman compare*. Vol.3. Paris: Mouton & Co., 1973, pp. 129-131.

⁵² *Ibid.*, vol.3. pp. 129-131.

their studies.⁵³ When the youths reached majority, they had the right to end the contract which was signed on their behalf.

Although no apprenticeship contracts were found among the documents in the Islamic archives, we need to heed J. Schacht's observation on the nature of written evidence in Islamic law. He wrote that Islamic law diverged from current practice by denying the validity of documentary evidence, but that documents remained indispensable in practice; they were in constant use and normally accompanied every important transaction.⁵⁴ It may well be that hiring an apprentice was not considered an important transaction, or different from regular wage labour hiring. My work on the Granadan legal archives fully supports that observation: I have not found any hiring contracts of any sort there. Instead, transactions related to property, sales or estate divisions, were recorded at the court and accompanied by the signatures of the witnesses.

In conclusion, since wage labour was common in the medieval Islamic city, the hiring of wage labour, including an apprentice, must have taken place without a contract, merely on an oral agreement between employer and employee. The practical aspects were sufficiently regulated by two important provisions of the Islamic law, the law of guardianship and the law of hire. One may argue that wage labour became more efficient as a result because transaction costs were eliminated. Paying a notary to file the additional "paper work", taking time to be present in court, paying the court fees, including those of the witnesses, saved time and money. For jobs of short duration and small, daily wages, it meant a great deal of saving and it may have decreased the cost of contract enforcement. Apprenticeship within the family resulted in cost savings: the labour of the son remained in the household and did not benefit the master. A son apprenticing with a father saved on living expenses and on physical capital, since a son had easy and free access to tools, furniture, machines, and saved on rent or purchase. He saved on paying for rights of access to technology and benefited without cost from the full disclosure of specific techniques of production or technological innovation. Society saved on the cost of social capital: the hereditary title of master, *mu'allim*, the fixed location, and transmission of

⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 22.

⁵⁴ SCHACHT, Joseph. *Introduction to Islamic Law*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1964, p. 82.

techniques, all provided stability for society and smoothed intergenerational integration

The professional manual, the Islamic education system and the literacy of the workforce

It is impossible to provide here an entire list of the professional manuals written in the medieval Islamic lands. They still have to be classified, according to discipline, geographic origin, or chronology. I will offer only a glimpse of the various professional manuals here, according to their relevancy to the historical development of the Islamic education system and the literacy of the workforce, and through them to human capital formation.

For the first 150 years, up to 800AD, the accumulation and transmission of knowledge in Islamic society was done orally, with people memorizing information and reciting it, following a tradition established in Arabia. The transition from oral to written culture was a lengthy process, which primarily involved changes in the Arabic language itself, standards of living, and the production of cheap paper. By the ninth century there is evidence that schools, classes and curricula became common features in Islamic cities.⁵⁵ Education and learning became available on a wider scale, as shown by the early appearance of teaching manuals for primary education.⁵⁶ We know that in Baghdad, courses included mathematics, logic and disputation, accounting, hunting, sports, music, astronomy, medicine, geometry, training or teaching of animals as well as farming, trading, construction, goldsmithing, sewing, dyeing, and other crafts, which al-Jāhiz, author of a ninth century manual for teachers, recommended for the lower classes only.⁵⁷ Confirmation that education was now based on textual transmission comes from two sources. One is the proliferation of teaching certificates, the *ijāzas* for different topics found in the Arabic manuscripts. The *ijāza* is the certificate of reading or auditing which is recorded on the last or first page of a text used for teaching, by which individuals who participated in the reading session, can now claim the right to teach. The

⁵⁵ GÜNTHER, Sabastian. "Advice for Teacher: the 9th century Muslim scholars Ibn Sahnūn and al-Jāhiz on pedagogy and didactics." In: GILLIOT, CL. *Education and learning in the early Islamic World*. Ashgate: Variorum, 2012, pp.53-92.

⁵⁶ HECK, Paul. *The construction of knowledge in Islamic civilization*. Leiden: Brill, 2002.

⁵⁷ GÜNTHER, Sabastian. "Advice for Teacher..." *op.cit.*, pp. 82-83.

certificate confers upon the recipient the right to transmit a text, teach it, or to issue legal opinions.⁵⁸ It became recognized as a supervised teaching tool and an established method in education in Medieval Islam.⁵⁹ The second source is the office of a *mustamlī*, a certified supervisor of texts transcribed through dictation. His role was to verify the execution of a copied manuscript and check for mistakes.⁶⁰ As early as the ninth century, the extraordinary rise of books and libraries also manifests the development and spread of the written word.⁶¹ Literacy was not restricted to the religious milieu or the court administrators; it also extended to some elements of the manual laborers.⁶² In Damascus, workers participated in reading and reciting sessions and tradesmen's names are listed in the records of these sessions.⁶³ The switch to written texts corresponded to the introduction of cheap paper in the eighth century and while the education system of societies in both the Middle East and in early medieval Europe was always constrained and limited by the expense of the writing materials and the availability of vellums, papyri and stone, the arrival of paper changed all this. It allowed for a move from scroll to codex and hence to libraries and made production of books cheaper.

The first professional manuals were written by and for scribes, bureaucrats who used literary and numeracy skills in the administration of the court or other public institutions.⁶⁴ Some dealt directly with the technical aspects of

⁵⁸ WITKAM, Jan Just. "The Human Element between Text and Readers: The Idaza in Arabic manuscripts". In: GILLIOT, ed. *op.cit.*, p. 149.

⁵⁹ VAJDA, George. *Les certificats de lecture et de transmission dans les manuscrits arabes de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris*. Paris: CNRS Editions, 1956.

⁶⁰ WEISMEILER, Max. "The office of the mustamlī in Arabic Scholarship,". In: GILLIOT, ed. *op.cit.*, pp. 173-210.

⁶¹ On the early libraries, see GROHMANN, Adolph. "Libraries and Bibliophiles in the Islamic East". In: *Ibid.*, pp. 307-319; ECHE, Youssef. *Les bibliothèques Arabes*. Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1967. On the codex, see DÉROCHE, François. *Islamic Codicology. An introduction to the study of manuscripts in Arabic script*. London: al-Furqan Foundation, 2006.

⁶² Many of the individuals registered in the biographical dictionaries of scholars have tradesmen's names as a family name. COHEN Haim J. "The Economic Background and the Secular Occupations of Muslim Jurisprudents and Traditionists in the Classical Period of Islam (Until the Middle of the Eleventh Century)." *JESHO*, vol. 13, 1970, pp. 16-61.

⁶³ HIRSCHLER, Konrad. *The written word in the medieval Arabic lands*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, pp. 56-57.

⁶⁴ SCHOELER, George. "The relationship of literacy and memory in the second /eighth century". In: MACDONALD, M.C.A. ed. *The development of Arabic as a written language*. Oxford: MBI Foundation, 2010.

acquiring literacy and numeracy skills, such as teaching, calligraphy,⁶⁵ Qur'an reading,⁶⁶ administration of justice and government policies, financial measures, and bookkeeping.⁶⁷ The manuals for Qur'an readers, *muqrīs*, specified rules for pronunciation, punctuation etc. and had a chart of all the variant readings which the reader consulted when his memory lapsed. Areas of state administration, such as tax collection and the royal mint, or of secretarial duties, such as market supervisors, *muhtasibs*, judges, *qadis*, notaries and secretaries, all had their own professional manuals. Agricultural manuals,⁶⁸ manuals on irrigation techniques, *qanat* digging, bookbinding, soap making, ink making, minting, pharmacological drugs, arms making,⁶⁹ and cooking were equally rich in technical details.⁷⁰ Applied science manuals included manuals for physicians, astronomers, mathematicians, and navigators.⁷¹ Other professionals wrote manuals for brokerage, *samāsira*, and water carrying.⁷² The last one was a didactic tool written for the illiterate in order to help the water carrier memorize his obligatory verses, but it also addressed techniques.

The scope and content of the professional manuals range widely, but they share certain characteristics. The typical author was an experienced

⁶⁵ JAMES, David. "The Commentaries of Ibn al-Bas,īs., and Ibn al-Wah,īd on Ibn al-Bawwāb's "Ode on the Art of Calligraphy" (Rā'iyyah fī 'l-khat,t.). In: KATHCART, K.J. and HEALEY, J.F. eds. *Back to the Sources. Biblical and Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Dermot Ryan*. Dublin: Glendale Press, 1989, pp. 164-191; GACEK, Adam. "Al-Nuwayrī's Classification of Arabic Scripts". *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, 2, 1987, pp. 126-130; SOUCEK, P. "The arts of Calligraphy". In: GARY, B. ed. *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia*. Paris, Unesco; London, Serindia, 1979, pp. 7-34; *Calligraphers & Painters: A Treatise by Qadi Ahmad*, translated by MINORSKY, V. In: *Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers*, vol.3, no.2. Washington, 1959. The manuals attest that as in other fields, the techniques used in the practice of calligraphy followed regional patterns.

⁶⁶ DENNY, Frederic Mathewson. "Qur'an Recitation: A Tradition of Oral Performance and Transmission". *Oral Tradition*. vol. 4, 1989, pp. 5-27.

⁶⁷ The *Lumā' al-qawānīn* written for al-Malik al-Sālih, Najam al-Dīn Ayyūb and the numerous *Kitāb al-amwāl* and *kitāb al-kharāj* written during the first three centuries.

⁶⁸ See the recent online site devoted to these manuals at, www.filaha.org.

⁶⁹ CAHEN, Cl. "Un traité d'armurerie composé pour Saladin." *Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales*, 12, 1947-48, pp. 103-163.

⁷⁰ RODINSON, M. "Recherches sur les documents arabes relatifs à la cuisine." *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1949, pp. 95-165.

⁷¹ Ahmad Ibn Mādjīd al-Nadjī, *Kitāb al-fawā'id fī usūl al-bahr wa'l-qawā'id*, translated as *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean Before the Coming of the Portuguese*, by TIBBETS, G.R. Oriental Translation Fund. New Series, vol. XLII, London, 1981. First published in 1971.

⁷² MOKRI, Mohamed. "Un traité persan relatif à la corporation prolétaire des porteurs d'eau musulmans". *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, XLV/1, 1977, pp. 131-156.

practitioner, who had mastered the secrets of his profession and was capable of writing them down. He was frequently a supervisor, attached to the central administration, who coached others and introduced them to the trade. Writers were proud of their knowledge and expertise: many had their names eternalized among the practitioners, such as the calligraphers, who had scripts named after them.⁷³ The availability of cheap paper allowed workers to procure their own copy of their professional manual, and writers could afford to acquire several copies of other manuals with which to compare their own. A worker, if he so wished, could acquire a written copy of a manual and carry it with him to his place of work. Even the water carrier was advised to carry a copy with him if he was unable to read, so that the water and food, which the public received from his hands, would be blessed. One group of copiers specialized in copying manuals for the navigators to take with them to sea.⁷⁴ The written text became more than merely the transmitter of knowledge. The military manuals written in Mamlūk Egypt are the best examples of literacy acquisition occurring in the most unexpected places.⁷⁵

While the collection and classification of the professional manuals remains a desideratum, the significance of the phenomenon and its various historical dimensions and ramifications is significant in and of itself. Joel Mokyr made the pertinent observation that technological innovation will not occur in a society which is “malnourished, superstitious or extremely traditional”.⁷⁶ The Islamic society which oversaw the innovations in mechanical engineering, civil engineering, military technology, ships and navigation, textile, paper and leather, agriculture and food technology, mining and metallurgy, with written professional manuals in each disciplines, was, indeed, none of the above.⁷⁷ For the first three hundred years it was a society with no tight social constraints, open to diversity and tolerance, a “melting pot” of ethnicities, religions, languages, cultural traditions and political regimes. No literacy rates are available, but the

⁷³ WIET, Gaston. "L'évolution des techniques dans le monde musulman au Moyen-Age." *Journal of world History*, 6, 1960-61, pp. 15-44. AL-HASSAN, A. and Hill, D. R. *Islamic Technology. op.cit.*

⁷⁴ *Arab Navigation. op.cit.*, pp.5-6, 7, 17.

⁷⁵ A survey of the military manuals may be found in SHATZMILLER, Maya. "The Crusades and Islamic Warfare - A Re-Evaluation". *Der Islam*, 69/2, 1992, pp. 247-287.

⁷⁶ MOKYR. *The Lever. op.cit.*, p. 12.

⁷⁷ AL-HASSAN and HILL. *Islamic Technology. op.cit.*

evidence of the spread of education, books, libraries and professional manuals; proficiency in writing and reading presented here cannot lead to doubt. Furthermore, the existence of the manuals corroborates the assumed link between literacy and technological innovation. The development of an educational system within such diverse entities could not have been completed without the economic resurgence of the Middle East in the wake of the demographic shock of the sixth and seventh centuries. The evidence of real wages for unskilled labour in early Islamic Iraq and Egypt may now be taken as an indicator for the spread of education.⁷⁸ The rise in per capita income among the unskilled as well as the higher classes indicate that discretionary spending was available for the large segment of the society which could avail themselves of the emerging education system. It is a common observation that in most premodern societies, literacy and numeracy became more easily available with the rise of per capita income.⁷⁹ The Reis study highlighted education as an item of consumption too. Families were now able to spend on education allowing youngsters to remain in school longer and being able to provide them with the tools of literacy, books and teachers. Not everyone had access to literacy and numeracy, but there were sufficient numbers who were able to read the professional manuals and to write them. Technical innovations, knowledge, skills and manufacturing techniques were all transmitted through these written manuals.

Epstein argued that “In the absence in premodern societies of compulsory schooling and of efficient bureaucracies, the best available solution on all counts was arguably a system of training contracts enforced by specialized craft association.”⁸⁰ No argument there, but given the professional manuals, the evidence of the spreading of literacy and numeracy, and the spreading usage of technology, a guild contract was not the only efficient tool for human capital formation. One also has to take into account Ogilvie’s objections to the guild model: learning craft skills took much less time than

⁷⁸ PAMUK, Şevket and SHATZMILLER, Maya. “Prices, Wages and GDP per capita in the Islamic Middle East, 700-1500”. *Journal of Economic History*. Forthcoming.

⁷⁹ On the European comparison PRAK, Maarten. “Mega-structures of the Middle Ages: the construction of religious building in Europe and Asia, c. 1000-1500” *Journal of Global History*, vol. 6, 2011, pp. 381-406; BURINGH, Eltjo. *Medieval Manuscript production in the Latin West*. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

⁸⁰ EPSTEIN, S. R. “Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship, and Technological Change in Preindustrial Europe”. *op.cit.*, p. 688

guilds claimed, did not require formal apprenticeship, and was managed in many successful industries through non-guild institutions.⁸¹ There were large numbers of non-apprenticeship-trained workers; many apprenticeships were concluded without guilds and women's labour benefitted males disproportionately. The Islamic system of property rights, where women had direct control over their wages and where women's labour was protected by a gender blind Islamic hiring law, was equally effective in taking care of such liabilities.⁸²

Mobility, urbanization, ethnicity, trade

The mobility of the labour force across the newly Islamized territories is demonstrated in the sources, expanding and corroborating the context of the transmission of knowledge and skills. The numbers of artisans who reportedly were moved to newly built cities are staggering. The impact of artisans was felt especially in the cities, thanks to the increase and intensification of the urbanization process beginning in the seventh century onwards, including the building of new cities and enlargement, renovation and redecoration of old ones.⁸³ 100,000 workers were recruited for the building of Baghdad, 10,000 for the enlargement and refurbishment of Cordova, and 12,000 for the construction of the city al-Ja'afariyya for the Caliph al-Mutawakkil in the ninth century. The revolt in al-Rabad, the artisans' quarter of Cordoba, ended with the exile or migration of hundreds of artisans and their families to Fez, where they were responsible for increasing the local industries and providing the Andalusian manufacturing techniques. Samarra, Fustat, Mahdiya, Fez, Madinat al-Zahra, Cairo, all benefitted from the new skills and manufacturing techniques exercised by migrating artisans.

The process is also visible in the development of artistic styles. Artisans could move with ease from one region to another in response to the demand for their skills.⁸⁴ Architects were known to work far away from the place

⁸¹ OGILVIE. "Rehabilitating the Guilds: A Reply". *op.cit.*, p. 177.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 175, 177. On women's labour, see SHATZMILLER. *Her Day in Court*. *op.cit.*, pp. 149-1175.

⁸³ BOSKER, Maarten; BURINGH, Eltjo and VAN ZANDEN, Jan Luiten. "From Baghdad to London: the dynamics of urban growth in Europe and the Arab world". *Review of Economics and Statistics* (forthcoming).

⁸⁴ SOURDEL, Dominique and Janine. *La civilization de l'Islam classique*. *op.cit.*, p. 398.

where they lived,⁸⁵ or were willing to travel distances to install the artifacts they created.⁸⁶ Al-Jāhiz even claimed that hydraulic engineers, expert agronomists and marble workers came to Baghdad in the ninth century from China. Al-Hamadanī, who wrote a manual describing mining techniques, reported that thousands of Persians brought gold and silver mining techniques to the Yemen. Rock crystal carving was perfected in Sasanid Iran, but the techniques were successfully transferred to Egypt in early Islamic times and mass production ensued.⁸⁷ The process was reversed when the migration of Muslim artisans benefitted the textile industry in Christian Spain.⁸⁸ The Mongols forced artisans from Iraq to migrate east, but many also migrated to Mamlūk Egypt after the fall of Baghdad.⁸⁹ In the eleventh century the names given by the Almoravids to quarters and city gates of Marrakesh, the newly built Moroccan capital, suggest that the leather artisans of neighbouring Aghmat had abandoned their city to settle in the new capital.⁹⁰ Paper fabrication passed from North Africa to Spain through the migration of artisans,⁹¹ and in Fatimid days, the use of wooden beams in the building of ceilings was brought to Egypt by builders from the Maghreb. The inhabitants of Sfax were able to imitate the textile fabrication techniques used in Alexandria in the *Genizah* period. All in all, the impact of artisan mobility on human capital formation was considerable and long-term. The process also affected the rural areas, bringing new technology to irrigation and cultivation. The construction of canals and villages are reported immediately after the conquest in the Middle East,⁹² while in North

⁸⁵ Mayer. *Architects. op.cit.*, p.28; CRESWELL. *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*. vol. 1. New York: Hacker Art Books, 1978, pp.163 ff.

⁸⁶ MAYER. *Woodcarving. op.cit.*, p.16. The Egyptian carpenter Abu Bakr b. Yusuf made the components for *minbar* in his atelier and travelled with them to Mecca in order to put them up.

⁸⁷ Literary evidence shows fabrication in Basra, and that the Fatimid treasure contained between 18.000 and 36.000 items". See ATIL, Esin. *Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981, p.36

⁸⁸ GLICK, Thomas. *Muslim and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, p.218.

⁸⁹ ASHTOR, Eliyahu. *A social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages. op.cit.* p.289

⁹⁰ DEVERDUN, Gaston. *Marrakech. Des origins à 1912*. Rabat: Éditions techniques nord-africaines, 1959, p.134

⁹¹ IDRIS, Hady. *La Berbérie orientale sous les Zirids, 10e-12e siècle*. Vol.2. Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1962, p.637.

⁹² LAPIDUS, Ira. "Arab Settlement and Economic Development of Iraq and Iran in the Age of the Umayyad and Early Abbasid Caliphs". In: UDOVITCH, A. ed. *The Islamic Middle*

Africa the introduction of the underground irrigation technique known as *qanat* to Morocco is reported to have occurred after engineers were brought over from Spain under the Almoravids.⁹³ A few years later, in 1195, the Almohad Caliph al-Mansur sent 20.000 prisoners of war, mostly Christians, to work on the construction of underground irrigation canals, the *qanat*.⁹⁴

Ethnic and religious minorities also played a role in this process, creating a monopoly over the practice of specific technical skills and transmitting them within communal boundaries. In the Middle East and Spain, the Christians had a monopoly on the fabrication of polychromatic incrustation and mosaics. Muslim metal work from Syria displays Christian symbols, indicating that the artisans were Christians and that such motifs were tolerated. In Fatimid and Ayyubid Egypt, Jews specialized in silk rather than cotton, as well as in dyeing, medicinal herbs, metals and glass. The *moqanīs*, engineers who practised the techniques of *Qanat* digging in Pakistani Baluchistan were all Afghans from the Ghilzais tribe, while those in Southern Morocco were the Todgha group from the oases and valleys of the Draa and the Tafilalet Atlas.⁹⁵ In eighteenth-century Cairo, Copts, Jews, Armenians and Greeks exercised a monopoly on gold and jewellery manufacturing.⁹⁶ But in the end ethnic monopolisation of skills proved inefficient and restrictive. The monopoly over the practice of specific techniques among small groups not only blocked new influences, but also led eventually to the disappearance of these techniques, either when conversions took place and members could no longer live in their previous quarters or when entire communities migrated away. Segregation of ethnic communities occurred when minority groups were forced to live together in defined quarters, not only to satisfy their religious and dietary needs, but also when they needed to function as a team for the purpose of manufacturing.⁹⁷

East, 700-1900: Studies in Economic and Social History. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, p.189.

⁹³ GOBLOT. *Les Qanat. Une technique d'acquisition de l'eau*. op.cit., pp.149-155.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.46, note 6 and p. 48 respectively.

⁹⁶ RAYMOND, André. *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle*. Vol.2. Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1973, p.227.

⁹⁷ MAYER. *Woodcarvers*. op.cit., p.14 note 4. GOBLOT. *Les Qanat. Une technique d'acquisition de l'eau*. op.cit., p. 46.

Servile labour was not excluded from the process of human capital formation. The Islamic notary manuals show that the price of a “skilled” slave, baker, carpenter etc. was double the price of an unskilled slave. Skilled slaves earned wages in the markets and later shared the income with their master. Literate and numerate slaves were entrusted with conducting the master’s business, and those employed in government progressed rapidly through the ranks. The military slave system, which produced the Mamlūk régime of Egypt, one of the hallmarks of Islamic history, was all about education. The young slaves imported from the Caucasus received schooling in the barracks and achieved high levels of literacy, even before beginning their military training.⁹⁸

Conclusion

I have argued here that during the eighth to the eleventh centuries, human capital, together with a finer division of labour, played a role in the economic efflorescence of the Middle East and that here, too, lays the significance of premodern labour history to labour history. I have attempted to establish the process of human capital formation on an empirical basis by drawing together the historical evidence available in the sources, and I have argued that this process was linked to higher standards of living enjoyed by a reasonable portion of the population. With rising income, parents could invest in education to enhance their children’s future gains, and workers could afford to buy books as items of consumption. Education, in this case literacy and numeracy skills, could take place once discretionary income appeared in the economy. The process also permitted the development of markets for non-essential goods, such as education, books, libraries, manuscript copies etc. Not unrelated was the process of intensive urbanization which took place across various regions. With no restriction on the movement of skilled labour, the mobility of artisans and the resulting distribution of skills also increased. Many aspects of the broader background, such as the increase in agrarian output, rise in per capita income, increased urbanization and the manufacturing of cheap paper, which played a crucial role in the process, have to be relegated to future publications. Other topics waiting for further research and exploration could

⁹⁸ AYALON, David. *L’esclavage du Mamelouk*. Jerusalem: Israeli Oriental Society, 1951.

not be treated here either, including the vexing question of child labour in Islam and its relationship to apprenticeship, costs of literacy and child labour in labour markets and the opportunity costs associated with it.

This is only a preview of a much larger subject, but it is nonetheless one which champions the claim that the lack of a guild-like institutional model in medieval Islam was not detrimental to the process of human capital formation. Human capital was a significant and congruent component both in the context of the economic conditions of the Middle East and in the larger framework of the economic history literature.

European Workers between order and revolt. Labourers in feudal society (eleventh to the thirteenth century)*

Mathieu Arnoux

In the infinite debate about the origins of the modern European economy, the issue of medieval growth from the eleventh to the thirteenth century has an uncertain place. Though establishing the population figure at the beginning of the fourteenth century is crucial for any interpretation of the late medieval crisis and subsequent early modern development, recent scholarship has not brought new information to light in this field. The most accurate presentation of the *status quaestionis*, by Bruce Campbell, makes clear that, even when real (i.e. non estimate) figures of the population can be produced, for example from the Domesday Book (1086), the tax returns of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, or the crops figures in the manorial accounts, the final figure depends as much on the interpretative frame chosen by the scholar than on the evidence gathered from the records.¹

In this regard, the common knowledge of what happened in Europe during the eleventh to the thirteenth century remains set within the landscape designed a half-century ago, in the classic books of Georges Duby, first in *L'économie rurale et la vie des campagnes* (1962), then in *Guerriers et paysans* (1973).² In these two synthetic books, Duby developed two

* I wish to thank Christian De Vito, Jan De Vries and the anonymous referees for their helpful comments on my first draft. A part of this paper was previously published as “Between Paradise and Revolt: Laboratores in the Society of the Three Orders”. In: CROUCH, David and THOMPSON, Kathleen (eds.), *Normandy and its Neighbours, 900–1250. Essays for David Bates*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2011, pp. 201-214. A full treatment of its topic can be found in ARNOUX, Mathieu. *Le temps des laboureurs. Croissance, travail et ordre social en Europe (XI^e-XIV^e siècles)*. Paris: ed. Albin Michel, 2012.

¹ CAMPBELL, B.M.S. *English Seigniorial Agriculture (1250-1450)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.386-410.

² DUBY, Georges. *L'économie rurale et la vie des campagnes dans l'Occident médiéval*. Paris, 1962 (English Translation: *Rural Economy and Country Life in Medieval Europe*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968); DUBY, Georges. *Guerriers et paysans, VII^e-XII^e siècle. Premier essor de l'économie européenne*. Paris: Aubier, 1974

different, or conflicting, explanations of medieval economic growth. In the first book, which shared many hypotheses with Michael Postan, the starting point was technological innovation in agriculture, leading to improvement in work productivity then to population increase and massive land clearance. The chronology of this process was complex and different for any region. There was an early and obscure stage of demographic growth in Carolingian times before the cycle of technological and agrarian change. In his second book, Duby focused on the early medieval part of the process, from the seventh to the twelfth century. Technological change was no longer seen as the origin of the growth. Population increase and development were linked, in some enigmatic way, to the evolution of the social structure and the emergence of feudalism. In the beginning of the eleventh century, the first debates about the social orders and the new organization of power and authority were evidence of such social and economic processes.

From this moment on, economic growth in the high Middle Ages has been put aside by most historians of medieval societies, usually because of the lack of serial sources and statistical figures. During the 1990s, the so-called debate among French and European medievalists about the *mutation féodale*, which focused exclusively on the sociological structure of the feudal élite did not bring any progress to the field, and the problem remains: medieval economic growth is an unsolved problem. More recently, the brilliant presentation of the various interpretations of the English economic evolution in John Hatcher and Mark Bailey's *Modelling the Middle Ages* put the question on an economic footing: if there was no decisive technological change during the period, where does the dramatic demographic growth of the eleventh to the thirteenth century come from?³

The hypothesis of a medieval “industrious revolution” could help to solve the dilemma. This notion has become a widespread concept in the global history of work, since Jan De Vries borrowed it from historians of Japanese industrialization. Since economic growth in the Netherlands and England began before the innovations linked to steam technology that changed industrial conditions, there must have been another change in production

(English translation: *The Early Growth of the European Economy, Warriors and Peasants*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974. For an important review of this book see R. H. Hilton. “Warriors and Peasants”. *New left Review*, 83 (1974), pp. 83-94.

³ HATCHER, J. and BAILEY, M. *Modelling the Middle Ages. The history and theory of England's Economic Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

factors. The industrious revolution was a two-pronged process, which combined a huge increase of labour supply and social and institutional change, which made it possible for a large part of the population to buy commodities and improve their living standards.⁴ The chronology of the process matters: for De Vries, the industrious revolution is “early modern” and “pre-industrial” and happens during the long eighteenth century. But the origin of the process, especially the social change in the work ethic, which is crucial in the explanation of the increase in labour supply, is more difficult to investigate, particularly because of the lack of serial figures for the sixteenth century and before.

Hence the proposition, that an early stage of the industrial revolution took place during medieval times. Actually, if we lack reliable statistic or series of probate inventories for this period, we could argue from other kinds of data with a very different kind of chronology. For the fourteenth century, an important article by Chris Dyer brought compelling evidence of work ethics widespread among English labourers.⁵ Furthermore, it has been suggested that most European vocabulary related to work, wages and production, appeared in the records as early as the twelfth century.⁶ In the same period, a large part of the words used in the same semantic field during later antiquity and the high Middle Ages disappeared or changed their meaning. Such evolution raises the issue of important changes and innovation in the organization of production and work in the time when feudalism and lordship grew in European society. From this point of view, there is not much help to expect from recent literature in medieval history: for the three last decades, the rulers, kings, lords, ecclesiastics and urban elites, authority, distinction and power have been the main topics. The question of work and the social group of labourers were mostly neglected. The social model of the Three Orders provides a good starting point for a new inquiry on work.

⁴ DE VRIES, J. “The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution”. *Journal of Economic History*, v.54, 1994, pp. 249-270; *The Industrious Revolution. Consumer behavior and the household economy, 1650 to the present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁵ DYER, C. “Work ethics in the fourteenth century”. In: Bothwell, J, Goldberg, P.J.P. and Ormrod, W.M. (eds.), *The problem of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England*. Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell and Brewer, 2000, pp.21-41.

⁶ GODELIER, Maurice. “Aide-Memoire for a Survey of Work and its Representations”. *Current Anthropology*, 1980, v. 21, pp. 831-835.

Frequently quoted and commented on when the question arises, Georges Duby's great book *Les trois ordres*, published in 1976, remains nevertheless a solitary landmark. Among historians of medieval societies, it raised debate on two points: the actual existence of a "Feudal Revolution" at the beginning of the eleventh century, and the intellectual origins and birth of an ideological formula: *laboratores, oratores, bellatores*.⁷ The problem of the institutional enforcement of this social classification of orders is usually bypassed. Mostly grounded in evidence from the Anglo-Norman world, which was its birthplace, the following pages reconsider the model of the Three Orders and its relevance for a renewed history of work.

Genesis of a historiographical problem

Although it had been obvious for a great part of European society from the Middle Ages on to the end of the "Ancien Regime" that each man should belong to one of the three "*états*", - the nobility, clergy and the third, or common, group - the problem of the origin, birth and enforcement of such an idea remained outside the interest of historians until the 1960s. Jacques Le Goff was the first to investigate this theme in his great 1964 book, *La civilisation de l'Occident médiéval*, from an anthropological point of view.⁸ He addressed the idea expressed by Georges Dumézil that Indo-European religious, juridical and political thought was characterized by a tri-functional organization, where the first function was related to religious and magic sovereignty, the second to warfare, and the third to fertility and economic activities. The relationship between this scheme and the tripartition of medieval and early modern European society had been explored by Dumézil himself, and by his disciple Jean Batany.⁹ They both favoured the hypothesis of some continuity of the Indo-European structure, especially into Anglo-Saxon society, where, at the end of the ninth century,

⁷ DUBY, Georges. *Les trois ordres ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme*. Paris: Gallimard, 1976; English Translation: *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

⁸ Le Goff, Jacques. *La civilisation de l'Occident médiéval*. Paris: Arthaud, 1964, pp. 319-28. English Translation: *Medieval Civilization 400-1500*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988, pp. 255-64; "Note sur société tripartite, idéologie monarchique et renouvellement économique dans la chrétienté du IX^e au XII^e siècle". In: *Pour un autre Moyen Âge: temps, travail et culture en Occident: 18 essais*. Paris: Gallimard, 1977, pp. 80-90.

⁹ Batany, Jean. "Des "trois fonctions" aux trois "états"?" *Annales ESC*, 18 (1963), pp. 933-38.

the idea of the Three Orders was expressed for the first time by King Alfred the Great. Le Goff focused on an historical construction of the religious and social representation of the orders and pointed out that, since the earliest evidence of the idea was to be found in the tenth century, the theory of Indo-European continuity had to account for the disappearance of the model at the beginning of the Middle Ages or its rebirth during the tenth century.

Georges Duby decided to devote his seminar to this problem in 1970, after he was elected to the Collège de France. The book he published in 1978, which remains one of his major works, presented the results of a collective investigation. It presented all the pieces of the dossier for the tenth to the twelfth century and outlined the chronology of the historical institution of the idea of the Three Orders in society. Two crucial moments were identified: the first expression of the theme around the year 1000, and its enforcement as the official expression of the monarchic ideology of the Plantagenet and Capetian kings in the second half of the twelfth century.

The book is a crucial piece in the reconstruction by Duby of the dynamic of feudalism as the result of a social and ideological mutation of post-Carolingian society. The birth of a new model of social organization, which broke with the stratification of the early Middle Ages, was a major element of the evolution. Eventually, studies in marriage and family patterns of the feudal group in the eleventh and twelfth centuries made it possible to have a global view of feudal society.¹⁰ The weakening of the public authority at the end of the tenth century and the correlated outburst of violence from the knights (*milites*) formed the background to a general debate on social organization and evolution, where the Three Orders scheme had to compete with other propositions of social and religious organization: the heretic ideas, the Peace of God and the social proposal of the Cluniac monks. Then the idea and the social debate it referred to disappeared for almost a century, perhaps because of a preoccupation with the political and religious struggle of ecclesiastical reform, until its second birth in the middle of the twelfth century.

¹⁰ DUBY, Georges. *Le chevalier, la femme et le prêtre: le mariage dans la France féodale*. Paris: Hachette, 1981. English Translation: *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest: the Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, transl. by Barbara Bray. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983.

Duby's book was well received, but there were few further publications on the topic.¹¹ One major contribution was the influential article published in 1994 by a specialist on Anglo-Saxon society, Timothy Powell.¹² Like Le Goff and Duby before him, Powell rejected the hypothesis of the continuity of an Indo-European tri-functional pattern, and presented the theory of the three orders as an historical construction, an intellectual reaction in a period of crisis. In the English case, it did not raise the problem of the misdeeds of chivalry, but an older European question, the military competencies of the ecclesiastic institutions. The presentation of the Three Orders, *laboratores* (labourers), *bellatores* (knights), *oratores* (clerics), as the providential framework, where there is a place for everyone, was a preliminary to an examination of the specific case of the bishops. As the chiefs of the *spiritualis militia*, they had to fight with the specific weapons of their order: "the coat of Justice, the shield of Faith, the helmet of Salvation, the sword of Spirit". But, were there any circumstances in which they could lay down the staff and use the sword in the battlefield? The rules of the *ordines* strictly prohibited such a transgression, which, in the bishops' case, implied a move from God's army down to the secular troop. In late tenth-century England, such a proposal had not only theoretical but also practical implications in the struggles between the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes. For Archbishop Wulfstan of York and Abbot Aelfric of Eynsham, who wrote the most important texts on this topic, the bishops' role was to preach, convert and baptize the pagans after the battle; they were not permitted to fight them on the battlefield. Timothy Powell's interpretation of the Anglo-Saxon evidence made the clerics, i.e. the *ordo oratorum*, the target of Aelfric and Wulfstan's theory, whereas Georges Duby had earlier detected that the knights, i.e. the *ordo bellatorum*, was the crucial point of the scheme. There

¹¹ OEXLE, Otto G. "Die funktionale Dreiteilung der "Gesellschaft" bei Adalbero von Laon: Deutungsschemata der sozialen Wirklichkeit im früheren Mittelalter". *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, v.12 (1978), pp. 1-24; Le Goff, Jacques. "Les trois fonctions indo-européennes, l'historien et l'Europe féodale". *Annales ESC*, 34 (1979), pp. 1187-1215; IOGNA-PRAT, Dominique. "Le 'baptême' du schéma des trois ordres fonctionnels: l'apport de l'école d'Auxerre dans la seconde moitié du IX^e siècle". *Annales ESC*, 31 (1986), pp. 101-26.

¹² POWELL, Timothy E. "The 'Three Orders' of society in Anglo-Saxon England". *ASE*, 23 (1994), pp. 103-132. Also see WORMALD, Patrick. *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999, pp. 457-62 and, about Wulfstan's political theory, "Archbishop Wulfstan: eleventh-century state-builder". In: TOWNEND, Matthew ed. *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: the Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2004, pp. 18-19, 20.

is no contradiction between them on this point, and the ideas of Archbishop Wulfstan, who, in his *Institutes of Policy*, presented the *ordines* as follows:

Every rightful throne that stands fully upright rests on three pillars: one is *oratores*, and another is *laboratores* and the third is *bellatores*. *Oratores* is clergy, who must serve God day and night, interceding zealously for all the people. *Laboratores* are working men (weorcmen) who must provide that by which all the people live. *Bellatores* are warriors, who must defend the land valiantly with weapons. On these three pillars, every throne shall stand upright in a Christian nation. And if any of them weakens, the throne will soon totter; and if any of them should break, then the throne will fall and that will damage the people.¹³

As Timothy Powell points out in the conclusion of his paper, “the Three Orders had both to be seen as a model for stability and unity and yet broadly enough defined to enable those like Aelfric to make their particular points”. So far we have considered how the model of the Three Orders was applied to the *oratores* and *bellatores*, let us now try to discover what kind of message was given to the *laboratores*, who were by far the large majority of the population. After all, the *ordo* in which they gathered with no other consideration of social *status*, should be seen as the very novelty of the system.

Ordo laboratorum: Emancipation and discipline for the labourers?

Before any interpretation of the few bald words devoted to the *laboratores*, we have to be clear on the exact nature of the evidence. The description of the orders cannot be read as prescriptive: it is not a juridical statement nor a moral exhortation. This may explain why the simple word *laborator* can be applied to a group of men who used to be called, in England or on the Continent, by many different names, referring to their degree of freedom, the *status* of their tenure or the nature of their economic functions. The aim of the Three Orders model was to restore the genuine condition of people, as the holy Providence had fixed it, as a way for human salvation. Indeed,

¹³ JOST, Karl ed. *Die “Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical”: ein Werk Erzbischof Wulfstans von York*. Bern: Francke Verlag, 1959, pp. 55-7, quoted by Powell, “Three Orders of Society”, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

these descriptions of Christian society had to be understood as a proposition of reform with related actions.

When theologians expressed the idea that agrarian work could be by itself fulfilment of Providential design, they surely implied that it had to be done freely. In archbishop Wulfstan's case, it is possible to link the theory of the orders, i. e. the idea that the labourers were one single group in the eye of God, with his decisive action against slavery, which was still widespread in tenth-century England. A part of his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (1014) was devoted to a sharp condemnation of the slave trade, which sold many Christian Englishmen, women and children to Viking, Welsh, Irish or other traders:

Widows are widely forced to marry in unjust ways and too many are impoverished and fully humiliated; and poor men are sorely betrayed and cruelly defrauded, and sold widely out of this land into the power of foreigners, though innocent; and infants are enslaved by means of cruel injustices, on account of petty theft everywhere in this nation. And the rights of freemen are taken away and the rights of slaves are restricted and charitable obligations are curtailed. Free men may not keep their independence, nor go where they wish, nor deal with their property just as they desire; nor may slaves have that property which, on their own time, they have obtained by means of difficult labor, or that which good men, in Gods favor, have granted them, and given to them in charity for the love of God.¹⁴

In Abbot Aelfric's didactic works, there are frequent hints to the slaves (*theow* or *thraell*) who lived and worked on the domestic estates. The lists of dependent countrymen of the *Domesday Book* (1086) provide significant evidence of the diffusion of slavery in Anglo-Saxon society in the time of King Edward. By the end of the eleventh century, however, this population

¹⁴ WHITELOCK, Dorothy ed. *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. London: Methuen, 1939; Wormald, *Making of the English Law, op.cit.*, p. 344. For a reference to slave trading in late eleventh-century Bristol, see William of Malmesbury, "Vita Wulfstani", ii, c. 20 in William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives*, WINTERBOTTOM, Michael and THOMSON, Rodney M. eds. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002, pp. 100-02. At the very same moment on the eastern border of Christendom, Bishop Adalbert of Prague took similar action among Czech people in favour of ecclesiastical reform and against the slave trade: PERTZ, Georg Heinrich ed. *Vita Adalberti episcopi Pragensis auctore Johanne Canapario* (BHL 37), *MGH Scriptores* (in fol.) IV, p. 581.

had vanished, as had the old Anglo-Saxon words referring to it.¹⁵ Even if it is particularly obvious for England, we have to see this process as a European one, whose importance cannot be underestimated. In the beginning of the eleventh century, slavery and the slave trade were still present as a danger, though they had become very rare on the continent.¹⁶ Around 1100, they had disappeared forever, leaving behind them states of dependency or non-freedom, which were absolutely different from the old slavery.

Even in those areas of Europe where slavery had long disappeared, the hypothesis of a single group of labourers alongside the group of knights, had strong social and juridical implications, because it made ineffective the old social stratification, especially between free and un-free men. In Carolingian times, freedom meant military service; in the new organization, no peasant had to serve in the army, nor to bear weapons, working in the field being his only duty. In other words, the order of labourers was also the orders of disarmed laymen, to which a tripartite society granted full protection, as the Peace of God was supposed to do in other parts of Europe. The actual history of European peasantry shows that the process of disarmament of the countrymen did not take place at the beginning of the eleventh but rather in the twelfth century. My hypothesis is that the enforcement of the society of Three Orders as an implicit way of ordering of the French and English kingdoms achieved the process of disarmament, not by general enslavement of the peasants, but through negotiation between the orders, granting to the workers symbolic gratifications and real economic guarantees. The evidence for this evolution is sparse, but it does exist.

Labour and original sin: Augustine versus Augustine

Medieval expositions of the social model of the Three Orders are often misread because of a misunderstanding caused by an incorrect appreciation of the “Augustinian” nature of the theory. In the commonly understood Augustinian view of original sin, the labourers expiate, by painful and weary work, the sin of our father Adam, as the Almighty had explained to

¹⁵ PELTERET, David A. E. *Slavery in Early Medieval England, from the Reign of Alfred until the Twelfth Century* Studies in Anglo-Saxon History, 7. Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995, pp. 232-40.

¹⁶ ARNOUX, Mathieu. *Le temps des laboureurs*, op.cit., pp. 66-97.

him, after he had to leave the Paradise.¹⁷ Such an interpretation is consonant with our modern representation of Augustine and with the point of view of clerics and lords on the peasant group. Nevertheless, it makes it difficult to understand how the new organization was taught to the third group, who represented the largest part of Christendom. There was nothing specific to explain why peasants were to bear all the burden of the sins of humankind. Such a ubiquitous cliché has been until now a major obstacle for a correct understanding of the model of the Three Orders. It is grounded in Augustine's later and pessimistic thought, which is one of the many possible representations of the African father. Actually, there are in the works of Augustine other texts, well known to medieval theologians, which fit far better with the sources on the Three Orders. The most important is the chapter of his tract *The Literal meaning of Genesis*, about *Genesis*, 2. 15: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it".¹⁸

Remembered only by historians of medieval philosophy, this text was, until the end of the Middle Ages, one of Augustine's best known, since it took a place in the margins of the of the Glossed Bible, thus becoming the main authority for every comment on this part of the holy book, and a basis for the preachers. Questioning the fact that Adam cultivated Paradise before he committed the sin and was expelled, Augustine wondered whether it was possible that the work was not intended as punishment for the sinner: "is it not simply incredible that he should condemn him to hard labour before sin?" The answer was positive, beyond any doubt. Work in the field of the fertile paradise was only pleasure, joy and participation in the magnificent work of the Creator: "there was no stress of wearisome, but pure exhilaration of spirit". Very important for our topic was the idea that something of this exultation survived the Fall and the expulsion from Paradise, and could prefigure, in those who loved their agricultural labour or work among nature, Man's predestination to become again Creation's gardener: "had we never seen how some people till the field with such

¹⁷ For a recent example, consult FOSSIER, Robert. *Le travail au moyen age*. Paris: Hachette-Littératures, 2000, p. 19: "En revanche, il [le travail] est moralement abject. C'est une punition, celle que le créateur infligea au premier couple après la faute."

¹⁸ ZYCHA, Joseph. ed. *Sancti Aureli Augustini de Genesi ad litteram duodecim libri*, Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum, 28. Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1894, VIII, 8-9, Bd. 8, pp. 242-45. English Translation: HILL, E. *On Genesis (Works of St Augustine, 1/13)*. New York: New City Press, 2002, pp. 356-357.

pleasure that it is a severe punishment for them to be called away from that to anything else”.

This theory of the nature of labour sounds very different from the “usual” Augustine, philosopher of the expiation of the sin through the pain of work. If used in preaching to the peasants, it could have very important implications for the religious interpretation of the Three Orders. Indeed, if the *ordo laboratorum*, instead of being responsible for the expiation of original sin, was to be considered as the true witness to the experience of Paradise, and labourers compared to men from the time before the Fall, it was not difficult to argue that the other orders, chivalry and clergy, had been instituted after the Fall (and Augustine in the same treatise provided abundant material for this idea). For example, he explained that war and the domination of the lord over his serf were unthinkable in Paradise, as too was the domination of the husband over his wife.¹⁹ The two orders of priests and of knights were at first consequences of sin, then reaction to and perhaps remedy for it.

It is not difficult to collect texts in French, German, English or Italian literature, where the *laboureur* was described as a perfectly good and just man, an unquestionable example of the true right life in the face of the Almighty. Piers Ploughman, and another ploughman, brother of the good priest, in the *Canterbury tales*, or in Germany the wise father of the young Helmbrecht, and the Ackerman from Bohemia are all figures of the same model of innate faith and charity, which was so deeply rooted in medieval peasant ideology.²⁰ When Renart the Fox decides to convert and become a good Christian, in the last and satirical version of his deeds, in the French kingdom of the early fourteenth century, he decided to become a ploughman:

Another job he wants to get
That is to be a ploughman (*laboureur de terre*).
That is one have highly to appraise

¹⁹ *De Genesi ad litteram*, b. 11, XXXVII, 50, pp. 371-72.

²⁰ CHAUCER, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury tales*, First fragment, v. 529-532; Wernher der Gartenaere, *Helmbrecht*, vv 242-258 ; cf. BELL, Clair Hayden. *Peasant Life in Old German Epics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1931, pp. 43-44; VON TEPL, Johannes. *Der Ackermann*. KIENING, Christian. ed. and transl. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2000.

To love so much and not despise.
 To ploughing Adam applied
 When he went out of Paradise:
 Everyday, he kept on ploughing
 And his life so earned.
 God to plough sent him
 So granted him his life.²¹

Obviously, Renard failed in this attempt at redemption: work and the honest life gained nothing but pain and poverty. This is a common topic in the social literature of the fourteenth century, which describes either with satirical, pathetic, or rebellious words the injuries inflicted on the pacific and defenceless group of labourers. Its most famous slogan was the theme of the leader of the 1381 revolt, John Ball: “Whan Adam dalf, and Eve span,/Wo was thane a gentilman?”²² This was indeed a very concise and efficient comment on Augustine’s treatise on *Genesis*.

Conflict and rebellion

Even if the peasant group was disarmed (*inermes*), and its ideology seemingly peaceful and stranger to every conflict, the social form of the *ordo laboratorum* must not be seen as generally accepted in all European societies. The Roman church never agreed with a social model, which presented the clergy as one among other orders of the society, with no priority nor special dignity. Perhaps Gregorian hostility to it was the main cause of the vanishing of the theory of the order during the period of the Investiture struggle, in the second half of the eleventh century. Even at the end of the twelfth century, the conflict was not extinguished. In his most famous tract, *On the Misery of the Human Condition*, Cardinal Lothar of Segni (1161-1216), who was not yet Pope Innocent III (1198), described incessant work among mortals as a mere vanity, an insane attempt to escape

²¹ RAYNAUD, Gaston and LEMAÎTRE, Henri. eds. *Le roman de Renart le contrefait*, 2 vols. Paris: Champion, 1914, 2, p. 47, vv. 26981-27029.

²² DEAN, James M. ed. *Medieval English Political Writings*. Middle English texts. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996, p. 140.

the vision of the miserable human condition. So was economic growth, of which he gave the most impressive description:

Mortals rush and run about through fences and paths, climb mountains, cross hills, ascend cliffs, fly over the Alps, step over pits, go into caves; they explore the inner parts of the earth, the depths of the sea, the uncertainties of the water, the shadows of the forest, the inward way of solitude; they expose themselves to winds, to rains, to thunders and lightnings, to floods and storms, to disasters and dangers. They hammer and melt metals, cut and polish stones, cut down and chop wood, spin and weave fabrics, cut and stitch cloths, build houses, plant gardens, cultivate fields, grow vines, fire ovens, erect mills, fish, hunt, and catch birds. They meditate and cogitate, consult and arrange, complain and dispute, rob and steal, cheat and trade, contend and fight, and do countless things of such sort in order to accumulate riches, to multiply profits, to purse wealth, to acquire honours, to raise their ranks, to extend their powers. And this also is labor and vexation of mind.²³

The conflict was not only with the Clerics. The fear of revolt, particularly from the peasants, stands behind much evidence about the theory of the Three Orders. One particularly striking text is the narrative by John of Worcester of the threefold nightmare of King Henry I of England, who was threatened by a crowd of peasants “standing by him with agricultural implements”, then by “a large band of knights, wearing armour, bearing helmets on their heads, each of them holding lances, a sword, spears and arrows”, and finally by “archbishops, bishops, abbots, deans and priors, holding their pastoral staff”.²⁴

The most famous and complete description of the Three Orders, in the Norman chronicle of Benoit of Sainte-Maure, is also linked to a narrative of revolt. King Henry II Plantagenet commissioned the poem by Benoit, a poet from his native Anjou, after he had dismissed the Norman canon, Wace, author of the unfinished *Roman de Rou*. It is therefore particularly

²³ Lothar of Segni [Pope Innocent III], *De miseria condicionis humane*. LEWIS, Robert E. ed. The Chaucer Library Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1978, pp. 111-12.

²⁴ *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*. vol.3. MCGURK, P. Ed. Oxford Medieval Texts. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 198-203.

significant that the Three Orders model is introduced when the narrative describes a discussion held (about 940) between Duke William Longsword and Abbot Martin of Jumièges. This modification upset a long historical tradition, which went back to the time of Dudo of Saint-Quentin (around 1000).

The original matter of the dispute was about the person of the Duke. William, Christian-born, son of the converted Rollo, had invited the Cluniac monks of St-Cyprien in Poitiers to restore the ancient community of Jumièges and asked Abbot Martin whether he could resign his ducal dignity and enter the monastic community as a monk. His crucial question was about the opportunities granted to the laity and the clergy to obtain salvation. The Three Orders of the Christian religion were the key to the problem: “Why are there three orders of Christian in the church? Will there not be one mercy and one reward, for those who perform separate offices in the Christian religion?”.

Martin’s answer is a classic of the post-Carolingian theology of the orders:

Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. (...) The totality of the Christian religion consists of three distinct orders. It is practised by the generous labour of laymen, canons and monks, and follows the trinity of persons and the one God in substance, according to the articles of belief. Their service, successfully accomplished, leads by regular steps to heaven.²⁵

There are therefore three orders, one for laymen and the other two for clerics: secular (canons) and regular (monks). As the chief of the lay order, the duke had to stay in his own place and accomplish his own duty, that is, to organize his succession and strengthen his legitimacy.

The dialogue remained unchanged in its meaning in the Latin version of the chronicle written by William of Jumièges in the middle of eleventh century, then in the French version, the *Roman de Rou*, which Wace undertook in 1160 and left unfinished.²⁶ Around 1170, when Wace was dismissed by the king for unknown reasons, Benoit de Sainte-Maure began the redaction of a

²⁵ Dudo of St Quentin, *History of the Normans*. transl. by CHRISTIANSEN, Eric. Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998, pp. 77-78.

²⁶ MATHEY-MAILLE, Laurence. *Écritures du passé: histoires des ducs de Normandie*, Essais sur le moyen âge, 35. Paris: Champion, 2007, p. 33.

new French versified chronicle, where the topic of the discussion between William and Martin changed completely.²⁷ Duke William's project of monastic life and his question about the reward promised to each order and a part of Martin's answer, were a mere copy of Wace's text. This was not the case for the presentation of the orders. The Three Orders of society, "Chevaliers, clerics et villains" were presented twice, first by William, then by Martin, in a clear view of political philosophy, exactly as archbishop Wulfstan had described them in his "Institutes of Policy" more than a century and a half before.

The other famous part of the *Chronicle*, which amplified Wace's narrative of the same event, was devoted to the great revolt of the Norman peasants in the end of the tenth century.²⁸ The short, and rather enigmatic, description of the revolt written by William of Jumièges around 1050, was interpreted by Wace and Benoit as a great confrontation between the labourers and their lords. Wace's version of the peasant's slogans was strangely empathic:

Son of a whore! said some, why do we put up with all the harm which is being done to us? Let us free ourselves from their control. We are men as they are; we have the same limbs as they do, we are their equal physically and are able to endure as much as they can. The only thing we lack is courage. Let us unite on oath, defend our goods and ourselves and stick together. If they wish to wage war on us, against one knight, we have thirty or forty peasants, skilful and valiant. Thirty men in the flower of their youth will be cowardly and shameful if they cannot defend themselves against one man.²⁹

They received no answer from the knights other than violence and slaughter. In Benoit's version, the rebellion was presented as a transgression of the order of society, especially in regard to the peasants' attempt to eat fish and game, to keep for themselves the fruit of their labour and to resist the looting of their lords.³⁰ The answer to the peasants, a horrible outburst of violence, conformed probably better to the ideas of the king and courtiers

²⁷ Benoît, I, vv. 13229-13548, pp. 383-92.

²⁸ ARNOUX, Mathieu. "Classe agricole, pouvoir seigneurial et autorité ducal: l'évolution de la Normandie féodale d'après le témoignage des chroniqueurs". *Le Moyen Âge*, 98 (1992), pp. 35-60.

²⁹ Wace, vv. 864-882, pp. 124-27.

³⁰ Benoît, II, vv 28854-29052, pp. 197-203.

than the presentation by Duke William and Abbot Martin of the dignity and duties of the labourers, but it also fitted in the scheme of the orders. One point remains enigmatic however: there is no record of any rebellion from Norman or English peasants until the fourteenth century. Instead of a celebration of the glorious victory of the *milites*, Benoit's text should be read as an exorcism of their fear of a peasant revolt. His description of the orders could be as well read as a kind of proposition for a peaceful Christian society, the last chance before a general civilian war.

Conclusion

Thirty years after the publication of Georges Duby's great book, the history of the "Three Orders" has retained a great part of its fascination and much remains to be studied. Although it is generally analysed from the genealogical point of view of a history of political theory, the threefold representation of Christendom must also be examined from a functionalist viewpoint, as an institutional attempt to negotiate a peaceful society in a tense period. It addressed the violence of the knights and the laicizing temptations of the clerics, as Duby and others have shown, but also the rebellious character of the peasants. Literary and religious sources witness either the intellectual construction of the Three Orders or the social tension in which the negotiation took place. In this frame, textual evidence gives ground for an interpretation of the *ordo laboratorum* as the ideological facade of a medieval industrious revolution, which took place in Western and North-western Europe during the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.

We know that the industrious revolution is not only a matter of a virtuous representation of society, family and work: ideology does work with actual retribution of good practices. Surely, the suppression of slavery and the slave trade in northern Europe was not enough to buy the peasants' consent to their disarmament. During the eleventh and thirteenth century, retribution for labourers could not consist, as in seventeenth century Netherlands, in a share of luxury goods, and the rise of the standard of living did not consist in a greater supply of commodities. According to all the sources, to enjoy sumptuous cloths and exquisite foods was the exclusive lot of the clerics and lords, and of urban elites for the late medieval period. Subsistence, which was essentially wheat, rye, oats and barley, had to be the main issue

for medieval labourers, who faced and feared hunger and famine as everyday realities. In the same regions where narrative sources witness the rise of the *ordo laboratorum* as a way of peasant life, other records give evidence of huge institutions, closely integrated in the agrarian economy, which aimed to grant peasants and poor people an easier access to food.³¹ As Chaucer wrote, giving his own parish the tithes of his crop should be a part of peasant identity and pride.³² Tithes, according to canonical regulations, had three functions: food for the local clergy, building and maintenance of the parish church and alms for the poor people. In almost every village, the parochial barn, where a large part of the crops was preserved, was a massive evidence of this economy of redistribution. Considered as social institutions, from the same point of view, seigniorial mills, which, at least in the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, were strictly regulated by customary rules, were elements of an institutional economy of the labourers. According to Henri Pirenne, even local markets, should be considered from the same point of view as welfare institutions:

“[The legal system of towns in western Europe] sought to secure their inhabitants a supply as cheap as possible. Its ideal aim, and its achievement, was fighting high prices and setting for every commodity the “just price”, which in other words was the lowest price. How? By the plainest, which is also the most radical way: eliminate all categories of middlemen and set an immediate link between the producer and the consumer. Extremely complicated by-laws created an extremely simple situation: the meeting of the producers and the consumers. Every attempt to create monopolies or to speculate was relentlessly and ingeniously repressed: the purpose was to stop the rise of prices by prohibiting the commodities to be exchanged several times before reaching the buyers.”³³

One could arguably object to the ecclesiastic and seigniorial nature of tithes, mills and markets, and record the extremely hierarchical and unequal

³¹ ARNOUX, Mathieu. *Le temps des laboureurs. op.cit.*, pp. 221-336.

³² *Canterbury Tales*, General Prologue, 539-540 : « Hise tithes payed he ful fair and wel/bothe of his propre swynk and his catel » and 486-489 for the link between tithes and elms.

³³ PIRENNE, Henri “Le consommateur au Moyen Âge [1922]”, in *Histoire économique de l'Occident médiéval*, Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1951, pp. 532-534.

organization of medieval society. There is no doubt that maintaining the privileges of the two other orders against the peasant claims was a function of the social model of the three orders. But there is no doubt too that social peace, subsistence insurance, institutional organisation of markets and improvement in the standard of living had an effect on the growth in the population and the economy. One can credit generous and compassionate rulers, ecclesiastic and landlords, with granting their peasants this welfare organisation. My hypothesis is that the labourers themselves conquered it and largely maintained it, as they created the conditions for the great medieval growth, until the crisis of the fourteenth century.

Multiplicity of labor relationships in coastal Karnataka

Nagendra Rao

Global labour history and the labour history of South Kanara

GIn recent decades, the global history of labor has moved from a mere Marxist methodology to a neo-Marxist methodology. This process is especially visible in the writings of Marcel van der Linden, who has explicitly challenged the traditional Marxist notion of the working class, influenced by the process of emergence of the industrial society:

...all definitions of the working class being used have three aspects in common. Firstly, they assume that members of the working class share at least one characteristic, namely that they are dependent on a wage for their survival, ...Secondly, they involve the (often implicit) assumption that workers are part of families who in principle also belong to the working class... Thirdly, all definitions assume that the working class is next to, or counterposed to, other social classes, in particular the employers...¹

A broader definition of the working class is thus provided:

...the ensemble of carriers of labour power whose labour power is sold or hired out to another person under economic and non economic compulsions, regardless of whether the carrier of labour power is him-or herself selling or hiring it out and, regardless of whether the carrier him – or herself owns means of production.²

¹ VAN DER LINDEN, Marcel. "Who are the workers of the world?: Marx and beyond". *Workers of the World International Journal of Strikes and Social Conflicts*, vol.1, no.2, January 2013, pp. 58- 59.

² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Within this framework, Van der Linden has underlined the need to accommodate large numbers of workers or social groups within the working class³ and has referred to the concept of “extended or subaltern working class”.⁴ He has written that:

...there is a large class of people within capitalism, whose labour power is commodified in various ways. ...it includes chattel slaves, sharecroppers, small artisans and wage earners. It is the historic dynamics of this “multitude” that we should try to understand. ...in capitalism there always existed, and probably will continue to exist, several forms of commodified labour subsisting side by side...Capitalism has utilized many kinds of work relationships, some mainly based on economic compulsion, others with a strong non economic component.⁵

Van der Linden’s argument applies to capitalist and pre-capitalist periods. His theoretical frame allows us to consider that both economic and non-economic methods were used to coerce workers – in the context of South Kanara, as we will see, the caste system proved a to be a fundamental non-economic method to reach labor commodification, while debt was a powerful economic tool to impose forced labor on peasants. Moreover, it makes large numbers of workers, both with and without labor power, visible, and points to their mutual relationships, as in the case of wage earners and slaves who actually performed the same kind of work in late medieval South Kanara.

This paper discusses the multiplicity of labor relations that emerged in the region called South Kanara, a part of coastal Karnataka in South India, in the late medieval and early modern periods. It seeks to show that different categories of workers – free and unfree – belonging to different castes existed, thereby also pointing to the fundamental difference between caste and class. Moreover, it refers to the theory of “extended subalterns” to show the need to go beyond the traditional Marxist pattern of analysis of labour relations, and attempts to analyze information concerning different regions of the West Coast of India including Gujarat and Malabar.

³ One may note in this context that wage work may take different forms and that, in the pre-modern period, it was not necessarily paid in cash, as the non-monetized rural centres of South Kanara show.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

Politics and economy in South Kanara

Since antiquity, South Kanara was under the control of local and supra local dynasties, such as the Alupas and the Hoysalas; the latter had their capital in Dwarasamudra.⁶ The coming of the Vijayanagara in the fourteenth century was a major development, with Vijayanagara (“City of victory”) in the modern Bellary district of Karnataka as the capital. The Vijayanagara was a multicultural or multilingual state, as administrators spoke different South Indian languages such as Kannada, Telugu, and Tamil. Scholars have analyzed its administrative nature. Burton Stein applied segmentary state theory in the case of this region, thereby showing the prevalence of large numbers of semi-autonomous and autonomous units in the form of Nayakas, which replaced the Nadus of the Tamil country.⁷ Nevertheless, scholars such as Noboru Karashima, R. Champakalakshmi and Kesavan Veluthat have questioned this theory, thereby showing the need to apply feudalism theory in the context of the region. Since segmentary state theory failed to discuss the question of social formation in Karnataka,⁸ and Noboru Karashima has provided considerable epigraphic and other evidence to prove the feudalism thesis, we are inclined to accept the position of the latter author, pointing to the importance of the feudal relationship in this region in the form of serfdom and forced labor, although we also acknowledge that Vijayanagara kings attempted to control this region by giving grants to temples and appointing two governors in Barakuru and Mangaluru, showing the importance of the region for Vijayanagara.

Within the state of Vijayanagara, South Kanara emerged as a strategic region because of its ports such as Mangalore and Barkur. For this reason, local chieftains such as Bangas and Chautas were granted autonomy,⁹ and their

⁶ RAMESH, K.V. *A History of South Kanara*. Dharwad: Karnatak University, 1970.

⁷ STEIN, Burton. *The New Cambridge History of India: Vijayanagara*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

⁸ CHAMPAKALAKSHMI, R. “State and Economy: South India: Circa AD 400-1300”. In: THAPAR, Romila. ed. *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*. Bombay: Popular Prakashana, 1995; VELUTHAT, Kesavan. *The Early Medieval South India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010 ; KARASHIMA, Noboru. *History and Society in South India: The Cholas to Vijayanagar: Comprising South Indian History and Society Towards a New Formation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

⁹ RAMESH. *A History of South Kanara*. op.cit.

activities were not interfered with, provided they accepted Vijayanagara's suzerainty. Moreover, this autonomy – and the feudalization process – grew after the Vijayanagara period, both because of the lack of a central authority and because of the local feudal lords' fight against the Portuguese. By virtue of this local resistance, reinforced by the opposition of the Keladi kings who succeeded the Vijayanagara, the Portuguese failed to implement their cartazes (passport) policy in the region¹⁰ and were forced to establish a direct relationship with the kings of Malabar of Kerala. While they did influence local society there, they did not produce any substantial change in South Kanara, where a fundamental continuity of economic and social institutions is visible in this period.

There is evidence to suggest that the region was influenced by a feudal social formation. Villages were ruled by feudal lords, such as the Bunts, who possessed their own militia and respected the *brahmanas* as the religious authority. One can actually compare this alliance between Bunts and Brahmanas to the Brahmana-Ksatriya alliance in the Tamil country, although in South Kanara, like in other parts of South India, one is not able to find Ksatriyas.

Brahmanas were respected by both local and supra local authorities, could represent state authority, and controlled non-brahmana workers, as we learn from the evidence of large numbers of land grants. The presence of brahmanas, temples and local chieftains contributed to the feudalization process of the region and brahmanas possibly played an important role in legitimizing the position of local chieftains. Two classes therefore emerged, with brahmanas and non-brahmana landlords as dominant communities, and non brahmana workers as subordinate groups. As this implies, dominance was not related to caste alone, that is, not every brahmana was a landlord, as not all non-brahmanas were workers. Rather, work and workers cut across caste lines – this being a very important feature of the region. At the same time, one can suggest that large numbers of untouchables were serfs who could be controlled by dominant groups, while large numbers of Sudra workers could retain their independence.

What about social mobility within this framework? Specific stories show that social mobility among dominant groups was permissible, but there are

¹⁰ SHASTRY, B.S. *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations, 1498-1763*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2000.

not many cases of upward social mobility. In a way, a case such as the one of Mayura Sharma (brahmana) becoming Mayura Varma (ksatriya), is an example of downward social mobility, which was also an important phenomenon related to the need to obtain large numbers of workers. The text called *Gramapaddhati* also mentions fallen brahmanical groups,¹¹ pointing to the fact that some brahmanical groups had to indulge in agricultural production. Indeed, some brahmana groups worked in their own plots, as is the case of the Havyaka brahmanas who worked in their areca plantations.

If then commodification of labor was not necessarily along caste lines, caste did play a role in allowing brahmana landlords to convince Sudra workers to work in their land.¹² Thus, cases of unfree workers becoming landlords were rare, and a patron-client relationship prevailed in the region – differently from its neighbor Kerala – until the late eighteenth century British conquest of South Kanara.

Even today, South Kanara is mostly an agricultural zone, and agricultural production was the major economic activity of the region in the past as well.¹³ The region had sufficient rainfall and river resources, obtained a considerable amount of tradable commodities from the ghat regions, and developed close relationships between the ports and hinterland. In particular, it became a major rice exporter during the Portuguese period – Portuguese *cartazes* refer to sale of superior quality of rice to the Portuguese-controlled regions such as Goa, West Asia, Africa, and Malabar.

Apart from agricultural production, there were other activities such as craft production and trade. In the historical or modern period, South Kanara was not known for production of high quality craft goods,¹⁴ thus differing from the Northern Karnataka, Telugu and Tamil regions. The region possibly exported agricultural goods and imported craft goods such as textiles. Nevertheless, coarse varieties of cloths used for consumption by common people were produced.

¹¹ RAO, Nagendra. *Brahmanas of South India*. New Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2005.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ VASANTHAMADHAVA, K.G. *Western Karnataka: Its Agrarian Relations*. New Delhi: Navrang, 1991.

¹⁴ RAO, Nagendra. *Craft Production and Trade in South Kanara AD 1000-1763*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2006.

Most importantly, craft production and trade were controlled by migrants and outsiders. For example, one finds reference to large numbers of Telugu artisans and gold smiths from Goa and other regions of India. Similarly, large numbers of traders on the coast were outsiders, especially Arabs and other Muslim categories, and Saraswats. Their settlements could be found in ports such as Basrur and Mangalore. Trade contacts led to the exchange of goods and ideas with other parts of the world, thus making South Kanara history become part of global labor history. Furthermore, trade networks strongly impacted the labour commodification process, and particularly the rice trade contributed to this development, as it compelled local landlords to enhance agricultural production, a process that was further intensified after the conquest of South Kanara by the British.

Free and unfree labor, or the multiplicity of labour relations

It is important to question the distinction between “free” and “unfree” labour, usually equated to the distinction between proletarians and non proletarians.¹⁵ In the traditional view, proletarians are wage workers, who lack property, and therefore are compelled to sell their labour, but are able to select the persons who purchase their labor. Conversely, non-proletarians are those who are either compelled to sell their labour to specific buyers whom they cannot select, or they possess some property and therefore cannot be considered as propertyless.

In the case of pre-colonial South Kanara there is evidence to state that these two categories existed. However, it is not possible to divide workers into watertight compartments such as free and unfree. For instance, as Jan Breman has shown for Gujarat, in South Kanara as well unfree labour was converted into free labour during a particular period of the year, in connection with agricultural work. In such instances, the unfree workers were allowed to sell their labour to new masters.

Moreover, while the traditional literature envisages a progressive replacement of unfree labour by free labour,¹⁶ no such a linear process

¹⁵ VAN SCHENDEL, William. “Searching labor historiography: Pointers from South Asia”. In: BEHAL, Rana P and VAN DER LINDEN, Marcel. eds. *Coolies, Capitalism, and Colonialism: Studies in Indian labor history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

¹⁶ For a critical survey, see SCHENDEL. “Searching labor historiography...” *op.cit.*

occurred in the region, since unfree labour was actually preferred by both masters and servants in the context of patron-client relationships that were also typical in regions such as Gujarat and South Kanara. This pattern was both culture- and class-bound. Like in Gujarat, for instance, the Anavil brahmanas in South Kanara claimed landownership by narrating the legend of Rama giving them land, thus using myths in order to justify their dominant position in society.¹⁷ At the same time, workers largely accepted these narratives, and did not attempt to become free before the age of industrialization.

Agricultural property in this region was termed *balu*, literally “to live” or “life”. This implies that land had become important for the population, as the region had sufficient rainfall, fertile soil, and a river system suited for agricultural production. The kings, chieftains or feudal lords were landowners, and peasants or tenants or *okkalu* settled in the land, as part of a process of subinfeudation of land, with tenants in turn distributing land to subtenants, or *kilokkalu*, sometimes without permission from the landlords themselves. A network of relationships thus emerged between feudal lord, *okkalu*, and *kilokkalu* who used the assistance of hired labourers and hereditary labourers or serfs.¹⁸

Hereditary serfs were controlled by economic and non-economic means. In particular, the need to maintain their family and the fear of social ostracism prevented them from opposing their bounded status. Conversely, hired laborers – or *kuliyalu*, *kuli* meaning “wage” – mostly paid in kind – were free in principle, and could select their masters, but lacked security. In the process of their commodification, economic means were used: in particular, the master could evict them, thus *de facto* leading to greater dependency between the master and servant, since, unlike modern industrial proletarians, they would rarely leave their village to go to another village or urban centre in search of wages. Mostly paid in kind, in order to increase their security, they would rather accept to become hereditary serfs, as in the halipratha system in Gujarat. Therefore, although possibly large numbers of workers were *kuliyalu*, they could become *muladalu* (serfs) due to particular

¹⁷ BREMEN, Jan. *Patronage and Exploitation: Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat, India*. Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.

¹⁸ RAMESH. *A History of South Kanara*. *op.cit.*

situations. In this sense, “proletarian workers” were turned into “non-proletarians”.

Other kind of labour relations also existed. The Dherds, for instance, were considered as agricultural serfs who depended on their masters, as was the case of the Mogers. They were also called “conditional slaves” because they remained attached to the master as long as the latter looked after them and their family. In the absence of support from the master, the Dherds could look for new perspectives in order to gain their living, but could alternatively also have been bought and sold. According to the sources, moreover, a second group of Dherds existed that was attached to the land, and could not leave it. Finally, a third category of Dherds had to serve their master along with their family, and when the slave died his family members would go to his wife’s brother and serve his master. Slavery then did not end with death, for even if, theoretically, a slave could become free, in practice he or she continued to remain under the control of the master.¹⁹

Workers called *holeyalu* and *hennalu* (female serfs), for instance, had to work in the field of masters. The first were considered as “slaves who could be transferred with the land, at the time of the latter’s sale or donation, to the new master”.²⁰ The transfer of not just land, but also labour indicates that these workers were considered as mere commodities. The social status of the worker played an important role in compelling workers to accept their subordinate position. Not surprisingly, *holeya* in the local Kannada language means “untouchable”.²¹

The *hennalu* was a female worker, showing that women were compelled to work on the land as well. The term *alu* means servant, someone who had to work for the master. While the *okkalu* and *kilokkalu* can be considered as free wage labour, *holeya* and *hennalu* can be considered as unfree wage labour attached to the land, highlighting the emergence of multiple forms of serfdom in this region, in the context of a feudal mode of production.

¹⁹ KUMAR, Dharma. *Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural Labor in the Madras Presidency*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1965, p. 39.

²⁰ RAMESH. *A History of South Kanara. op.cit.*, p. 286. In the historiography of the region “serf” and “slave” are interchangeably used, thereby potentially creating a confusion regarding their actual implication for the labour history of South Kanara. In the present context, the term slave may be read as serf.

²¹ BHAT, N. Shyam. *South Kanara: 1799-1860: Study in Colonial Administration And Regional Response*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1998.

Moreover, after seventeenth century slavery was introduced in South Kanara, in the context of the global slave trade, and especially as a result of the emergence of the Muslim dynasty in the Deccan, trade contacts with the Arabs, and the coming of Europeans. Slaves were mainly employed as domestic servants of rich traders, kings, and their officers, but were not incorporated in the agricultural sector, where no shortage of labour existed, due to the presence of hereditary serfs and hired labourers. Possibly for the same reason, the sources suggest that in Kanara a more liberal form of slavery existed than in Malabar, for in the first region slaves could own and cultivate their own piece of land and could interact with their masters.²²

More broadly, however, this document underlines a process of expansion of forced labour in early modern South Kanara, and the integration - if relatively late and peculiar - of the region into the longer-term slave trade in southwestern India. The latter can be traced back at least into the Vijayanagara and post Vijayanagara period. For instance, after the fall of the Vijayanagara in the sixteenth century around 700 illegitimate children had been sold as slaves by the local authorities of the Ikkeri kingdom. Furthermore, before the coming of the Portuguese, the Arabs were already well established in some parts of western coastal India, through Muslim dynasties in the Deccan in the late medieval period.²³ Within this context, Abyssinian slaves are mentioned in the context of the provinces of western coastal India, while later, many African slaves attempted to become free from their Portuguese masters. The emergence of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan in Mysore, who ruled the region in the late eighteenth century, also contributed to the increase of slavery. For that period, a reference is made to 20,000 slaves in the form of prisoners of war, sudras and brahmanas who had lost their caste status as they had interacted with lower caste people.

In the early nineteenth century, British records claimed that in the region of coastal Karnataka there were nearly 80,000 slaves - one in twelve inhabitants. According to another report, there were nearly 50,000 slaves.²⁴ The documents, written in order to oppose slavery in the USA, made

²² ADAM, William. *The Law and Custom of Slavery in British India In A Series Of Letters To Thomas Fowell Buxton*. Boston: Weeks, Jordan, 1840, p. 170.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

explicit reference to the policy of importing slaves from Arabia and Africa to Goa, and consequently to other parts of the western coast.

The caste system played an important role in the commodification process. In South Kanara, just as in its neighbour states, there were brahmana and sudra landowners, and sudra and untouchable workers. The brahmanas obtained large numbers of land grants, a practice that was in use before, during and after the Vijayanagara period, only to stop when South Kanara became part of the Madras Presidency. The kings supported the brahmanas to justify their own authority and, in turn, the brahmanical position was safeguarded due to their social position. As priests and knowledgeable people, brahmanas were respected in society, preaching bhakti philosophy. The construction of large numbers of temples in South Kanara further justified brahmanical domination. The sudra landowners benefited from their alliance with brahmanas, this being a traditional pattern in South Kanara. In the absence of a strong central authority, the ruling classes could exploit vulnerable groups such as the *holeyas* in the form of *kuliyalu* and *muladalu*. Both men and women workers were subjected to exploitation.

However, not all brahmanas owned land. Possibly a large number of landless brahmanas existed, who became temple priests. Some brahmanas also tilled their own fields, particularly within those migrant brahmanical communities such as the karad and the havyaka brahmanas. The Gowda Saraswat Brahmanas were also given a low social status because they indulged in the non-brahmanical profession of trade.²⁵ Therefore, there were different categories of brahmanas, as there were sudras who did not work as labourers, but were chieftains and land owners. Thus, caste cannot be equated with class, for there were classes within castes.

However, this of course is not to say that social status did not play an important role in the commodification of labour, especially for workers who belonged to the lowest category in the caste hierarchy. Different terms are used to refer to them: *huttalu*, *mannalu*, and *salada*. *Huttalu* refers to a person who was a slave by birth. *Mannalu* was a serf who was attached to the land, and *salada* was the person who became a serf due to a debt

²⁵ RAO, *Brahmanas of South India*, op.cit.

burden.²⁶ The master decided the fate of *salada*. One can assume that these serf categories remained dependent on their masters for their survival.

Non-agricultural labourers

A significant difference existed between agricultural and non-agricultural labourers. Unlike the first, non-agricultural workers migrated from different parts of India, and showed the prevalence of the circulation of labour. Free labour also prevailed in non-agricultural production, although this does not mean that all of them were “proletarians”, since some had property and others possibly had to accept forced labour over a period of time. Moreover, a wide range of intermediate forms of labour relations co-existed in the very experiences of individual workers.

Other artisans combined professions of agricultural and craft productions: they were owners in their workshops and labourers in the fields, possibly obtaining a wage for their work as agricultural workers. Moreover, some sources make reference to part-time artisans, such as textile weavers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and potters. In Barkuru, for example, there were textile weavers who lived in the weavers’ district called Patasalakeri,²⁷ where artisans worked at home and possibly produced goods needed for consumption by other workers. One record also refers to oil workers being asked to build a matha, a religious institution in the region – an example of forced labour imposed on artisans.²⁸ Religion also played an important role in the commodification of artisans’ labour.²⁹ The temples made payment to workers such as carpenters and musicians and appointed ladies to serve the deity and provide services also to members of society.³⁰ Paid in kind, the latter show that such women worked as free labourers.

Some artisans were landowners, and employed peasants on their own property called *muliwarg*. These land grants to artisans were important, for they gave them economic security and, in turn, forced them to remain in the village and provide services to the members of the community. The artisans

²⁶ KUMAR. *The land and caste in South India. op.cit.*, p. 39.

²⁷ SHETTY, B. Vasantha. “Barakuru - A Metropolitan City of Antiquity”. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Mysore University, 1985.

²⁸ *Indian Antiquary*, XXIII, p. 59.

²⁹ *South Indian Inscriptions*, Vol. VII, No. 334.

³⁰ *South Indian Inscriptions*. Vol. IX, Part II. No. 417.

owned dry and wet land, the latter being suitable for agricultural production. There is also reference to artisans who became rich agriculturists.³¹ Another source also refers to the garden owned by one *achari* (carpenter or any other kind of artisan).

Non-agricultural producers lived in colonies, mostly in urban centres. For example, records refer to colonies of washermen, fishermen, and potters, the first two respectively called *madivalabettu* and *bestarabettu*. They established their colonies and workshops, and were able to defend their interests. However, they did not form a homogeneous community, for a notable hierarchy existed among them.

When the master craftsmen became rich, they purchased land and controlled the labour of other artisans. Oppositely, those artisans who failed to obtain regular income had to accept to remain attached to the village and the land that was given to them. Others worked independently in their workshops and provided labour services for a wage: it was their circulation within the country that allowed them to remain free.

Conclusion

The micro study region of South Kanara has showed similarities with other micro and macro regions, and points to the usefulness of the category of “extended subaltern groups” in order to investigate the complexity of labour relations. In late medieval and early modern South Kanara, free and unfree labour existed, but there is no evidence of the latter being replaced by the first during this period. The opposite is actually true in some cases, with a process of replacement of free labour by unfree labour occurring. Moreover, a multiplicity of intermediate labour relations existed, with individuals going through free and unfree labour in different periods of their lives, or in connection with the various occupations they performed at the same time. This article has also shown that caste and class cannot be equated, for workers belonged to different castes, such as sudras, untouchables, agriculturists, non-agriculturalists, and even brahmanas. Finally, a comparative approach has evidenced similarities between South Kanara and Gujarat, especially regarding the way serfdom remained a major institution based on a patron-client relation.

³¹ RAO. *Craft Production and Trade in South Kanara. op.cit.*

Industriousness in an imperial economy. Delineating new research on colonial connections and household labour relations in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies

Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk

Europe was made by its imperial projects, as much as colonial encounters were shaped by conflicts in Europe itself.¹

“In recent years, postcolonial and post-nationalist studies have designed a research agenda allowing for dynamic and reciprocal analyses of colonial interactions. This scholarship opposes the widespread idea of nations as self-contained units of analysis. Moreover, it counters the teleological notion that developments in Western Europe and North America formed blueprints for other societies and cultures on their “road to modernity”.² Because of their interwoven histories, historical developments in “the East” and in “the West” cannot be understood without studying them relationally.³

¹ STOLER, Ann, and COOPER, Frederick. “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda”. In: STOLER, Ann, and COOPER, Frederick, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, pp. 1-56. Many thanks to the guest editor and peer reviewers of *Workers of the World* and to Corinne Boter and Louella de Graaf for their useful comments on earlier versions of this article.

² For an excellent, and already classic, account, see CHAKRABARTY, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008 [2000].

³ CONRAD, Sebastian, and RANDERIA, Shalini eds. *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2002, pp.10, 12; COOPER, Frederick. *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005; BAYLY, Chris. *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914. Global Connections and Comparisons*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004. While Bayly explicitly distances himself

Obviously, intensified colonial encounters in the nineteenth century constitute an important setting for analysing these entangled histories.

In their inspiring work, Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper, responsible for the opening quote of this article, emphasize the many ambivalences of colonial rule, and point to the importance of recognizing how colonialism not only shaped the histories of the colonies, but just as much those of the metropolises. We cannot understand the *postcolonial* world without acknowledging these “tensions of empire”, and it is important to “examine thoughtfully the complex ways in which Europe was made from its colonies”.⁴ We need to (re)read the historical archival material from this perspective, placing colonial history not solely in the context of domination and subordination, but reconstructing a more dynamic history, characterized by tensions, anxieties and paradoxes, collaboration and resistance.⁵ Examining these tensions and contradictions will help us to understand the postcolonial remains of these complex relationships more fully.⁶

One of these legacies is the worldwide division of labour. This partly results from colonial relations, but has also been in constant development since decolonization, under the influence of shifts in global economic power relations.⁷ Throughout history, the division of work has witnessed both continuities and important changes, on the global, the regional and the household level. In this article, I will argue that the approach of “entangled history” can be a fruitful line of investigation for labour history. Whereas studies on colonial and postcolonial labour history have recently been on the rise,⁸ there have not been many attempts to approach labour history in the

from postcolonial history, he does aim to show interconnectedness and interdependencies in world history.

⁴ COOPER, Frederick. *Colonialism in Question*, *op.cit.* p. 3.

⁵ STOLER, Ann L. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

⁶ COOPER and STOLER, “Between Metropole and Colony”. *op.cit.* p. 33.

⁷ See e.g. NEDERVEEN MEERKERK, Elise van; VAN VOSS Lex Heerma and HIEMSTRA-KUPERUS, Els. “Covering the World: Some Conclusions to the Project”. In: NEDERVEEN MEERKERK, Elise van, VAN VOSS Lex Heerma and HIEMSTRA-KUPERUS, Els eds., *The Ashgate Companion to the History of Textile Workers, 1650-2000*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010, pp. 773-792.

⁸ See, among others: AUSTIN, Gareth. *Labour, Land and Capital: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807-1956*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005; BAHAL, Rana, and LINDEN, Marcel van der. eds. *Coolies, Capital and Colonialism: Studies in Indian Labour History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Alessandro

empire from the perspective of colonial entanglements. Most studies using the concept of entangled history (or *histoire croisée*⁹) so far have focused on political or cultural history, and not so much on labour relations in an imperial context. With regard to the division of work in the household between men, women and children both in the colonial and in the metropolitan context, this perspective has not yet been applied. Economic history, as I will argue below, is another discipline to which the integration of an approach of colonial entanglements would be a challenge.

Studying the division of work between men, women and children in the context of a colonial economy is particularly interesting because gender and age not only serve as categories of analysis, but also formed dynamic categories constructing differences of “class” and “race” in the past. By investigating this household division of work in different parts of the empire, and by establishing connections between these developments, we can truly bring “metropole and colony, colonizer and colonized [...] into one analytic field”.¹⁰

This article delineates a new research project on household labour in the Netherlands and its colonies on Java. This particular case study is not singled out to suggest that other parts of the Dutch empire, or the world, are not important or interesting. Also, I wish to avoid “methodological imperialism” by simply replacing “nation” with “empire”. It would be a major challenge to reconstruct how “webs of empire” – connections and frictions both within and between empires – influenced the household division of labour.¹¹ However, to accomplish this in the near future, we must first do much of the labour intensive empirical historical work. Sometimes, this involves digging up new information in the archives; sometimes, it means studying well-known material from a different perspective.¹² In the need of such studies on the work of households in the period of colonialism,

Stanziani, ed. *Labour, Coercion, and Economic Growth in Eurasia, 17th-20th Centuries*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

⁹ WERNER, Michael, and ZIMMERMAN, Bénédicte. “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity”. *History and Theory*, vol. 45, 2006, pp. 30-50.

¹⁰ COOPER and STOLER, “Between Metropole and Colony”. *op.cit.*, p. 15.

¹¹ BALLANTYNE, Tony. “Rereading the Archive and Opening up the Nation-state: Colonial Knowledge in South-Asia (and Beyond)”. In: BURTON, Antoinette Burton, ed. *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, pp. 102-121, 104.

¹² BALLANTYNE, “Rereading the Archive”. *op.cit.*, p.116; STOLER, *Along the Archival Grain*, *op.cit.*

this article is not a result of advanced empirical research.¹³ Rather, it offers suggestions on how to carry out such an empirical study, and how we may disentangle the workings of colonial connections on labour relations.

Why connections and entanglements? The case of the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies

In explaining “the rise of the West”, some economic historians have pointed to the importance of the re-allocation of household labour. One influential model is offered by Jan de Vries, who proposes that preceding industrialization, Western Europe experienced an “industrious revolution”, starting in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. Between circa 1650 and 1850, labouring households supposedly became more hard-working – not out of necessity, but because of their changing consumptive desires. Crucial to this growing industriousness was the reallocation of the available time of *all* household members: male workers shifted from leisure to more work, and women and children increasingly involved in market activities.¹⁴

De Vries’ “industrious revolution” thesis offers several advantages. First, in his model both production and consumption are essential, whereas most historians before him have neglected the dynamics between the two.¹⁵ Secondly, De Vries points to the importance of households as crucial units of analysis for economic activity and labour relations. This signifies the need to investigate productive and consumptive activities of women and children, and their role in historical economic development. Interestingly – although historians have not yet explicitly linked this to the industrious revolution thesis – contemporary ideologists and policy-makers aimed to

¹³ The research project in fact only started on 1 January 2013, funded by the Dutch Scientific Organization (NWO) and involves two PhD-students and one senior researcher. For more information see: <http://www.wageningenur.nl/en/Expertise-Services/Chair-groups/Social-Sciences/Rural-and-Environmental-History-Group/Research/Industriousness-in-an-imperial-economy-1.htm>

¹⁴ VRIES, Jan de, “Between Purchasing Power and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe”. In BREWER, J. and PORTER, R. eds. *Consumption and the World of Goods*. London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 85-132; VRIES, Jan de. “The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution”. *Journal of Economic History*, vol.54, 1994, pp. 249-270; VRIES, Jan de. *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

¹⁵ SASSATELLI, Roberta. *Consumer Culture. History, Theory and Politics*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2007, p. 19.

combating poverty and idleness from the eighteenth century onwards. As we will see below, both in the Netherlands and the Netherlands-Indies, attempts were made to reform the ‘idle poor’ into industrious workers.

However, De Vries pays little attention to institutional histories such as social policies nor to the *restrictions* and power relations within households, and especially the difficulties that women and children in these units faced. He principally presupposes equality and almost unlimited free choice, whereas many social actors and groups did not enjoy full access to all (new) consumer goods. Moreover, De Vries does not include the impact of *unequal global relations* in his analysis, since many of the new exotic consumer goods – presumably forming the incentive for working-class households to work harder – were *not* gained on entirely equal terms.

On the contrary, the new consumer preferences in “the West” that would have stimulated families’ industrious behaviour were not purely endogenous developments. Consumption patterns in Western-Europe received a major impulse by partly enforced shifts in trade and labour relations in “the East”.¹⁶ An exponent of such important influences was colonial extraction, according to some economic historians leading to the “Great Divergence”.¹⁷ Therefore, my new research project ‘Industriousness in an imperial economy’ aims to investigate household work and consumption patterns – and changes therein – not only in the context of endogenous economic demand and supply factors, but with the inclusion of institutions (such as colonial authority and social policy), unequal power relations and imperialism.

Already before 1800 European seafaring powers attempted to set up extractive institutions in order to gain as much as possible from the New World and Asia, often resulting in radically changing labour relations. One clear example is slavery, but also many other forms of bonded, coerced and

¹⁶ For a still inspiring monograph on the changing role of sugar among the British working class see MINTZ, Sidney. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Elisabeth Sifton Books (Viking Penguin), 1985.

¹⁷ POMERANZ, Kenneth. *The Great Divergence. China, Europe, and the making of the modern world economy*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000; ACEMOGLU, Daron; JOHNSON, Simon and ROBINSON, James. “The rise of Europe: Atlantic trade, institutional change, and economic growth”. *American Economic Review* 95:3, 2005, pp. 546-579.

semi-free labour coincided with the spread of colonialism and capitalism.¹⁸ On seventeenth-century Java, for instance, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) increasingly gained control of the hinterlands of Java, where lands were suitable for the cultivation of coffee and other tropical products. The Dutch tried to make the native population work for them both by collaborating with local rulers, by using armed force and by legislation.¹⁹

In the nineteenth century, imperialism intensified and was accompanied – most notably on Java – with increased political and administrative control by the metropole. There are several indications that this severely affected the division of labour and the allocation of time in households, not only in the Netherlands East Indies, but also in the Netherlands. In this article, I will further explore two examples of such effects of colonialism on labour relations, first of all in the early nineteenth-century initiatives to enhance industriousness in both parts of the empire, and secondly, by comparing debates on labour legislation for women and children in both colony and metropole.

Example 1: Imposing industriousness in metropole and colony (c. 1830-1900)

Already in the seventeenth century, poverty and idleness became increasingly linked in the rhetoric and policy of authorities both in the Dutch Republic and on Java. Dutch towns increasingly restricted poor relief for unemployed migrants, and work was connected to beneficial entitlements.²⁰ On Java too, migration and “vagrancy” were condemned as economically counterproductive.²¹ Following economic decline in the eighteenth century, work became increasingly considered to be the answer to the rising problem of poverty: the idle poor should be reformed into hard-working and productive citizens. This rhetoric applied to lower-class men, women, and children alike. Local initiatives such as workhouses and

¹⁸ See, e.g. PRAKASH, Gyan. “Colonialism, Capitalism and the Discourse of Freedom”. *International Review of Social History*, vol. 41: Supplement S4, 1996, pp. 9-25.

¹⁹ For Java, consult BREMAN, Jan. *Koloniaal profijt van onvrije arbeid. Het Preanger stelsel van gedwongen koffieteelt op Java*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010, pp. 18-20.

²⁰ LEEUWEN, Marco H.D. van. “Amsterdam en de armenzorg tijdens de Republiek”. *NEHA-Jaarboek*, vol. 59, 1996, pp. 132-161.

²¹ BREMAN. *Koloniaal profijt. op.cit.*, p. 41.

spinning contests – typically women’s and children’s work – increased tremendously in the second half of the eighteenth century. However, practically all initiatives failed. The poor often refused work, or left the workhouse because of its bad reputation. Most women and children could earn more and be more flexible elsewhere in the labour market.²²

Following the deepened economic troubles of the Napoleonic wars, similar attitudes towards pauperism prevailed. After the erection of the Dutch Kingdom in 1815, initiatives to combat poverty were taken to the national and even imperial level. The Dutch king entrusted one person in particular to realize plans to both counter pauperism and stimulate the industriousness of poor families, in the Netherlands and on Java. This person was Johannes van den Bosch (1780-1844), who had served as a military officer in the Netherlands-Indies since 1799, but was expelled to the Netherlands in 1810, probably because of his criticism of Governor-General Daendels’ policy. Back in the Netherlands, he successfully fought against the French in 1814-1815.²³

After the war, Van den Bosch spent most of his time designing plans for combatting poverty in the Netherlands, which was particularly dire in towns. Van den Bosch was convinced that, unlike in Britain, not industry but *agriculture* would be the answer to the existing problems. His experiments (1808-1810) with cash crop cultivation back on Java probably formed the foundation for his ideas.²⁴ Van den Bosch argued that the Dutch urban poor should get the “right to work” by cultivating agricultural crops for the market on wastelands in rural regions. To this end, he established – with private funds – a Benevolent Society (*Maatschappij van Weldadigheid*), which would set up agricultural colonies in Drenthe, an under-populated province in the East of the Netherlands. Tens of thousands of pauper families with mostly urban backgrounds, were migrated (and later even deported) to these “peat colonies” for several years to learn how to cultivate a piece of land. The idea was that this would reform them into

²² NEDERVEEN MEERKERK, Elise van. *De draad in eigen handen. Vrouwen en loonarbeid in de Nederlandse textielnijverheid, 1581-1810*. Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007, pp. 177-179.

²³ BOERMA, J., *Johannes van den Bosch als sociaal hervormer: de maatschappij van weldadigheid*. Groningen, 1927, pp. 2-4.

²⁴ SCHRAUWERS, Albert. “The ‘Benevolent’ Colonies of Johannes van den Bosch: Continuities in the Administration of Poverty in the Netherlands and Indonesia. *Comparative Studies of Society and History*. vol.43, n.2, 2001, pp. 298-328, 301.

industrious agrarian workers, who within a few years could leave the colonies with some savings and an improved mentality.²⁵

However, suitable colonists were hard to find, and “industriousness” soon needed to be enforced to a great extent. Part of the colonial sites became penal institutions for convicted paupers. Even in the “free” colonies, regulations were strict and detailed. In the 1820s, Van den Bosch personally corresponded with the overseers of the peat colonies regularly, making sure that they saw to it that “no household would be bereft of the necessary, but that it itself would earn these necessities”.²⁶ The detail with which Van den Bosch calculated the bare necessities for households’ subsistence strikes the historian’s eye when reading the archival material. Although perhaps benevolent in intent, the peat colonies were an example of social engineering, not eschewing intensive control – and even force – over people’s daily lives. A strict daily regime of meals, work and rest was established, with only little leisure time. Wages were set at two-thirds of regular Dutch (adult male) wages, from which costs for daily subsistence were subtracted. Interestingly, Van den Bosch reckoned with equal expected earnings for men, women and children, which in practice made his calculations unrealistic.²⁷ Whenever a colonist family earned more, the earnings were partly put in a health fund, partly saved, and partly paid out as pocket money. Enough savings could buy the family out of the institution.²⁸

The number of voluntary colonists coming to Drenthe remained low: yearly, on average 22 families arrived between 1830 and 1860.²⁹ Most of the thousands of families and individuals in the colonies were instead sent or even convicted to the “Beggars Institutions” by the authorities of their home towns. In 1875, still 2,809 people were living here, of whom only 10 had volunteered.³⁰ Rather than reforming poor men, women and children into hard-working citizens, the colonies had turned into a full-fledged penal

²⁵ SCHRAUWERS. “Benevolent Colonies”. *op.cit.* pp. 303-313.

²⁶ National Archive (NA), Collection Van den Bosch, inv. no. 58, Benevolent Society, fol. 79v.

²⁷ NA, Vd Bosch, inv. no. 58, fol. 14v.

²⁸ BERENDS, R. Et. Al. *Arbeid ter disciplineren en bestraffing. Veenhuizen als onvrije kolonie van de Maatschappij van Weldadigheid 1823-1859*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1984, pp. 60-61.

²⁹ KLOOSTERHUIS, C.A. *De bevolking van de vrije koloniën der Maatschappij van Weldadigheid*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1981, p. 243.

³⁰ ‘Bevolking der Rijksbedelaars Gestichten’, *Economist*. Vol.24, n.2, 1875, pp. 732-736.

institution, removing unwanted elements from urban society. Judging from their original intention, the peat colonies should be considered a failure. Nevertheless, an important effect of these social experiments was that they set an example for the Cultivation System in the Netherlands Indies that their inventor Johannes van den Bosch designed and implemented during the time he was appointed Governor-General (1830-1833).

The Cultivation System has been extensively described, but for this paper, the relatively underexplored links with Van den Bosch' benevolent colonies in the Netherlands are particularly interesting. Both can be seen as state-led "development projects", focusing on agricultural production of cash crops by the (poor) population, who would receive a cash bonus for surplus crops they cultivated. Also, in both cases, the objective was to reform "lazy" paupers into industrious workers.³¹ Van den Bosch stated that Javanese peasants only needed a few hours' work per day for subsistence, and that their industriousness needed to be enhanced, for their own benefit as well as that of the imperial economy.³² To achieve this, Javanese peasants were required to set aside a proportion of their land to produce export crops, such as coffee, sugar and indigo, for the Dutch authorities. Although peasants obtained monetary compensation for their produce, they mostly had to use this to pay land rents to indigenous elites and Dutch civil servants. This system would be in place until around 1860, and although it worked out differently in various parts of Java, it had a tremendous impact on both the Javanese and the Dutch economies.³³

For the sake of this paper, it is most interesting to zoom in on the effects on household labour, in particular on women's and children's work efforts. Angus Maddison has assumed that the introduction of the Cultivation System did not mean that Indonesian workers were impoverished, but that they had to work harder to meet their daily necessities.³⁴ While Maddison

³¹ SCHRAUWER. "Benevolent Colonies". *op.cit.* pp. 313-314.

³² BOSCH, J. van den. "De consideratiën en het advies van den 6 Maart 1829, uitgebragt door den benoemden Gouverneur-Generaal van N. Indië J. van den Bosch, op het rapport van den heer Du Bus over de kolonisatie". [1829] In: PARVÉ, D.C. Steyn. *Het koloniaal monopoliestelsel getoetst aan geschiedenis en staatshuishoudkunde*. Gravenhage, 1850, pp. 294-328, 304.

³³ ELSON, Robert. *Village Java under the cultivation system, 1830-1870*. Sidney: Asian Studies Association of Australia with Allen and Unwin, 1994, pp. 43-44.

³⁴ MADDISON, Angus. "Dutch income in and from Indonesia 1700-1938". *Modern Asian Studies*. vol. 23, n.4, 1989, pp. 645-670.

did not explore the economic activities of Indonesian women and children, my argument here is that *their* work efforts largely increased. Indeed, Ben White has recently stated that the Cultivation System “required fundamental reorganization of the household’s division of labour”.³⁵ Firstly, women’s and children’s labour input in subsistence agriculture increased, as men got more involved in cultivating cash crops. Secondly, women and children assisted or worked fully in the cultivation of cash crops as well, and Elson even suggests that in some respects this resulted in more equal labour relations between the sexes.³⁶ This enhanced work effort by women and children may have originated mostly out of necessity, as Boomgaard argues,³⁷ but other historians suggest that colonial interactions also entailed new consumptive possibilities for Indonesian households. More generally, the rise of waged labour severely affected labour relations in the Javanese economy and households, as well as their consumption patterns.³⁸

Moreover, the Cultivation System indirectly affected work patterns of labouring households in the Netherlands. Take, for instance, the effects of textile exports by the Dutch Trading Company (*Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij*, *NHM*). Established in 1824 to monopolize trade with the Netherlands East Indies, the NHM soon after also started to ship cotton cloth produced in the Netherlands to the Indonesian market. To this end, new cotton factories were set up in the proto-industrial region of Twente.³⁹ This greatly stimulated the emergence of the mechanized Dutch textile industry, and boosted industrialization in the Netherlands. Mechanization caused the rapid decline of hand-spinning, seriously decreasing the demand for Dutch women and child workers.⁴⁰ Simultaneously, the imports of large quantities of factory-made cotton clothes led to the decline of domestic hand

³⁵ WHITE, Ben. “Labour in childhood’s global past: Child work and colonial policies in Indonesia, 1800-1949”. In: LIETEN, Kristoffel and NEDERVEEN MEERKERK, Elise van. eds. *Child labour’s global past*. Amsterdam: International and Comparative Social History - vol.13, 2011, pp. 479-501, 485.

³⁶ ELSON. *Village Java under the cultivation system, 1830-1870*. op.cit., pp. 205-206.

³⁷ BOOMGAARD, P. “Female labour and population growth on nineteenth-century Java”. *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs*. vol. 15, n. 2, 1981, pp. 1-31.

³⁸ ZANDEN, Jan Luiten van and RIEL, Arthur van. *Strictures of Inheritance. The Dutch Economy in the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 116.

³⁹ Graaf, Ton de. *Voor Handel en Maatschappij, Geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij, 1824-1964*. Amsterdam: Utrecht University, 2012, pp. 59-63.

⁴⁰ NEDERVEEN MEERKERK, Elise van. *De draad in eigen handen*. op.cit.; GROOT, Gertjan de. *Fabricage van verschillen: mannenwerk, vrouwenwerk in de Nederlandse industrie (1850-1940)*. Amsterdam: Aksant, 2001.

spinning and weaving of cotton by Indonesian women, who consequently began to spend their time on other forms of gainful employment.⁴¹

Eventually, the Cultivation System and other forms of colonial extraction may even have contributed to the decline of female labour force participation in the Netherlands, which occurred faster than in other West-European countries in the second half of the nineteenth century. Partly by cheap imports from the colony, and partly by monopolized exports to the Netherlands-Indies, the Dutch economy flourished after 1850 and real wages increased.⁴² This increased wealth allowed many Dutch working-class households to reallocate their time from the production of commodities towards more consumption and production of utility goods for the household – such as hygiene and cleanliness – most notably by wives and children.⁴³ No doubt, the influx of tropical consumer goods for ever-lowering prices impacted greatly on labouring households, not only on their consumption patterns, but also on their productivity, as Mintz has suggested.⁴⁴ This entanglement will be explored in the near future, based on empirical evidence of Dutch consumption patterns.

But even if economic change facilitated these changes, why did both the supply of and the demand for industrious Dutch women and children decline? In explaining this, ideological shifts are crucial. During the nineteenth century, the ideology regarding Dutch working-class families gradually changed. Increasingly voices were heard to protect children and women, and to make sure fathers and husbands could earn sufficiently to provide for them. Towards the end of the century, changing ideologies in the metropolis also had some effects on Indonesia, most notably through the “Ethical Policy” after 1901. Nevertheless, Dutch policy-makers displayed extremely differing standards regarding labour policies within the empire, as we will now see.

Example 2: Debates on women’s and children’s work in the empire (c. 1900-1940)

⁴¹ BOOMGAARD, P. “Female labour and population growth on nineteenth-century Java”. *op.cit.*, pp. 16-17.

⁴² VAN ZANDEN and VAN RIEL. *Strictures*. *op.cit.* pp.136, 239.

⁴³ MOKYR, Joel. “Why ‘More work for mother?’ Knowledge and Household Behavior, 1870-1945”. *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 60, 2000, pp. 1-40.

⁴⁴ MINTZ. *Sweetness and Power*. *op.cit.*

Recent research has revealed that until around 1850 (married) women's and children's work was widespread in the Netherlands. Only from this period onwards the male breadwinner ideology fully gained ground in the Netherlands, and was also extended to all social classes by 1900. Compared to many other Western European societies, however, the participation by Dutch women and children started to decline relatively fast from the 1850s onwards.⁴⁵

However, ideology and practice did not always neatly coincide. While Dutch legislation forbade industrial child labour under 12 since 1874, agriculture and services were long exempted. When around 1900, compulsory schooling until age 12 was introduced, many young children appear to have been kept from school to work in the fields. Since the minimum working age had been raised to 14 in 1919, many parents complained to the National Labour Inspection that they had children running around idly for two years after leaving school.⁴⁶ While married women's market work had demonstrably declined, the Secretary General complained in 1928 that in industrial centers, "housefathers cannot find work and live off the earnings of their daughters".⁴⁷ Still later, during the economic crisis of the 1930s, "protective" legislation banning all married women's work was decreed so that their position should be in the family, and not in the labour market. Interesting discussions arose in the preparatory committees between conservatives, liberals and feminists, who not so much disagreed on the true destination of married women, but differed very much on whether the state ought to prescribe this ideal or leave it to the "free" choice of families.⁴⁸ In all of these documents, it is clear that economic necessity and unemployment among men underpinned the call for "protective" legislation for Dutch women and children.

Turning our eye to Indonesia, Dutch observers early on painted a rather stereotypical picture of hard-working Javanese women. Contemporary observers noted that Indonesian women were generally remarkably active in

⁴⁵ SCHMIDT, Ariadne, and NEDERVEEN MEERKERK, Elise van. "Reconsidering The 'Firstmale-Breadwinner Economy': Women's Labor Force Participation in the Netherlands, 1600–1900". *Feminist Economics*, vol. 18, n.4, 2012, pp. 69-96.

⁴⁶ NA, Labour Inspection, inv. no. 1746, diverse petitions.

⁴⁷ NA, Labour Inspection, inv. no. 267, letter from C. Zaalberg to Jac. van Ginneken, 1-8-1928.

⁴⁸ NA, Labour Inspection, inv. nr. 271.

the public sphere, both within the household and in the labour market. This contrasted to their view of the Javanese peasant, who was allegedly satisfied with producing the needs required for subsistence, and would spend most of his time on leisure. In the nineteenth century, European views on the role of Indonesian women apparently became more diverse. Partly, this was due to the more intensive contacts between the indigenous population and the Dutch, who increasingly started to permanently migrate and build a life in the Netherlands-Indies. Partly, these shifting attitudes were also related to changing gender norms in the European context.

Around 1900 opinions were voiced that the loose family ties in Java resulted in a lack of industriousness and entrepreneurship and thus hampered economic development. Women's principle role ought to be in the household, instead of in the public domain, in order to secure a more coherent family life. Moreover, Christian missionaries tried to impose "western" family values on those households they converted. They opposed polygamy, and tried to convince Indonesian women that their most important task was to be a wife and mother, who was mainly occupied with household duties.⁴⁹ In 1914, elaborate research on Javanese women showed clear differences between girls and women from various social groups. The poor and "ordinary" *desa* (village) women, helped their parents in the fields from a young age, or looked after their younger brothers and sisters. After marriage, they often worked hard on their plots of land or in their own business, as Javanese men were generally "unfit to maintain them properly". Next, there were *santri* women, generally middle-class Muslim women who received religious education and usually became obedient and thrifty housewives. Finally, *prijaji* (elite) women were often highly educated and rich, who tended to outsource their household work and were seen by the Dutch as idle and extravagant.⁵⁰ Doubtless, these were stereotypes, but my point is that they still focused on Indonesian women's industriousness (or

⁴⁹ LOCHER-SCHOLTEN, Elsbeth. "Door een gekleurde bril...Koloniale bronnen over vrouwenarbeid op Java in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw", pp.41-44 e BEMMELEN, Sita van. "Een adatrechtstudie in historisch perspectief. J.C. Vergouwen over Toba-Batakse vrouwen". pp. 52-77, 71-72. In: REIJS, Jeske; Kloek, Els; JANSZ, Ulla; WILDT, Annemarie de; NORDEN, Suzanne van; BAAR, Mirjam de. eds., *Vrouwen In De Nederlandse Kolonien, Zevende Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1986.

⁵⁰ *Onderzoek naar de mindere welvaart der Inlandsche bevolking op Java en Madoera. IXb3. Verheffing van de Indische vrouw*. Batavia, 1914, pp. 3-5.

lack thereof). Unlike in the Netherlands, the idea that married women should not work was not explicitly voiced for native women.

A similarly ambivalent attitude ruled in regard to the work of Indonesian children. Whereas work by children, especially under the age of 12, had been a matter of growing concern and intensive debate in the Netherlands since the 1840s, and legislation was implemented since 1874, a total disregard of the issue prevailed in the Netherlands Indies. This becomes clear furthermore if we look at school enrolment: by 1900, only 5% of all Dutch children under 12 did not attend school, whereas at the same time only one in every 200 Indonesian children received schooling.⁵¹

Some ten years later, debates arose in the context of international criticism on the Dutch reluctance to implement legislation against female night labour and child work in the Netherlands-Indies in the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1920s, the Netherlands was even summoned by the international community to implement protective labour legislation in the colonies. Interestingly, while the minimum age for child labour in the Netherlands had been raised to 14 in 1919, it was set at 12 for Indonesian children in 1926. Proponents of female and child labour stated that, following the *adat* (Islamic law and traditions), women's labour was customary and "natural", and that children were better off working than being idle.⁵² Of course, these opinions were voiced primarily by western entrepreneurs and liberal politicians who viewed Indonesian women and children as a source of cheap labour.

But not only businesspeople stressed the inherent differences between Dutch and Indonesian women. In 1925, publicist Henri van der Mandere stated:

It is self-evident that women in western society are excluded from hazardous and tough labour [...]. Women's position in Indonesian society is incomparable to that of the Dutch woman. Whereas manual labour is an exception in the Netherlands, it is

⁵¹ WHITE, Ben. "Childhood, Work and Education, 1900-2000: The Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies/Indonesia Compared". *Brood en Rozen*. 4: Kinderarbeid, pp. 105-109.

⁵² LOCHER-SCHOLTEN, Elsbeth. "Female labour in twentieth century Java. European notions – Indonesian practice". In: LOCHER-SCHOLTEN, Elsbeth and NIEHOF, A. eds. *Indonesian women in focus: past and present notions*. Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1987, pp. 77-103; WHITE, Ben. "Childhood, Work and Education". *op.cit.* pp. 110-111.

the rule here; there are even regions where it follows from *adat*, that almost all work is done by women.⁵³

Indeed, the census of 1930 lists almost 30% of all married women on Java and Madura with a *registered* occupation, predominantly in agriculture and industry. Compared to the Netherlands, this percentage was extraordinarily high.⁵⁴ The citation indicates that it was not only considered “natural” that Indonesian women worked; the inherent differences between Indonesian and Dutch women also made it self-evident that the latter instead needed protection. This is a fine example of what Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper have called “the grammar of difference”.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Research on the connections between family labour, household time allocation and colonialism is necessarily sketchy, as this is an understudied subject. The research project “Industriousness in an imperial economy” will explore these issues in the next five years, based on extensive archival research, while looking through the lens of entangled histories. More solid conclusions are expected in the near future, but so far we can already sketch some broad lines regarding attitudes towards and practices of women’s and children’s work in the Netherlands and Java.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, attitudes towards women’s and children’s work in the Netherlands and Java were strikingly similar. Fear of idleness among the working poor was a big issue until well into the nineteenth century. Authorities initiated projects to “teach” industriousness to working-class men, women and children both in the Netherlands and the Netherlands-Indies. An important example are the “peat colonies” in the Netherlands and the Cultivation System on Java, implemented by Johannes van den Bosch. Both projects show ample parallels in ideological background and implementation. In both cases, agrarian cash crops were cultivated by households, following strict rules, which enabled them to earn their own living in addition to subsistence. Both

⁵³ VAN DER MANDERE, H.Ch.G.J. “‘Internationale wetgeving en Indië’”. *De Indische Gids*. 1925, pp. 1, 25. Thanks to Nynke Dorhout for providing me with this quote.

⁵⁴ Own calculations based on *Volkstelling 1930*, vol. III, 1934, pp. 94-95.

⁵⁵ STOLER, Ann, and COOPER, Frederick. “Between Metropole and Colony”. *op.cit.* pp. 1-56, 3.

projects also displayed a deep contempt for “lazy” paupers and peasants, who needed to be reformed into industrious citizens.

Entangled as their origins may be, there were also clear differences. The Cultivation System was implemented in Javanese villages on a large scale, with wide implications for the population and the household division of work. In contrast, the Benevolent Colonies constituted a relatively isolated area in the Netherlands, where vagrants and beggars were transported out of the “ordinary” (often urban) society. In fact, the Cultivation System probably even had more effects on Dutch labour relations than the Drenthe peat colonies. Combined with the activities of the NHM, the system encouraged industrialization and mechanization of the cotton industry in parts of the Netherlands. The increased imports of colonial goods for lower prices also led to different consumer patterns in many Dutch working-class households. In general, much of the improved living standards of Dutch households may be linked to colonial extraction.

A first analysis of the debates on Dutch and Javanese women’s and children’s work shows many ambivalences and tensions; for instance, between ideology and practice. Despite the ideal of the male breadwinner, in the Netherlands many married women and children still worked in the first half of the twentieth century. Regarding Javanese women and children, on the one hand, we can discern tensions between attempts to “Westernize” them, and introduce the ideal of domesticity. On the other hand, inherent differences between Dutch and Indonesian women and children were stressed, justifying why the former should not and the latter could indeed perform (heavy) labour.

However, here again we must be aware of the differences between ideologies and practice. Much of the “protection” of Dutch wives and children was primarily aimed at protecting white male labour during economic crises. Following Stoler’s plea to research the colonial archives with a critical eye, I believe the same applies to the historical material on “Dutch” women and children. Only in this way, can we make connections between seemingly unconnected developments in labour relations across the empire. On many of the entanglements displayed above, much more research is needed to explore their complex workings and to unravel both their direct and indirect effects. This is the aim of the research project “Industriousness in an imperial economy” for the following years.

Towards a history of convict labour in the nineteenth century Cape

Nigel Penn

Introduction

During the course of the nineteenth century, labour relations in the British Cape Colony underwent a profound transformation. Firstly, the slave trade was abolished in 1807, as it was throughout the British Empire, prior to the abolition of the institution of slavery itself in 1834. Secondly, after a brief period where legislation (the Caledon Code of 1809) seemed to confirm the position of the indigenous Khoikhoi as *de facto* slave substitutes, they too were liberated from labour bondage by Ordinance 50 of 1828. In theory, then, after 1838, when the period of compulsory ex-slave apprenticeship was ended, there was no un-free labour at the Cape. Henceforward, all labour relations would be covered by legal contracts and wages would be paid to the labourers. It was at precisely this moment, however, when supposedly free men and women were able to sell their labour in a free labour market, that the Cape government instituted a rigorous, extensive and efficient convict labour system that was, for a time, the admiration of the British Empire.¹ Even more extraordinary is that the system reached its zenith just as convict labour was being phased out in Britain's Australian colonies. Seemingly undeterred by the Empire wide retreat from forced labour the supporters of the Cape's convict system claimed real success in the essential business of punishing and rehabilitating criminals. More than this, they claimed, the convict system could make good British subjects out of people who were previously regarded as having been wild or savage. Proponents could also claim that convict labour had unlocked the Cape's economic potential through the role it had played in linking the interior to

¹ For the creation of this convict system and its reception by the British government see PENN, Nigel. " 'Close and Merciful Watchfulness': John Montagu's Convict System in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Cape Colony". *Cultural & Social History*, vol.5, Issue 4, December 2008, pp. 465-480.

the coastal regions, by building roads and mountain passes, as well as by the improvement of harbour facilities, particularly through the construction of the Breakwater in Cape Town.² Moral regeneration, the propagation of British values and economic progress were praiseworthy imperial objectives, but were they best achieved through a forced labour system? The answer seems to be, at least in the case of the Cape Colony, that they were, and this was because of the unique circumstances to be found in the nineteenth century Cape.

Although it is tempting to see the convict labour system at the Cape as being a substitute for slavery, or as a compensatory source of un-free labour designed to meet the labour needs of the post-emancipation colony, the relationship between the two forced labour systems is not that straightforward.³ The origins of the Cape convict system are not to be found in the traditions of Cape slavery, nor in the labour crisis caused by the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of the Khoikhoi. Rather they are to be found in the debates and experiments concerning convict labour and penal reform in the British Empire and, particularly, in the Australian colonies. The roots of the Cape's convict system, in fact, lie in Van Diemen's Land in the 1830s and early 1840s. The chief designer and initiator of the Cape's convict system was its colonial secretary, John Montagu, who had previously been the colonial secretary of Van Diemen's Land. It was in Van Diemen's Land that Montagu had tried to reform the existing convict system, which had developed from something known as the Assignment System – where individual convicts were assigned to colonists as labourers – into what became known as the Convict Probation System. The key features of the latter system (which owed something to the ideas of Alexander Maconochie, the idealistic private secretary of Governor Franklin of Van Diemen's Land) were that groups of convicted men should work at hard labour in gangs under close supervision within a system that allocated rewards or punishments according to the conduct of the convict. The

² For a contemporary view of the success of the Cape convict system see NEWMAN, W.A. *Biographical Memoir of John Montagu With a Sketch of the Public Affairs Connected With the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope During His Administration As Colonial Secretary From 1843-1853*. London, 1855.

³ The connection between the end of slavery and the institution of the Cape convict system is made by BERNAULT, Florence. "The Politics of Enclosure in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa". In: BERNAULT, Florence. ed. *A History of Prison and Confinement in Africa*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003, p.8.

Convict Probation System was a failure in Van Diemen's Land, partly because Montagu was fired before he could implement it properly (after having become involved in disputes with the Governor and his interfering wife, Jane), partly because more convicts were sent to Van Diemen's Land than the island could cope with and partly because public opinion as a whole was turning against the idea of convict labour in Australia. In 1843, however, Montagu was appointed to the Cape as Colonial Secretary and found himself in a position to implement, unimpeded, his reformed convict system.⁴

Interestingly, Montagu was never ordered by his colonial masters to reform the Cape's prison system. This was an initiative he took upon himself. His first priority had been to reform the colony's financial system and make it credit worthy.⁵ Though Montagu argued that the Cape would benefit from the implementation of a well organized convict labour force it was not the labour situation at the Cape that prompted the introduction of his system. Rather, Montagu was concerned to prove his previous critics wrong and demonstrate that he had a contribution to make to debates about penal reform. Whilst he deplored the inefficient and haphazard use of convict labour in the colony before his arrival, as well as the disgraceful state of prisons, including that of Robben Island, his reforms were aimed primarily at proving that he could run an effective penal system, not at creating a new source of un-free labour, especially not for the colonists. Although the colonists continually complained of a labour shortage, the convict labour system was not designed to provide them with convict labourers for that would have been a reversion to the already discarded and discredited Assignment System of Australia. Arguably, the colonists could have had all the labour they needed had they been prepared to pay attractive wages, but seemingly this was not an option in the recently emancipated Cape.

Montagu took great pains to insist that his convict labour system was aimed at the reform and punishment of the convicts and not simply at their economic exploitation as this would have been akin to slavery. Most of the regulations and instructions he issued concerning the management of his convict system have to do with matters relating to the

⁴ PENN. "Close and Merciful Watchfulness". *op.cit.*

⁵ See BREITENBACH, J.J. "The Development of the Secretaryship to the Government at the Cape of Good Hope under John Montagu (1843-1853)". *Archives Year Book for South African History*, II, 1959, for a discussion of Montagu's career at the Cape.

surveillance and disciplining of the convicts rather than the amount of work to be extracted from them. The regulations also emphasized that good conduct could result in a convict earning remission of sentence as well as gaining certain financial rewards or promotion from one category – the chain gang – to a more favourable one – the road gang. Montagu's system also placed great emphasis on the education of the convicts, stressing the need for instruction in literacy and Christianity whilst serving one's sentence. Explicit instructions were also given concerning the provision of adequate food and clothing as well as access to medical care.⁶ The end result of Montagu's system was supposed to be the reintegration of a morally reformed, physically healthy, hard working Christian and literate penitent, with employable skills, into society.

It might be argued that Montagu's convict labour system was simply a new form of government slave labour, similar to that of the labour of Company slaves from the slave lodge during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when they worked on public projects for the VOC. From the beginnings of British rule at the Cape, however, the government had sought to disassociate itself from slave labour and had not used slaves on public projects. It is true that convict labour was probably the cheapest way for the government to accomplish large-scale public works, but this is by no means certain and would bare renewed scrutiny. Many contemporary observers wondered whether the convict road building projects were, in fact, that cheap, and their expense – an alleged one sixth of government revenue - was an important reason for the phasing out of such projects towards the end of the nineteenth century.⁷ Certain mountain passes or sections of road were handed over to private individuals to build from time to time, but these were not always successful and included some notable bankruptcies.⁸ It is most likely that the truly difficult projects could only have been built using the resources that the Cape government could bring to bear, but this does not mean that they were cheap. In short, the utilization of convicts on public

⁶ "Regulations for the Discipline and Management of Convicts Employed on the Roads of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope", 1 Jan. 1844, in Papers, 1847 (742), HCPP, pp. 70-78.

⁷ KEEGAN, Timothy. *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1996, p. 212.

⁸ See for example the fate of Jan Tassie, originally contracted to build the Swartberg Pass in 1881. ROSS, Graham. *The Romance of Cape Mountain Passes*. Cape Town: David Philip, 2002, p. 134.

works brought economic benefits to the Colony, but this is not the same as arguing that the primary motivation for the institution of a convict labour system at the Cape was to find a replacement for slavery.

Nor was the convict labour system at the Cape in any way linked to the convict labour utilized by the Dutch during the period of VOC rule. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the VOC had sent hundreds of convicts, or *bandietens*, to the Cape as a form of punishment to engage in hard labour for the VOC for a number of years. The great majority of these *bandieten* had originated in the East Indies and had been charged with activities deemed to be criminal by the Dutch authorities. Once at the Cape they had worked on public projects – such as a breakwater for the harbour – and sometimes alongside Company slaves.⁹ Despite the temptation to see similarities in the trans-oceanic convict system of the Dutch and the British at the Cape, it should be acknowledged that the Cape convicts in the nineteenth century were almost entirely of indigenous or local provenance. Cape convicts were not imported from abroad and were all deemed to have committed their crimes in the colony.

The Cape convict system, in other words, was not established to meet the Cape's labour requirements in the post-emancipatory era. Its global connectivity to other regions was that it was modeled on a version of the British convict system in Van Diemen's Land and had arisen from debates concerning good governance, crime and punishment and the question of convict transportation within the British Empire.¹⁰ Essentially, it was established so that Montagu could prove a point, both to his superiors in England and his detractors in Australia. His point was that the Convict Probation System could be made to work if it was run efficiently, i.e., by himself. This is not to say that Montagu was not a sincere penal reformer. There is no reason to doubt that he was inspired by both Christian piety and the drive to increase economic productivity. His reforms certainly helped to

⁹ On the *bandieten*, see WARD, Kerry. *Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

¹⁰ The Cape's place in the networks of the British Empire is explored in BAYLEY, C.A. *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1830*. London: Longman, 1989; LESTER, Alan. *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in nineteenth century South Africa and Britain*. London: Routledge, London, 2001 and LAIDLAW, Zoe. *Colonial Connections, 1815-45: Patronage, the information revolution and colonial government*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005.

develop the colony's infrastructure, but they were also designed to create better men. It is to these men that we should now turn.

The Convicts

Despite the historical importance of the Cape's convict system, it has not received anything like the attention that it merits.¹¹ This is especially true of the men who worked in the system – the convicts. What do we know about the convicts?¹² Thanks to the highly efficient record system kept by Montagu (he had learnt about the importance of records and surveillance from his first boss in Van Diemen's Land, Governor Sir George Arthur) we can say a great deal about the men as statistics, but somewhat less about them as individuals. A key goal of a social historian of convict labour should be to try to discover what individual convicts felt and experienced within the systems that controlled them. The ideal form to reveal underclass lives is often through micro-history, a means of writing that I employed in a book on eighteenth century Cape criminals.¹³ Criminal life stories, or convict lives, in other regions and societies have also frequently lent themselves to narration in the form of detailed micro-histories, but there are certain challenges that still have to be overcome in the Cape before such a methodological approach can be utilized for the study of nineteenth century Cape convicts.¹⁴ What are they?

¹¹ Some earlier studies include VAN WYK, H. "Die Geskiedenis van die Gevangeniswese in die Kaapkolonie, 1806-1910". Unpublished PhD thesis, University of South Africa, 1963; CORRY, T.M. *Prison Labour in South Africa*. Cape Town: Nicro, 1977 and VAN ZYL SMIT, Dirk. "Convicts on the Hard Road: Reflections on the System of Convict Labour introduced by John Montagu in the Cape Colony (1844-1853)", *De Rebus*, May 1981, pp. 223-226. See also Harriet Deacon's study of the Breakwater Prison, "A History of the Breakwater Prison from 1859 to 1905". Unpublished BA Honour's dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1989.

¹² For the past six years, I have been running a research project using undergraduate students from the Historical Studies Department at the University of Cape Town to explore the archival records and the material remains of certain convict stations within the system. The results are very preliminary at this stage and need to be synthesized, but I acknowledge the contribution made by my field trip students and researchers to my understanding of the Cape convict system.

¹³ PENN, Nigel. *Rogues, Rebels and Runaways: Eighteenth Century Cape Characters*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1999.

¹⁴ For a recent example, see Clare Anderson's *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

The first challenge is, paradoxically, an over abundance of material. The Cape convict system generated an abundance of paper work that has hardly been touched by historians. Between 1844 and 1898, the years the system was in operation, nearly 400 volumes of letters were received from the various convict stations scattered about the Cape. In addition to these volumes are volumes of letters dispatched to the convict stations as well as volumes of correspondence generated by the Central Road Board, an essential adjunct of the convict labour project.¹⁵ It is true to say that these records have yet to reveal their riches as the entire topic of convict labour in the nineteenth century Cape, unlike Australia and India, has been sorely neglected. To these rich sources, one should add the court records of the period, in which one could find the sentences and court proceedings involving the many thousands of individuals who were convicted of crimes and ended up as convicts. To date, very little work has been done with these sources, and such work that has been done has focused on high profile criminals who escaped the system rather than on the long serving victims of the system.¹⁶

These copious materials also contain an abundance of detail that seem to provide more than enough evidence from which to construct a series of individual microhistories. As an example we may consider the descriptions of a few of the convicts working at Bain's Kloof convict station between 1850 and 1852.

Convict number 1704. Name Hans Platje. Mother, Bushgirl, father Hottentot. Age 26. Private soldier in Cape Mounted Rifles and labourer. Native place, Cederberg, Clanwilliam. Tried by Court Martial, Grahamstown, desertion, first offence, sentence 7 years. Wife resides near Grahamstown.

Or:

¹⁵ The Convict Branch Papers are to be found in Cape Archives [CA], Colonial Office[CO], 6199-6566, Letters Received: Convict Stations, Departments and Miscellaneous Bodies and Persons, 1844-1898 and CA, CO, 6840-6868, Letters Despatched. The Road Board records run from CA, CO, 559-802. The Board was dissolved in 1862.

¹⁶ See for instance Kirsten McKenzie's work, such as *Scandal in the Colonies: Sydney and Cape Town, 1820s to 1850s*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004 and HOLDRIDGE, Christopher. "The Escape of William Edwards: Respectability, Intrigue and Invented Identity in the Early British Cape and Australia". Unpublished B.A. Hons. dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2008.

Convict 1808. Name Cobus. African slave. Age 22. Labourer. Born Paarl, farm Lemoenkloof. 5'4'', dark eyes, soft black curly hair, complexion brown, 2 black moles on brow, etc. Offence assault with intent to commit a rape. First offence, sentence 4 years. No religion. Can neither read nor write. No family.

Or:

Convict 1807. Name Richard Lucas Burton. Englishman, age 17. Apprentice on board ship. Born Monmouth. Wales, England (sic). 5'5'', eyes light brown, hair, complexion fair with long visage. Marks: snake bite. Tried 13.1.50, Cape Town. Offence theft, first conviction, sentence 7 months. Religion Church of England. Can read and write. Single. Parents reside in Monmouth.¹⁷

With such detailed descriptions available, it might be argued, the micro-histories virtually write themselves. The problem is that the historian is spoilt for choice and has almost too much detail. Here one should distinguish between micro-history and prosopography. What do the details of a hundred criminal lives add up too? The answer is probably that details simply for the sake of detail are better read as statistics. When the historian is faced by an abundance of sketchy details how does s/he decide what is truly the defining life history? There is no easy answer to the question and only saturation in many life stories as well as the complicated context of a specific moment will reveal which life truly illuminates that moment or a period or historical process. Sadly, prosopographical detail tends to become scarcer in the records towards the end of the convict system and the difficulty of individuating lives increases. The fact remains, however, that future historians of the Cape convict system have no shortage of material.

The second challenge facing historians wishing to say something about individual convicts in the system is that one would have to choose what category of individual would be a suitable subject for a micro-history. The great majority of the convicts were local men, or, at least, men who had been tried and convicted in the Cape for crimes committed in the Cape. This did not mean, however, that all were Cape born. A break down of convicts

¹⁷ The examples are drawn from archival research in Sandra Steytler and Hans Nieuwmeyer's booklet, *Bain's Kloof Pass: Gateway to the North*. Paarl: Summit Publishing, 2003, pp. 23-24.

at Bain's Kloof convict station between 1850 and 1852 according to their countries of origin reveals that 398 were South African born, 34 from England, 1 from Wales, 4 from Scotland, 15 from Ireland, 16 from West Africa, 7 from the United States, 5 from India, 1 from East Africa, 1 from Holland and 3 were designated "Other".¹⁸ The cosmopolitan nature of the gang is a reflection of the fact that Cape Town was an important port on the international sea routes and that men frequently disembarked at the Cape and got into trouble ashore. What these figures mask is that some of the British born men had, quite often, had a spell in Australia, sometimes even as convicts. This sprinkling of exotics should not blind us to the fact that the vast majority of convicts were non-white men from within or on the borders of the Cape.

Although the Cape convict system was ostensibly color blind and non-racist, in that all men in the system were initially treated equally, receiving equal food, equal labour, equal accommodation, equal punishments, equal rewards and equal instruction, it was simply not possible, in a racially divided society like the Cape, to ignore racial categories. Even the most ardent supporter of the system, W.A. Newman, the Dean of Cape Town and Montagu's friend and posthumous biographer was well aware that the mixing of races in the labour gangs was quite remarkable and that they provided a unique microcosm of colonial life. It was also quite clear that they were the melting pots from which a civilized subject would emerge:

There may be seen, there at the same station, the should-be-civilized and the savage; the white man and the coloured; the culprit who has disgraced his Christian name by crimes which he has been taught to shun, and the heathen morally ignorant that theft is a crime, and who has hitherto been untaught that there is a God who has given his command against murder. There may be seen grouped at the same labour, dieted on the same rations, and even learning in the same school on the day of instruction, the English and the Dutch delinquents, the European sailor, the Africaner, the Kafir, the Bosjeman, the Fingo, the Hottentot, the Malay, the Mozambique; all shades of colour, all grades of intelligence; and yet perfect discipline, and mercy tempering justice, and encouragement holding out its advantages

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.22.

to the well-conducted...You may see, there, evil turned to good, and the ignorant taught to read...you may behold indolence earning industry, and the idle and thieving Bosjesman, and the cattle-lifting Kafir, making a high-road for commerce and civilization...In those stations the savage nature is restrained by wholesome discipline, and yet the same savage by his penal toil turns the wild mountain-pass to a road of usefulness, and the frowning tracks of barrenness into scenes of grandeur, cultivated beauty, and fertility.¹⁹

Newman's rather idealized description suggests that one of the virtues of the system was its even-handed, colour blindness. Yet from the inauguration of the system in 1844, Montagu divided up the convicts into racial groups and drew conclusions from the statistics. Between 1844 and 1848, for example, when there were over 700 convicts a year at work, an estimated 56.03% of them were described as being "Hottentots, Bushmen and Free Blacks"; 20.6% were described as being "Natives from the Border Tribes"; 10.63% were "Europeans or of European descent"; 8.38% were "Emancipated Slaves" and 3.83 % were "Prize Negroes [illegally traded slaves who were "freed" into colonial service}, Foreigners, &c".²⁰ These figures would change over time though the categories remained basically the same. In some years, for instance, if there were a frontier war in progress, the numbers of "Natives from the border tribes" would increase whilst other categories declined.

From which of these categories should the "exceptional normal" subject of micro-history be drawn?²¹ Ideally, a micro-historical approach should consider an individual, or individuals, from each category, although this would certainly be seen as endorsing Montagu's system of racial categorization. It would not really help to categorize the criminals by the crimes that they had committed since nine tenths of those sentenced to convict labour had committed theft, especially of livestock, or assault.

¹⁹ NEWMAN. *Biographical Memoir. op.cit.*, pp. 108-9.

²⁰ Montagu, Report, 1849, in Despatches, 1850 (104), HCPP, pp. 35-39.

²¹ This term originates in the debates surrounding Carlo Ginzburg's work on micro-history. Ginzburg argued that the anomaly tells us more than the rule, because it also speaks of the rule, whereas the rule only speaks of itself. But in a system with different rules we surely need an anomaly for each rule. For a recent discussion, see Perry Anderson's review of Carlo Ginzburg's *Threads and Traces: True False Fictive*. "The Force of the Anomaly", *London Review of Books*, vol. 34, no. 10, 2012.

(Those who committed more serious crimes, such as murder, were usually executed and hence did not end up in the convict system). It was clear to Montagu that stock theft was particularly attractive to those classified as being Khoikhoi, San or blacks of the “border tribes” [predominantly Xhosa] since they had a “love of a wandering life” and felt the “indolence common to all men before the comforts and wants of civilized life have been felt”. According to Montagu, the Xhosa were also marked by “a love of exploit as well as plunder that characterizes [them] in [their] marauding expeditions against the herds and flocks of our frontier farmers”.²² Quite clearly Montagu saw these criminal character traits as being racial in origin, or, if not exactly caused by race, caused by the low level of civilization which these races had obtained. His explicit belief was that his system would be able to correct these deficiencies of racial character though he admitted that whilst the “Khoikhoi, San and free blacks”, who made up more than half of the convicts, “were tractable and docile under a system of convict discipline”, the one-fifth or more of convicts from the border tribes were “less pliable and less accessible to moral influences”.²³ What this suggests, therefore, is that there were not only different racial categories for individuals within the system, but that the system changed, over time, to deal with these different categories.

This brings us to the third problem confronting the historian of convict life at the Cape. Which period of the half-century of the system’s existence should one focus on? My earlier paper on this subject focused on the inspiration for Montagu’s reform’s and the years during which he implemented them at the Cape. This period of “close and merciful watchfulness” was accounted a success by both the local government and the British government as well as by the majority of the Cape colonists, but it came to an end in 1852 due to Montagu’s ill health and his unpopularity in the colony. This unpopularity was partly the result of the erroneous public assumption that he was behind the British government’s plan to transport Irish convicts to the Cape – which provoked the rise of the Anti-Convict Association – and partly due to the correct assumption that Montagu, an arch conservative, was opposed to the granting of representative

²² Montagu, Report.

²³ *Ibid.*

government at the Cape.²⁴ The challenge now, however, is to chart the development of the system after Montagu's removal from the Cape and this makes it necessary to consider life on those convict stations that were established after his recall.

On the whole, one may observe a gradual deterioration in the treatment of convicts at stations established in the post-Montagu era. To some extent this was due to the fact that, once representative government was granted in 1853, the colonists had a greater say over how budgets should be spend and they resented the idea of paying for convict benefits. Other factors that should be taken into consideration are those associated with the advent of the so-called "mineral revolution" in South Africa.²⁵ Once diamonds were discovered in and around Kimberley in the 1860s, legislation was created to deal with the influx of African migrant workers to that region. This legislation was then used to deal with the rapid urbanization and industrialization that took place on the Witwatersrand once gold was discovered in the 1880s. Such legislation was often concerned with marking racial differences amongst workers (for instance, separate compounds and separate residential districts were allocated for black workers; different rates of pay and different categories of work were proposed for the different races; different diets were provided for different workers, etc.) and it proved difficult for prison authorities at the Cape to ignore these developments. How could the convict labour system be more liberal than the labour system in industry and the mines?²⁶ A similar shift in sensibility could be marked in other government institutions at this time – such as hospitals, lunatic asylums and schools. The constant wars and racial hatred on the Colony's eastern frontier also did little to endear white colonists to the large numbers of Xhosa who were now becoming, through annexation and desperation, colonial subjects. Many of these Xhosa became convicts as the distinction between prisoner of war and criminal became blurred and there was little

²⁴ PENN, "Close and Merciful Watchfulness". *op.cit.* See HATTERSLEY, Alan. *The Convict Crisis and the Growth of Unity: Resistance to Transportation in South Africa and Australia, 1848-1853*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1965 for an account of the Anti-Convict Association.

²⁵ The racialization of Cape society in the late nineteenth century is explored by writers like Vivian Bickford-Smith in *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2001 and DEACON, Harriet. "A History of the Breakwater Prison". *op.cit.*

²⁶ A common trope of early work on the compound system in the South African mines put things the other way around: the compounds were frequently compared to prisons.

incentive for colonial prisons to treat enemies as worthy of rehabilitation. To the influx of Xhosa prisoners one may add Khoikhoi rebels and deserters from the eastern Cape as well as the victims of the Cape's northern expansion – the San and Korana resisters of the late nineteenth century who became well represented in the convict gangs and at the Breakwater.

An examination of conditions of work at the convict stations reveals that, over time, the racist generalizations and assumptions written into the convict system would harden, as whites began to be housed and fed separately and the educational and religious instruction elements of the project were less rigorously and less equally applied. Money spent on the salaries of doctors or medical attendants was reduced and so was staffing. The system was not as tightly administered and there was a diminishment in its humanitarian, or reformatory content, at the same time as there was an increased emphasis on the economic exploitation of the convicts.²⁷ The discovery of copper and then diamonds in the northern districts of the colony, as well as long-term wool booms and a short-lived ostrich feather boom, provided great incentives for certain passes to be built and finished in a hurry regardless of the convicts' well being. Despite the long-term decline in the humanitarian project of the convict system, the particular sequence of events and processes in the late nineteenth century make it difficult to generalize about the treatment of Cape convicts over long periods. The scale of the system's time period, in other words, is too vast for an individual life story to encompass it. A lot, too, depended on the specific convict station to which a convict was sent, and this leads us to a consideration of the fourth major problem facing the historian of the Cape convict system – place.

The first project of the Cape convict system was to build a hard road between Cape Town and Stellenbosch across the sandy dunes of the Cape Flats. Thereafter, convict labour was directed to build a series of passes through the massive Cape Fold Mountains that served to separate the Cape's coast from the Cape interior. Different convict stations were established at each of the mountain passes, sometime one on each side of the mountain. As a rule, these mountain passes were high and isolated, in beautifully picturesque locations where mist and rain were common. They were often cold at night and snow capped in the winter, but hot in summer and during

²⁷ PENN. "Close and Merciful Watchfulness". *op.cit.*, pp. 465 and 477. Also see below, pp. 10-16.

the day. The vegetation of these passes was *fynbos*, the hugely diverse plant kingdom characterized by proteas and hundreds of other floral species. Sometimes there would be patches of indigenous forest. The roads characteristically hugged the slopes of precipitous mountains above a river valley far below and would involve the construction of huge stone blocked terraces in retaining walls backfilled with rock blasted from the cliff sides by gunpowder. Food, building materials and medical aid would have to be brought from miles away and accommodation built on the spot. Sometimes prefabricated wooden barracks would be erected or dis-assembled and moved along the line of road following the progress of the work gangs. Sometimes substantial and secure prisons or magazines would be built out of stone, structures that exist to this day.

Although this might sound as though it was a homogenous environment there was actually a big difference between each pass and the degree of difficulty in construction varied immensely. After the Hard Road across the Cape Flats was built, the first stations were established on either side of the Outeniqua Mountains, above the town of George in the southern Cape, to build a pass through the mountains. The initial name of this pass was Craddock's Kloof but, once it had been finished in 1847, it was renamed Montagu Pass in honour of the Colonial Secretary. Passes were then built through Mostert's Hoek to the Warm Bokkeveld in 1848 (named Mitchell's Pass after the designer, Charles Mitchell) and then through the Liemietberge, to link Wellington to Mitchell's Pass. This pass was named Bain's Kloof, after its chief engineer, Andrew Geddes Bain and was finished in 1853 after employing the labour of some 450 convicts. Eventually there would be over twenty different convict stations of substantial size in the nineteenth century Cape with considerable movement of personnel from one to another. If one counts "convict camps", however, a figure of seven hundred and twenty has been proposed.²⁸ A second wave of pass building moved into the interior as the mountains of the Olifants Rivierberge (Piekeniers Kloof, 1859) and the Little Karoo were breached in the 1860s and 1870s. In the 1860s, whilst some convicts were finishing building Prince Alfred's Pass through the densely wooded and well-watered Tsitsikamma Forest, others were labouring in the desert like conditions of

²⁸ LESTER, Claire-Anne. "Codified criminality: A socio-historical analysis of confinement at the Cape of Good Hope". *Historical Approaches*, vol. 9, History Department, University of Cape Town, 2011, p. 31.

Little Namaqualand in the Cape's north-west in order to build a road to transport copper ore over the Tiger Kloof. Finally, the rugged and lofty Swartberg Mountains were breached by a spectacular pass in 1888. These mountains were even harsher and more remote from support than the Cape Fold system and surrounded by the semi-desert of the arid Karoo. With such diverse environments, it is reasonable to suppose that the convict experience was also diverse and that no two stations were the same.

From the above it may be seen that there were many distinct places in the vast geographical space in which the Cape convict system unfolded. This suggests that a fruitful approach to writing a history of the convict labourers within the system might be to focus on a particular convict station and its men, instead of trying to cover the space of the system as a whole.

It was not only geographical place that created convict place. The convicts' working environment was also directly shaped by the nature of the administrators to be found at each convict post. The system, as envisaged by Montagu, required dedicated and disciplined guards or wardens who would be expected to send in detailed weekly reports about every aspect of an individual convicts' conduct ranging from his willingness to work to whether or not he raised his hat to his superiors. Recording such fine detail eventually proved to be too onerous for the hard-pressed officials who manned the system and, by the end of the nineteenth century rather brief reports were sent in about how many men had died, deserted or arrived at a particular station. Initially guards had been recruited from the military, but a lot of these men resigned, complaining that they had never experienced such hard conditions of employment. Eventually people of colour were enlisted as guards when it was found to be difficult to attract Europeans to the job. There were constant complaints of drunkenness, desertion and negligence leveled against the guards who sometimes seemed to receive more punishment from the visiting magistrates than their charges. Certain convict superintendants, like John Dallas, worked on nine different convict stations before moving to the Breakwater Prison and left an impressive record of his fights with his superiors or underlings in the form of reams of tetchy and abrasive letters.²⁹ The engineer or road work supervisor was also an

²⁹ One of the descendants of John Dallas has written a biography of his great-great-grandfather. DALLAS, David. *Weaver, Warrior, Warder: Scottish Pioneer John Dallas and his South African family*. Victoria: West Rosebud, 2010.

important influence at each pass and the road-building dynasty of Andrew and Thomas Bain presided over many a project, sometimes clashing with the convict supervisors over the allocation of men or resources.³⁰ A convict's work environment was thus crucially influenced by those put in charge of him. But it was perhaps even more influenced by those that he was forced to work with – his fellow prisoners – and a detailed micro-history would have to try to reconstruct the membership of a man's road gang or chain gang to be able to reconstruct the nature of personal relationships in a community of such diverse backgrounds.

Conclusion

Having outlined some of the problems facing the would be historian of the Cape convict system it is time to try to say something about what the convicts experienced. Although it may be too early to attempt a micro-historiographical approach, the abundant details do allow us to make some generalizations about how they were treated. How convicts responded to such treatment is a bit harder to discern. For the most part convict thoughts and feelings are given expression in the letters that their supervisors wrote to the office of the Superintendent General of Convicts. Occasionally a literate convict would himself write a letter of complaint to the authorities, but this would usually get both himself and the station supervisor into trouble as convicts were not allowed to have paper and ink. (It is significant that, despite their isolation, the major stations were served by the postal service). Apart from words, the deeds of the convicts are also expressive of their feelings, especially acts of resistance such as escape or rebellion.

It may be stated without fear of contradiction that building roads and mountain passes was hard work. The basic building material was stone. It was blasted with gunpowder and then cut to size with hammers and chisels. Great stone blocks, sometimes weighing up to ten tons each, were manhandled into place on steep slopes with gigantic crowbars, levers, ropes, cranes and pulleys. The main means of construction was dry-stone walling, that is, cement and mortar were not used (because of the scarcity of fuel to burn the lime needed for cement) and the rocks were placed with great

³⁰ Works on the Bains include STORRAR, Patricia. *A Colossus of Roads*. Cape Town: Hansa, 1984 and LISTER, M.H. ed. *Journals of Andrew Geddes Bain*. Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1949.

precision on top of each other. This was an accident rich environment and accidents did happen. Convicts were known for their bruised bodies and crushed fingers, but fatalities due to accidents were rare, comparing favourably to casualty rates in modern construction projects. Some men died in explosions and some under rock falls, but the majority of fatalities at the convict stations were caused by diseases, especially TB.

Not all convicts worked on the roads. Some, especially the more skilled, were used to maintain the iron tools or to do the necessary carpentry work. Until at least the 1860s, skilled convicts were paid up to three shillings a day for their services, a cost that amounted to 300 pounds an annum on the Knysna station. Others cooked, washed and repaired clothes or did chores around the camp-site or barracks. Food was generally good with men getting a hearty serving of one and a quarter pounds of meat a day and one and a half pounds of bread. Vegetables, apart from rice, were scarce, and extras like tea, coffee and tobacco rather dependent on good conduct or the station one was at. Clothing, shoes and bedding were usually adequate, especially in the early years, and provision was made for Sunday services and Wednesday afternoon literacy classes. Doctors, or medical examiners, either lived nearby the convicts or visited fairly regularly. Accommodation was frequently cramped and overcrowded, but otherwise kept the men warm and dry.

Punishments could be meted out for disobedience, desertion, insubordination, theft or violence. The men were not allowed to be whipped or beaten by their post supervisors or guards, but they could be imprisoned until a visit from the local magistrate who could then administer physical correction if deemed appropriate. For the most part punishment consisted of solitary confinement, deprivation of rations or privileges, loss of good conduct points or an extension of the current sentence.

All of this seems fairly satisfactory and the system was run in accordance with Montagu's plans until about 1865, with the Superintendent of Convicts, Charles Piers, specifically instructing his officers to avoid racial segregation and to treat every man fairly regardless of colour. Despite this, there were constant escape attempts and the odd incidence of violence when one convict would attack another. Escape was difficult, sometimes because the men were chained together, but also because the convict stations were

usually remote and it was difficult for fugitives to survive in the wilds. In populated areas, the public were offered rewards for the return of prisoners and these incentives usually resulted in recapture.³¹ It was becoming clear that the Cape colonials did not mix well with “Natives of the Border Tribes” and these groups were often housed and fed separately. When Xhosa men attempted to escape, some of the other prisoners were quick to try to recapture them, thus earning themselves remission of sentence. Montagu had been proud of the low rates of recidivism amongst his convicts and had promised work at the Road Board for any convict who had done his time, providing them with papers so that they could find employment. In reality, however, it is difficult to trace men once they left the system and it is hard to say whether all time-expired convicts found work.

Around about 1865, the system began to change, for reasons that are outlined above.³² Increasingly the government began to complain about the expense of the convict labour gangs and put increasing pressure on the road builders to complete their projects in the shortest period of time. There were frequent conflicts between engineers and convict supervisors as to how to meet deadlines, but both seemed to agree that it would be advantageous to reduce costs. This was achieved, quite openly, by reducing the quantity and quality of food, bedding and clothing and by reducing the amount of money spent on religious instruction, literacy classes, guards and medical care. Monetary awards to convicts were stopped and the entire rehabilitative aspect of the project was run down.³³

Moreover, despite Piers’ instructions to the Knysna station, the authorities in Cape Town had already decided, in 1859, to create a parallel office to his known as the Superintendent of Kaffirs, whose job it was to oversee and

³¹ 39 out of 42 escape attempts in 1860 were by “Hottentots, Bushmen or Kaffirs”. Government Publication, G.P. G20 1861 Report of the Superintendent of Convicts for the year 1860.

³² See pages 10-11.

³³ For evidence to support these contentions see the unpublished research essays of DE VRIES, Graham. “The Management of the Vlugt Convict Station Servicing the Completion of Prince Alfred’s Pass, 1865-1867”; DUNCAN, Kyla. “The medical care provided to convict labourers at De Vlugt and Yzer Nek Convict Stations, Knysna during the construction of Prince Alfred’s Pass 1858-1867”; MYERS, Lauren.

“Approaching the Prince Alfred’s Pass Convict System: Official and Personal Sentiment Towards Convict Labourers and their Reform” and WOODS, Belinda. “John Montagu’s view of rehabilitation and how this was reflected in reality at the Convict station on Prince Alfred’s Pass”. History Department, University of Cape Town, 2009.

administer separate treatment for African convicts from beyond the Cape's borders. The non-racial principles of Montagu, although rather dubious to begin with, had now been abandoned. As the convict system was transformed into a blatantly racist, punitive, hard labour system, it shed its philanthropic cloak though it could still claim to be teaching black criminals the virtues of discipline and hard work. A noticeable feature of the years after 1865 is that there are far fewer white men in the ranks of the convict work gangs and it is possible that other forms of punishment were being found for them as the system became harsher and more racialized. It is likely, too, that more white prisoners were detained at the Breakwater Prison instead of being sent to the desolate wilderness of Namaqualand or the Swartberg Pass. This was partly because, with the rise of diamond mining there was a rise in white-collar crime, such as illicit diamond trading, largely committed by whites and deemed to be in a different class of crime to stock theft or assault.

Despite the reduction in white numbers, overall numbers continued to grow. The implementation of new pass legislation, designed to regulate the movement of Africans seeking jobs on the Kimberley mines, also swelled the ranks of Cape convicts. By the 1880s, when the last of the great convict passes – the Swartberg Pass – was being built, the convict stations were actually overpopulated and numbers were too great to be properly housed, clothed or fed. At Swartberg, fifteen per cent of the 447 prisoners were sick at any one time as many had to sleep on the floor in freezing conditions with insufficient blankets to ward off the effects of snow and rain. They now ate only twice daily, to reduce the time wasted on meals, and suffered from hunger and thirst, partly occasioned by a directive from the government to reduce the food rations of African convicts so as to reduce costs.³⁴

By 1896, in keeping with broader trends in Cape society outlined above, the authorities were calling for complete racial segregation in the convict system and the prisons and describing racial mixing as the greatest blot of

³⁴ See the essays of LESTER, Clare. "Codified criminality: a socio-historical analysis of confinement at the Cape of Good Hope" and KEEGAN, Thomas. "The construction of the Swartberg Pass", *Historical Approaches*, Research Papers by History and Economic History Major Students of the University of Cape Town, Vol. 9, Historical Studies Department, University of Cape Town, 2011.

all in prison.³⁵ An indication as to how far the system had degenerated from the days of Montagu is provided by an article in a local journal called *The Lantern*. Its writer professed to be shocked to see in the Breakwater Prison “the delicate bank manager, the ex-fashionable young criminal of the shop till of Kimberley, side by side with the Bushman sheepstealer...the murderer, the raper and the Kafir insurgent”.³⁶ This was a far cry from the days when Dean Newman could rhapsodize about the beneficial nature of mixed race convict gangs. By this stage, however, the mountain passes had all been built and the prison gangs had largely served their purpose, having achieved, at least in colonial eyes, the economic, if not reformatory objectives, set by John Montagu.

As the Cape convict labour system adapted to twentieth century needs more and more convict labour was diverted to both the Kimberley mines and to private farmers to meet their labour needs. It is tempting to see in this a return to the long discredited Assignment System of Australia, banished because of its similarity to slavery and because it took convict supervision away from a supposedly benevolent state and placed it into the hands of profit-driven individuals. Though the overt forced labour component of the South African prison system has been largely phased out with the death of apartheid, conditions in South African prisons have never been as bad. It is somewhat surprising that despite the crisis in South African prisons today and the shocking prevalence of crime in society no historian has, as yet, attempted to draw a connection between the nineteenth century convict gangs of the Cape and rise of the criminal, or prison, culture on the Witwatersrand (as documented by Charles van Onselen).³⁷ Nor have students of the prison gangs who make up the Numbers Gangs of the contemporary Cape Flats (as described by Jonny Steinberg), attempted to

³⁵ The Head of Convicts and the Prisons Department stated in 1896 that ‘The task of the Convict Department re-organized in 1888...[was] to remove the greatest blot of all – the indiscriminate association of Europeans and Natives by day, on work for which the former class was quite unfitted, and by night in badly constructed, overcrowded and ill-ventilated sheds’. Quoted by DEACON. “History of the Breakwater”. *op.cit.*, p. 43.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

³⁷ For Van Onselen’s work on South African prison culture see VAN ONSELEN, C. *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*. New York: Longman, 1982 and “Crime and Total Institutions in the Making of Modern South Africa: The Life of Nongoloza Mathebula, 1867-1948”. *History Workshop Journal*, 19, 1985.

make a connection between those gangs and those of the colonial Cape.³⁸ It is not too fanciful to predict that future historians may be able to make such connections by turning their attention to uncovering the convict labour culture that doubtless existed in the many and diverse convict stations of the nineteenth century Cape.

³⁸ STEINBERG, Jonny. *The Number: One man's search for identity in the Cape underworld and prison gangs*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2004. Steinberg believes that the Numbers Gangs trace their origins back to Nongoloza Mathebula, an African prisoner in the late nineteenth century Witwatersrand prison system. There is no indication in the work of either Van Onselen or Steinberg that the Cape convict system had any influence whatsoever in the prison culture of contemporary South Africa.

What can we find in Augusto's trunk? About little things and global labor history

Henrique Espada Lima¹

Augusto drowned at sea while working as a mariner on June 25, 1861. When he died, he was in his mid-twenties and worked at the seaport in Desterro, on the Island of Santa Catarina in southern Brazil.² Augusto was born in Africa and illegally imported to the Brazilian coast in 1850, when he was apprehended by the Brazilian authorities along with other misfortunate fellows. In this new land, and according to the local laws that anticipated similar cases of the illegal African trade, he was not considered a slave, but what was called an “Africano Livre” (a free African). Under the custody and supervision of the Brazilian state, his work would eventually be assigned or auctioned to private citizens for a temporary (even if long) tutelage.³

Augusto died with a reputation. It was that reputation that drove the police to his house at Rua da Palma, Desterro, in order to make an inventory of his belongings. He had shared the dwelling with five other “blackmen” (*pretos*) of different conditions and from various places: the slaves Roque, Gregório, Francisco, and João, and a freedman named Joaquim. Apparently, the reason for the police official (*subdelegado*) Antonio Mancio da Costa's

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² This and all future references to this case come from: “Inventário de Augusto Africano Livre” (executor: José da Lapa Souza Coentro). Juízo de Órfãos da Cidade do Desterro, 1861 – Museu do Judiciário Catarinense (Archives in process of being organized).

³ About “africanos livres”, the best reference is Mamigonian, B. “To be a Liberated African in Brazil: Labour and Citizenship in the Nineteenth Century.” (University of Waterloo. PhD. Thesis, 2002).

unusual interest in this poor man's possessions arose from the rumor that Augusto, dead without heirs, had left behind an unknown amount of money kept in a locked drawer under a stool in his room.

The *subdelegado* arrived at the small house that Augusto rented with his house mates, and Roque showed him the drawer containing 3 gold and 33 silver coins and more than two hundred paper bills of different face values, amounting to a total of four hundred and thirty eight thousand réis. Corresponding to a third of the price of a slave at Augusto's age, or even a small house in the city, that was not the kind of money usually found in the hands of a black man who was a manual laborer, toiling side by side with slaves earning money for their masters or to fulfill the pecuniary obligations of conditional manumissions, as well as other free and freed poor workers.⁴

On the same day, Antonio Mancio visited Lieutenant-Colonel Manuel José Espíndola, the man who had bought Augusto's services years before and had been legally responsible for him. Espíndola presented Mancio a small trunk holding other objects that belonged to the young African. The *subdelegado* made a list: a pair of shoes, three pairs of black trousers, a coat and a jacket of the same color, a pair of white denim pants and three other pairs of old pants, two white shirts, a straw hat, two other hats made of black fabric, a collapsible top hat, a colored cotton cap and a black satin necktie.

Following the proper judicial proceedings for his *post mortem* inventory, the town's Judge of Orphans (*Juiz de Órfãos*) appointed a trustee to Augusto's estate in abeyance, publicized the proceedings in order to identify those who might be legally entitled to inherit it, and tried to ascertain the total value of his belongings.

Within the next three months, the judge fulfilled the formal requirements, starting by asking Lieutenant-Colonel Espíndola to appear before him and report about his former association with Augusto. From Espíndola's testimony we learn that Augusto had been assigned to him by the

⁴ During the Imperial period (from Independence in 1822 to the proclamation of the Republic, in 1889), the Brazilian currency unit was the *mil réis* (1\$000), divided in thousandths. *Tostão*, *pataca* and *cruzado* were coins that circulated in the mid-nineteenth century, with face value of respectively \$20, \$320 and \$400 réis. One thousand *mil réis* was known as *1 conto de réis* (1:000\$000). Gold and silver coins had higher values and smaller circulation. See Amato, Claudio; NEVES, Irleis; Russo, Arnaldo. *Livro das moedas do Brasil: 1643 a 2004*. São Paulo: Stampato, 2004.

government of the northeastern Province of Alagoas in 1850 (where he served as Captain), and that Augusto was part of a larger group of “one hundred and seventy [other Africans] who were taken by government forces and held as contraband”⁵. Caught as an illegal import, following a law to which Brazilian authorities were largely hostile meant to suppress the illegal slave traffic, Augusto was “liberated” to become a “free” worker whose labor was assigned to a private citizen who bid for it in an auction. When Espíndola was removed from Alagoas to a new position in distant Desterro, Augusto followed him.

His “freedom” was – as for many in the same situation – full of legal and practical ambiguities. According to Espíndola, Augusto was “under [his] direction and governance” but “lived and took care of himself outside the home”, coming to his house, where he had just an old pillow and a mat, only to spend the night and have an occasional meal. But Augusto was used to working and living by himself, and he handled his obligations to the man he would eventually identify as “master” by paying him a daily fee in cash out of his own earnings as a seafarer. When the judge asked about the money that Augusto might have left, Espíndola recalled that he had heard from the “public voice” (*voz pública*) that the African might even have had “a few *contos* (a currency unit equal to one thousand *mil-réis*)”. Augusto was also a “man of confidence” of a local businessman named Maximiano José de Magalhães Souza who paid him a monthly wage of 60 *mil-réis* for the last two years, and that was not the only source of his income.

According to Espíndola, “it was known and a natural thing that slaves would be shy around their masters and will only open up to those with whom they have confidence and familiarity”. Clearly considering Augusto no different from a slave in this respect, the Lieutenant-Colonel thus claimed to know little more about his former charge and suggested that the judge ask other informants about Augusto’s affairs.

The testimonies that came out of the investigation would eventually add up to create a better image of this young black worker who lived the very

⁵ See also: “*Relação dos Africanos pretos livres, pessoas particulares que arrematarão seus serviços, e dos Estabelecimentos publicos a que forão destinados de ordem do Exmo. Presidente desta Província nesta cidade no anno de 1850*”, Arquivo Público de Alagoas, Box: *Curador de Africanos*, In Silva, M. et alli. “Relatório final da Pesquisa – Fontes para a História da Escravidão em Alagoas”, Universidade Estadual de Alagoas, 2010, p. 241 (unpublished).

ambiguity that legally and practically defined his condition as a bonded worker and a “liberated” man. Those who testified called upon a series of words to describe Augusto's behavior: he had a reputation of being “a very hardworking black: diligent, active, economical”, “zealous”, “sparing”, and always “overseeing what belongs to him.”

His employer, Maximiano Souza, a ship-owner who was active in the trading business in Desterro's waterfront, was even more emphatic. He said that “the black was so diligent, dedicated to work, and economical, that he would not lose time, always working and making money from everything, being that [he] almost had no expenses [because] beyond the fact that he [Souza] used to give him clothes and food, it is known that [Augusto], because of his good manners and qualities, would gather similar provisions from the commanders of the ships where he used to work. And he economized to the extent that, very often, he would even borrow money to buy his own cigarettes (...).”

From Souza's testimony we also learn about Augusto's earnings: the trader would pay him, depending on the work he did, from 5 *patacas* (1\$600 *mil-réis*) to 2 *mil-réis* (2\$000) for every day he labored. He appears to have made similar arrangements with other employers to whom he eventually sold his labor. From those wages, Augusto would give his “master” Espíndola a daily fee of two *cruzados* (\$800 réis), or roughly half of his earnings.

The final pieces of information that we have about Augusto's life were given by his house mate Joaquim, a former slave and an African himself. From him we learned that his part of the shared rent was 4 *patacas* and 6 *vinténs* every month (1\$400 réis), and he also assured the judge that everything left by Augusto had already been delivered to the authorities. Asked to report about Augusto, he added: “that from his scars (*marcas*) and language, he knew that he was a *Preto Mina*”, indicating his West African origins.

The inquest into the life of the liberated African Augusto found no evidence of any other amount of money that he could have left behind. Eventually, the Judge of Orphans decided to conclude the proceedings and auctioned off Augusto's belongings for the revenue. In the absence of any eligible heir, the assets left were incorporated into the state coffers.

The return of the “big picture”

There is no doubt that Augusto's vicissitudes belong to the history of transcontinental connections. Social processes that reached across the globe

frame this story: the long history of slave labor; the African trade and its abolition in the Atlantic world in the nineteenth century; the expansion of the reach of international commerce and the spread of ideologies of free labor; and the invention of new forms of labor management in the larger colonial world.

In this article, I would like to connect Augusto's history to the current debate on the emergence of the Global History of labor, exploring the tension between the demand for a "Big Picture" and the close analysis of singular cases such as his. In the following pages, these questions will be addressed through a general discussion of the meaning of a global perspective in current historiography, as well as its presumed opposition to a so-called *micro-historical* perspective. At the end, we will return to Augusto, his belongings, and his fate, trying to reason about the place that his story might occupy in a larger discussion of the history of labor.

The current debate about the emergence of a "global history" seems to reopen the case about the centrality of a macro-level (certainly a macro-geographical) approach to social, political and economic issues in historical thinking. There are certainly many commonalities between the new "global" perspective and the traditional "world" view that was present in the social and economic approach that was triumphant until the early 1970's in some of the most important historiographical traditions; only to name a few, Fernand Braudel's "structural history" and the works of Charles Tilly come to mind.⁶

The intellectual and geopolitical context where the new global shift is taking place is also important. First – and in contrast with the previous moment – the current interest in the bigger picture evolves in an environment that some commentators perceive as saturated by the attention to disconnected contexts, disintegrated objects, fragmented social subjects, and localized histories. In opposition to this "history in pieces",⁷ an intellectual attitude

⁶ Riello, G. "La globalisation de l'histoire globale: une question disputée", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*. 2007/5, n. 54-4bis, 2007, pp. 23-33.

⁷ To use the term coined by one of the commentators on the development of social history: Dosse, F. *L'Histoire en Miettes: des Annales à la "nouvelle histoire"*. Paris: La Découverte, 1987.

that emphasizes connections and adopts a large-scale perspective presents itself as an antidote to the excesses of a cultural and social history that seemed to abandon any claims for a synthetic and comprehensive approach. One can always challenge this simplistic view of the last forty years of social history, but cannot fail to recognize that the latest surge in interest in a larger historical and geographical frame is anchored in some questions that were absent from, or at least a rarity in, previous iterations of this historical debate.

No less important for the current interest in a bigger picture is the emergence of the notion of “globalization” to describe today’s expansion of transnational markets and the development of new forms of interdependence in modern capitalism. Even severe critics of “globalization” – both the real world phenomena and the analytical concept – agree that there is something to learn from taking broad connections into consideration. As Frederick Cooper said: “Behind the globalization fad is an important quest for understanding the interconnectedness of different parts of the world, for explaining new mechanisms shaping the movement of capital, people, and culture, and for exploring institutions capable of regulating such transnational movement.”⁸ These words, written by a labor historian whose field of study is colonial and postcolonial Africa, are of particular interest because they are part of an acute criticism of the assumption of the “global” as the new fashion in historical studies. Cooper criticizes globalization from the perspective of someone who has spent his career thinking about a geopolitical space that has felt the impact of these connections with singular severity.

Cooper's remarks should be read, however, within the context of the current, renewed interest in a global perspective in labor studies, which is critical of the Eurocentric and imperialist approach that characterized earlier versions of the “global”. The thematic and conceptual expansion that labor history is experiencing today, incorporating dimensions that were neglected by traditional labor studies, such as the worlds of informal and un-free labor, is in fact strongly inspired by the commitment to look to transnational and

⁸ Cooper, F. “What Is the Concept of Globalization Good for? An African Historian’s Perspective.” *African Affairs* 100, no. 399 (2001), pp. 212-13.

interconnected social processes from outside the conventional point of view of the North Atlantic.⁹

Nevertheless, even a reinvigorated labor history can take advantage of Cooper's warning that the use of "global" to define the scope of any process of interconnections – loosing any "historical depth" in its analysis – can result in new misunderstandings: "It is salutary", he writes:

"to get away from whatever tendencies there may have been to analyze social, economic, political, and cultural processes as if they took place in national or continental containers; but to adopt a language that implies that there is no container at all, except the planetary one, risks defining problems in misleading ways."¹⁰

Intellectual caution and a salutary skepticism towards scholarly fashions are always welcomed, once we are able to distinguish between good questions and bad answers: If the terminology can be inaccurate or misleading, as in a careless use of "global" and "globalization" as trans-historical analytic concepts, the questions that these concepts are trying to grasp and explain are not.

Global history

Considering the main purpose of this paper, to discuss the possible congruencies between a global and a micro-analytical perspective taking the large field of labor history as my privileged standpoint, there are some questions that should be addressed. The first is about the real meaning that a "global" perspective could have in the actual empirical world of historical research and, therefore, about the historiographical content of the term. Secondly, considering the logical tension between the terms "global" and "micro", what could be the terrain on which these two approaches can learn from each other?

The term "global history" is relatively new. An academic journal with this exact title has been published only from 2006 on. "World history," another

⁹ Van der Linden, Marcel. *Workers of the World. Essays toward a Global Labor History* Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 6.

¹⁰ Cooper. "What Is the Concept of Globalization Good for?" *op. cit.*, p. 190.

term that circulates in the same scholarly contexts, and suggests some analogy, is a little older, but with a stronger interest in colonialism in the modern age.¹¹ In any case, “global history” as a new field of research, distinct from a necessary but insufficient history of empires and imperialism, emerged very recently, and we can correctly state that it is still a half-empty box with a label attached to it. The definition of its contents, methods and boundaries (a question that is not resolved by the claim of the absence of any) is still in dispute.

These questions are not new. As David Armitage recently recollected, Fernand Braudel, discussing the scope of his own study of the Mediterranean Sea, “warned that ‘the historical Mediterranean seems to be a concept of infinite expansion’ and wondered aloud: ‘But how far in space are we justified in extending it?’”¹² Armitage, himself an advocate of a global perspective, asked the same question about the Atlantic Ocean, whose history shares some of the same challenges and similar ambitions for defying the conventional wisdom that nation-states’ boundaries are natural and self-contained contexts for historical research.

The field of “Atlantic History” gives us a good example of successful attempts to address connections and trans-territorial historical processes.¹³ Considering the central role played by the slave trade and captive labor in the building of the Atlantic world, a fundamental topic to any approach to labor history in a global perspective, it is unsurprising that the history of slavery occupies a crucial place in this scholarship, at least in recent

¹¹ *The Journal of Global History*, sponsored by the London School of Economics, has been published by Cambridge University Press since 2006. *Journal of World History* has been published by the World History Association since 1990. “World History” is a preferred term for scholarly works such as: CURTIN, Philip. *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984 and BENTON, Lauren. *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Also noteworthy here is the pioneering journal published in Leipzig since 1991: *Comparativ. Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und Vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung*.

¹² *Apud* Armitage, D. “Three Concepts of Atlantic History”, In Armitage, D. & Braddick, M. J. (ed.). *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 26.

¹³ The common elements between the global histories and Atlantic history were underlined by Zuniga, J-P. “L'Histoire Impériale à l'heure de l'histoire globale”. Une perspective atlantique”, *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*. 2007/5, n. 54-4bis, p. 57.

decades.¹⁴ And indeed, early works deeply engaged in understanding the “dynamics of slave trade and abolition, the relationship between slavery and industrialism, the Haitian Revolution” by scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, and Eric Williams, as Armitage once more recalls, had been “obviously and consciously” aware of the Atlantic scope of their topics.¹⁵ Later, the same consciousness about the impossibility of really understanding slavery without granting central importance to connections and entanglements would come to prevail among scholars working in Europe and the Americas. This insight would be fundamental to such varied, seminal works as David Brion Davis’ or Pierre Verger’s books published in the late sixties and early seventies, which, respectively, tried to understand the place of slavery in the intellectual and political world of the North Atlantic, and explored deep commercial connections between the Brazilian coast and West Africa, in the South.¹⁶

Paying close attention to intercontinental relationships did not always, however, mean that all parts of the Atlantic world received their due attention. Often, an emphasis on North Atlantic connections and European influences overshadowed a more diverse and dynamic set of exchanges. Even a book that made a strong argument about the radical consequences of taking seriously the circulation of ideas and people in the Atlantic, Peter Linebaugh’s and Marcus Rediker’s *The Many-Headed Hydra*, failed to go

¹⁴ Armitage points out, though, that earlier versions of “Atlantic History” – namely the “anti-isolationist currents in the history of the twentieth-century United States” were concentrated in discussing the connections between the U.S. and Europe, without paying any attention to “slave trade and slavery, and of Africa, Africans, and of race more generally”, Cf. ARMITAGE, *op. cit.* 2002, p. 14. See also: GILROY, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Mas.: Harvard University Press, 1993.

¹⁵ Idem. Other important references about Atlantic History are: BAYLIN, B. *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005; GAMES, A. et als. *The Atlantic World: A history, 1400-1888*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007; GREENE, Jack & MORGAN, Philip (ed.) *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

¹⁶ Davis, D.B. *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966; Davis, D.B. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975; Verger, P. *Flux et Reflux de la Traite des Nègres entre le Golfe du Benin et Bahia de Todos os Santos du XVIIe au XIXe siècles*. Paris: Mouton, 1968.

beyond (or below) the North Atlantic in its search for the motley crew of a multi-ethnic and oceanic revolutionary working class.¹⁷

From a South Atlantic perspective, however, the many links between Africa and America are increasingly becoming more important than the older (and more studied) asymmetries and exploitative relations between metropolis and colonies. Going beyond the study of “colonial systems”, this scholarship is engaged in understanding how people from both shores of the southern ocean took an active part in building a complex network of trade, political and social institutions, and human relations in the vast geopolitical space of the modern Atlantic.¹⁸

Finding place for a small-scale perspective

Most of the works that focus on the broad field of “Atlantic History” could be used to exemplify that “systemic” perspective advocated by David Brion Davis as an antidote for the excessive compartmentalization (and, we might say, the nationalistic perspective) that is still the norm in slaves studies, both in the northern and southern hemispheres.¹⁹ Very frequently, however, the research strategy of choice by historians engaged in giving content to an Atlantic approach is to follow the transcontinental trajectories of very mobile individuals. In this context, significantly, many of these studies have

¹⁷ Linebaugh, P. & Rediker, M. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. New York: Beacon Press, 2001. A similar observation can be made about GILROY's *The Black Atlantic*, *op cit.*. For a broader (or global) perspective about the age of Revolutions, see: Armitage, D. & Subrahmanyam, S. (eds.) *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760-1840*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

¹⁸ See, among others: Thornton, J. *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; Alencastro, L. F. *O trato dos viventes. Formação do Brasil no Atlântico Sul, séculos XVI e XVII*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000; Florentino, M. *Em Costas Negras. Uma história do tráfico de escravos entre a África e o Rio de Janeiro*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997; Curto, J. C. & Lovejoy, P. E. (eds.) *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil During the Era of Slavery*. Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2003.

¹⁹ Davis, D.B. “Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspectives”, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 105, No. 2 (Apr., 2000), pp. 452-466. This paper is part of a larger AHR Forum, entitled Crossing Slavery's Boundaries, published in the same number of AHR.

focused on the (often exceptional) lives of slaves and the formerly enslaved.²⁰

The combination of, and the eventual tension between, the intense research on individual lives and the effort to consider the intercontinental flow of people, goods and culture obviously raises an important set of theoretical and historiographical questions. In this sense, Rebecca Scott's critical analysis of Davis's argument is revealing: She remembers the "potentially problematic" dimensions of a history whose emphasis lies in a systemic and broader approach to slavery: the risk of only "draw[ing] attention to the history of the actors with a system-wide scope of operation, toward bankers and traders and planters", erasing from the picture what she considers "one of the most durable insights of the past decades of scholarship on slavery": the "often very local interplay of the actions of slaves, free people of color, masters, nonslaveholding farmers, and the state". In short: agency, "a bit shopworn", but still a useful term and idea.²¹

Scott's own work exemplifies this urge to combine a "macro" perspective and a micro-analytical approach. Her last book, co-authored with Jean Hébrard,²² focuses on almost two hundred years in the history of the family of an enslaved woman from Senegambia named Rosalie, through the Haitian Revolution, the American Civil War and Reconstruction and going to WWII, discussing the emergence and dissemination of the idea of "public rights" in the Atlantic.

Scott's "micro-history set in motion" - as she describes it - reframes in a Atlantic and even global perspective some of the same questions that made the debate about "micro-history" relevant before: The diffidence towards broad models of explanation that would obscure the individual experiences and actions of less visible social actors and contradictory elements that don't easily conform to "big pictures".

And indeed, superficial readings of the rather ambiguous term "micro" gave rise to the conventional idea that a micro-history would only pay attention to

²⁰ To cite just one example: Reis, J. J.; Gomes, F.; Carvalho, M. O Alufá Rufino: Tráfico, Escravidão e Liberdade no Atlântico Negro, c. 1822-c.1853. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2010.

²¹ Scott, R. J. "Small-Scale Dynamics of Larger-Scale Processes", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 105, No. 2 (Apr., 2000), p. 473.

²² *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.

local scenarios, anonymous individuals and events, and fragmented historical problems. In contrast, however, if we reconsider the main arguments that inspired the works of micro-historians, or at least the most theoretically conscious among them, we would find a program of research that was keenly aware of the necessity to integrate the singularities of the historical reality and, crucially, to broader and farther reaching social processes.²³

At least two additional ideas that were present in the micro-historical project are also relevant here: First, the firm conviction that a radical reduction of the scale of observation could lead to relevant results in the analysis of *any* historical problem. As a consequence, micro-historians raised the expectation that broader explanatory models could be reconsidered, and even challenged, by the intensive observation of particular cases, individual and group trajectories, and aspects of historical reality that might otherwise be considered statistically irrelevant and intellectually negligible. Second, micro-history was also important in re-examining the idea of “context” as a general model that is assumed as the natural frame in which a given historical problem finds its correct place. On the contrary, according to micro-history, the critical analysis of the “context” – not only the evaluation of its pertinence, but also its definition and construction – should be an integral part of historical analysis. The image of a “*jeux d’échelles*”, the controlled variation of different scales of observation, implied exactly that experimental dimension of context-building. Micro-history, then, did not form in opposition to a “big picture” approach, but rather as a way of avoiding taking the meaning of “big picture” for granted.²⁴

Marcel van der Linden, one of the earliest and strongest advocates of a global perspective in labor historical studies,²⁵ has repeatedly insisted that a

²³ See, for instance, Revel, J. (ed.) *Jeux d’Echelles. La micro-analyse à l’expérience*. Paris: Gallimard et Seuil, 1996. On the origins of micro-history in Italy and its ramifications, see Lima, H. E. *A Micro-História Italiana: Escalas, Indícios e Singularidades*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2006.

²⁴ See Douki, C & Minard, P. "Histoire globale, histoires connectées: un changement d’échelle historiographique? Introduction" *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*. 2007/5, n. 54-4bis, pp. 7-21; also consult, Putman, Lara. "To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World", *Journal of Social History*, 39, n. 3 (2006), pp. 615-630.

²⁵ And, with Jan Lucassen, creator of the term “Global Labor History” (GLH) in a booklet that launched the project: Linden & Lucassen, *Prolegomena for a Global Labour History*. Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History, 1999.

“global history” should be intended neither as a theory for explaining “the capitalist world order”, nor as a history of globalization²⁶. According to him, global labor history “does not have to be large-scale only; it can include micro-history as well.” It would be possible then to write a “global history of a small village, a work site, or family.”²⁷

In Van der Linden’s arguments, global labor history is a kind of intellectual experiment that invites historians to consider the broader contexts in which we write our histories, trying to pay attention to the comparative dimensions of our topics and, more importantly, the connections and entanglements that are silently present in any historical research. The experimental dimension of global labor history in this sense closely corresponds to the same impulse that was present in the micro-historical approach since its inception.

Despite the fact that, as Van der Linden rightly remarks, labor historians were always particularly aware of the transnational dimension of their field of research, both the “methodological nationalism” of the more traditional historiography and the “Eurocentric” intellectual frame that was its main influence prevented a more acute sense of its “global” dimensions from developing properly.²⁸

Participating in the deep transformations of the scope of social history in recent decades with its new attention to the plurality of social actors and questions, the criticisms of Eurocentrism that characterized post-colonial theories and the consequent new attention to the historiographical traditions and research produced outside of the North Atlantic, labor history started to expand and redefine some of its main concepts and framework. Studies of labor, work and workers finally could go beyond the presumption of the industrial, unionized, young, usually white male laborer to also embrace questions of gender and sexuality, domestic and informal labor, and the tension and limits between “free” and “unfree” work.

²⁶ Van der Linden, “The Promise and Challenges of Global Labor History”, manuscript to be published in *International Labor and Working Class History*, v. 81. 2012, p. 6.

²⁷ Linden, “The Promise and Challenges of Global Labor History”, *op. cit.*, p. 7. See also the Introduction to: van der Linden, Marcel & Mohapatra, Prabhu (eds.) *Labour Matters: towards global histories*. New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2009.

²⁸ For an earlier discussion on “methodological nationalism” and its definition, see Wimmer, A. & Schiller, N. G. “Methodological nationalism and beyond: nation-state building, migration and the social sciences”, *Global Networks*, 2, 4 (2002), pp. 301-334.

Both micro-history and global history (and other related fields, like transnational and connected histories), and these fields' many permutations, can be seen then as consequences and protagonists of these new practices of historical research and writing in which we are today fully engaged. They correspond to the necessary impulse to redefine the relevant contexts and analytical categories in which we will write, among others, the histories of enslaved men and women, bonded workers, indentured servants, *coolie* laborers, and (why not?) liberated Africans.

On little things and the big picture

Now we can come back to the case that served so far only as the long epigraph of this paper: How does Augusto's tale fit in the discussion on the possible connections between micro-history and global labor history?

We can start with the long history of slave labor: Augusto was transported to the Brazilian coast through previously existing pathways of commodity exchange that connected it to the distant shores of Africa, Europe and beyond. Before him, millions of young African men and women, captured in internal conflicts stimulated by the same trade, were enslaved and carried to the Americas for more than three hundred years. The slave trade, in itself, was an extraordinarily profitable enterprise for those who were involved in it. In Brazil and elsewhere, African enslaved labor was used to harvest products that were widely consumed in a trans-oceanic network of commodities.

A new impulse for enslavement and the profitable trade of humans, which some authors called the "second slavery,"²⁹ started just as slavery as an institution was undergoing an unprecedented transformation in public opinion in the West, becoming a public abomination and losing the moral support that had taken it for granted for centuries.³⁰ The slow but noticeable spread of abolitionism since mid-eighteenth century was parallel and connected to the triumph of the market economy and capitalism in the same imperial powers that had profited the most from the "infamous trade", United Kingdom *à la tête*. The British actions against the slave trade from

²⁹ Especially Tomich, D. *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and the World Economy* Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2004, chap. 3.

³⁰ Miller, J. *The Problem of Slavery as History: A Global Approach*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

the beginning of the nineteenth century (with its abolition in the British Empire in 1807 and the subsequent pressure over its satellite metropolises like Portugal and the newly independent American nations to suppress it), and the subsequent military actions against the slave ships, had at least two strong consequences. First, it rearranged the routes and logics of the slave trade. Second, the British-led military and political campaign to end the slave trade catalyzed a complete reorganization of the labor systems in the Atlantic and the colonial world in general.

Augusto's situation as a "liberated African" reflects both dynamics. He was unlawfully transported to Brazil where international treaties and national law had made the slave trade illegal since 1831. Seized in 1850 on one of the unusual occasions that the law was actually enforced, partially as a response to growing British pressure, Augusto was placed in a new juridical category that was created by the same international laws that abolished the traffic in the long run. "Africano livre" was the Brazilian version of a legal form that was widespread in the Atlantic, inspired by the British experiments in the early nineteenth-century, like the institution of "Apprenticeship" and "Indentured African" status.³¹ These types of labor would later combine with other forms of indentured and forced work that became the staple for labor management in the extended colonial world of Africa and Asia.

This invention was both a response to the new disgust for slave labor and a socio-legal category designed to give form to the idea of "free labor" in a way that would eventually also be used to answer the growing demand for a cheap and reliable labor supply in an expanding colonial and capitalist world. Bound against his will to a form of labor contract into which he entered without knowing the terms and conditions, Augusto, as a "liberated African" would have his "wages" kept by the government in order to pay for his eventual return to Africa.

In Brazil, as in other slave societies, enslaved and freed persons were not passive spectators of unintelligible deep social, political, and economic transformations. On the contrary, they knew well that the diffusion of new ideologies of free labor, and related notions of natural rights and

³¹ Rupprecht, A. "'When he gets among his Countrymen, they tell him that he is free': Slave Trade Abolition, Indentured Africans and a Royal Commission", *Slavery & Abolition*, 33 (3), 2012, pp. 435-455.

entitlements, opened up new practical possibilities to bring their actual condition closer to their own expectations of freedom. The presently and formerly enslaved disputed the terms of their freedom in courtrooms and in front of other civil authorities. Even "africanos livres" were able to manipulate the legal ambiguities of their condition to face, or sometimes to avoid, some of the unsettling dimensions of their "liberated" status.

Augusto's experience of these transcontinental processes was also shaped and mediated by the local dynamics of the place to which he was brought. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Brazil had become one of the main world producers of sugar and coffee, especially after the Haitian Revolution made the old French colony of Saint-Domingue lose its place as the most profitable colony in the Americas. That was the principal reason why, despite the former suppression of the Atlantic slave trade, in the same period more than seven hundred thousand Africans were illegally introduced into Brazil in bondage and were largely used in the coffee plantations of the Southeast. In comparison, only about 11,000 Africans were rescued from the illegal trade along Brazilian coasts between 1821 and 1856, Augusto among them.³² Working as a seafarer, Augusto was involved in the infrastructure of market connections between the Brazilian coast and the rest of the world. Desterro was not an important trading port, but was certainly part of this intricate web, where both goods and ideas circulated, carried by men and women from different ethnicities, participating in the new expansion of economic relations in the Atlantic and beyond.

These same processes reverberate in the objects that were found in Augusto's locked drawer underneath his stool and in his trunk, starting with the same bank notes with which he was usually paid: manufactured in the industrial printers of Perkins, Bacon and Petch, in London, and imported from England by the Brazilian National Treasury since 1835,³³ they were a link in a chain of asymmetrical economic exchanges and transnational dependencies on a large scale.

Finally, Augusto's history was shaped by the way he was able to navigate and find his way into the interstices in this world of bondage and constraints.

³² For example, see Mamigonian, "To be a liberated African ...", *op. cit.* p. 6.

³³ About the company and its production of bank notes for international clients, see: Hewit, V. (ed.). *The Banker's Art: studies in Paper Money*. London: British Museum Press, 1995.

Thus, if the assortment of bank notes circulating in Desterro's waterfront were an indicator of the growing spread of monetization in labor relations and the constitution of a labor market even among day laborers and manual workers like Augusto, they could also be related to his other activities at the port: not only as a seaman himself but, most likely, as someone who had become involved in recruiting and managing the work of other slave or free men, Africans like him, as his apparent position of "man of confidence" would suggest.

Augusto's money, including the gold and silver coins of higher value (that would hardly have been used to pay manual workers), speaks to us of other circuits of currency that he was able to access. These coins could be evidence that he managed to operate in an informal market of credit that existed in a society where formal financial institutions (banks or others) were still developing. Participation in this informal credit market expanded the resources slaves had at their disposal to bargain for their freedom. Augusto's ability to acquire a good reputation with white traders and his fellow Africans alike would certainly have enhanced his ability to take part in this trade whose currency was not just money, but also trust and knowledge gathered from the "public voice".

Keeping a considerable amount of money under the same roof that he shared with other Africans, instead of seeking the assistance of one of the white patrons with whom he seemed to have good relations, suggests a relationship marked by mutual confidence and even camaraderie between him and his peers. Horizontal relations between these men cut across their different legal status, whether enslaved or freed. Augusto's apparent choice to treat these men with "confidence and familiarity" - a privilege that Captain Espíndola keenly perceived that he himself did not have - reveals a world of social solidarity and shared interests that was also a fundamental part of his life.

If Augusto was aware of the nature of his relationships with others, both the solidarities and the hierarchies, then he probably also understood the possibilities of social mobility and recognition open to men like him. Despite his probably accurate reputation as a spendthrift, he certainly paid considerable attention in his self-presentation, and in his rare moments of leisure we can effortlessly imagine him wearing his black outfit, shoes, necktie and other fineries found among his belongings in his post-mortem inventory. These clothes and accessories, examples of the European taste coming into fashion among Brazil's local elite, were the trappings of modern bourgeois respectability that Augusto might have desired for himself. This taste for fashion was only made possible by the international

circulation of marketed goods such as the collapsible top hat, the *chapeau claqué* that he owned, a stylish item invented in France some decades before.³⁴

What the surviving documents reveal to us about Augusto's short life is very limited. It is even possible – as the authorities certainly suspected – that the objects found by the police had been discretely selected by his mates. By identifying him as a “preto Mina”, his fellows – themselves men from different parts of the African continent – gave us a hint about other sets of transcontinental connections that might also be a silent presence in his personal history. Augusto could have brought from the Bight of Benin more than his scars and language. Some of his mores, or even religious beliefs, could have taken form in his own place and culture of origin. He could even have been, as were many other resourceful “minas” like him, a man of the Muslim faith.³⁵ But none of these hypotheses could be properly addressed in a short article like this. We can certainly say that many of the details and greater historical meanings of Augusto's short life would remain as inscrutable to us as the presence of the colored cotton cap, “o barrete de algodão colorido”, that was found defying the chromatic sobriety of his other personal belongings. Either a sign of his singular taste, or an object connected to his devotions, this cap reminds us that the physical as well as the documentary artifacts of Augusto's life leave his story and its place in the bigger picture open to future debate.

By digging through Augusto's trunk we can find, along with the various objects he left behind, evidence of the world of transcontinental connections that helped define his experiences and choices. Paying close attention to those objects that Augusto unwittingly bequeathed us, we also realize that his world – structured and coherent as we may find it – was also a place of autonomous action, and individual and collective creativity. The conditions of Augusto's life could be interpreted as collateral products of a process in which the impersonal forces of the free labor market came to displace an obsolete system of chattel slavery and class- and race-based personal constraint. Yet these social and economic processes which are manifested in what we can reconstruct of his life actually call into question the validity of

³⁴ Colonetti, A. et alli (eds.) *Cosa ti sei messo in testa. Storia e geografia del cappello*. Milano: Mazzotta, 1991.

³⁵ Karasch, M. *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro, 1808-1850*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 26.

any coherent model of transition to "modern" social and economic relations. As we have seen, Augusto's life is telling as an example of both broad and far-reaching social processes and the gaps and cracks in them. The new world of "free" work was constantly intertwined with and redefined by, not only the remains of a superseded model of labor management, but also - and maybe moreover - the active invention of new social and legal constraints, the constant negotiation of the social and cultural meanings of personal dependence and autonomy, and the perpetual redefinition of collective interests. The daily reality of social and labor relations, conflicts and solidarities contributed to the creation, with all its ambiguity and unfulfilled promises, of the world of "labor freedom" in which we still live.

Italian transnational fluxes of labour and the changing of labour relations in the Horn of Africa, 1935-1939

Stefano Bellucci

The Italian colonial rule of 1935-1939 in the Horn of Africa created an in-flux and out-flux of several tens of thousands of European workers into Africa over a time-span of only about five years. The experience was short-lived – even more so than the delirious Fascist ideology it stemmed from – for it proved to be politically, economically and socially unsustainable. Yet, it is argued here that it had long-lasting consequences on the labour relations in the region.

This article reviews this episode in Italian colonialism through the prism of Global Labour History and, more specifically, from a transnational perspective. With Patel, transnational history is broadly defined as the history of “interactions” beyond (*au-delà*) national borders, whereby states are considered as actors among others.¹ The focus lies on mobility of ideas,

¹ See Patel, Klaus Kiran. *Transnational History*, in: *European History Online (EGO)*. Mainz: The Institute of European History (IEG), 2010-12-03, URL: <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/patelk-2010-en> URN: <urn:nbn:de:0159-20100921314> [accessed: 04 April 2013]. Approached in this sense, transnational history is close to other “global” methodological perspectives: “the global migration history” by Jan Lucassen, Dirk Hoerder, and Donna Gabaccia; the “entangled history” by Sanjay Subrahmanyam; the “histoire croisée” by Michael Werner and Benedicte Zimmerman; “translocality” by Ulrike Freitag and Achim von Oppen; the “new imperial histories” and “tensions of empire” by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (regarding the circulation of ideas between the mother country and the colonies). Also of interest are studies based on individual or family biographies or based on the experiences of restricted groups throughout borders, such as in *The inner life of Empire* by Emma Rothschild. Moreover, transnational history is both an approach to the study of history and an object of study of history. See for example TYRELL, Ian. “History”. In:

people and knowledge beyond national borders and for this reason, when looking at Italian labour in the Horn of Africa, the intention is to go beyond a mere history of control/neglect and domination/resistance;² the goal is not just to contrast Italian interests in Africa and African resistance to colonial exploitation. Rather, the main point is to analyse the inter-dependence between different societies and states – the national State of Fascist Italy, the colonial State of Eritrea and the Imperial State of Ethiopia – and to address the transnational fluxes of Italian labour and its complex impact on the African labour context. Understanding the ways in which Italian workers who settled in Africa (Italy > Horn of Africa > Italy and elsewhere in Africa or the Middle East) interacted with local workers, helps to explain how different – capitalist and feudal – forms of labour exploitation intertwined or reacted with each other. For, although the Italian presence was short-lived, this link produced changes in labour conditions in and among the peoples of the Horn of Africa: hybrid forms of labour relations occurred and the meaning of work – economically *and* culturally – changed forever in the region.

Transnational, Italian labour fluxes to and from Africa

In-fluxes (1935-1936). Italian East Africa (AOI, the acronym for Africa Orientale Italiana) was created in 1935, and corresponded approximately to today's Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. It was divided into 6 governorates: Eritrea, Amhara, Shoa, Harar, Galla-Sidama and Somalia. According to the statistics available, which do not all coincide, the total number of workers who were transferred to the AOI between 1935 and 1939 was around 200,000.³ In 1936, 80 per cent of the migrants were navvies and labourers destined to work on the roads and railways, while the rest were drivers

IRIYE, Akira, and SAUNIER, Pierre-Yves. eds. *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*. Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 493.

² See: COOPER, Frederick; GUTKIND, Peter C.W.; COHEN, Robin, and COPANS, Jean. eds. *African Labor History*. London: Sage Publications, 1978; BERMAN, Bruce. *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya. The Dialectic of Domination*. Oxford: James Currey, 1990.

³ See *Gli Annali dell'Africa Italiana*, III, 2, 1940, p. 1075; also consult "Commissariato per le migrazioni e la colonizzazione", in Ipsen, Carl, *Demografia totalitaria. Il problema della popolazione nell'Italia fascista*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1977, p. 178.

(around 3,500), dock workers, (around 2,000), bricklayers (around 4,000) and various other industrial workers.⁴

Between 1936 and 1939, workers emigrated to the AOI from territories “outside” the Italian peninsula: around 1,200 from Italy’s Mediterranean colonies in the Aegean islands and Libya; and around 1,500 additional emigrants from what the statistics refereed to as “unknown regions”.⁵ The majority of workers, however, came from the Italian peninsula itself. As Gianluca Podestà explains in his accurate book, *Il mito dell’Impero*, they mostly came from rural areas, were themselves agricultural workers for the most part, and did not generally hold any qualifications that might have enabled them to be engaged in the manufacturing sector.

By identifying the Italian provinces where most workers came from, the criteria of selection appear not only based on the economic situation prevalent in the areas of provenance in question, such as the high unemployment rate – e.g. the North East of Italy, Sicily and the Neapolitan metropolitan area – but also on the political and geo-political situation – e.g. greater emphasis was put on recruitment from regions where the Socialist movement was strongest, such as Emilia-Romagna or where organizations of agricultural workers existed, such as Apulia.⁶ The following table shows

⁴ The period in which most workers emigrated was between 1936 and 1937 when Italy adopted a huge plan for establishing an infrastructure, involving the construction of roads. *Commissariato per le migrazioni e la colonizzazione interna. Migrazioni in Africa Orientale Italiana al 31 dicembre 1937*, Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ASC), PCM, 1934-1936, f. 1.1.23 / f. 3299/14. See also, “Migrazioni verso l’Impero”. In: *Rassegna economica dell’Africa Italiana*, January 1938, p. 93; “Le migrazioni e la tutela del lavoro nell’Impero”. In: *Rassegna economica dell’Africa Italiana*, October 1938, p. 1634. The Fascist sources stressed that this mobility towards Africa contributed to somewhat lowering the level of unemployment in Italy, although clear data were never provided. Unemployment, moreover, had already fallen after the war effort of the period from 1934-35 for the conquest of Ethiopia, when around 330,000 troops and Fascist Blackshirt militants had been mobilized. GUARNIERI, Felice. *Battaglie economiche fra le due guerre*. Milano: Garzanti, 1953, p. 517; TAGLIACARNE, G. “La partecipazione delle regioni d’Italia alla guerra d’Africa”. In: *Giornale degli economisti e rivista statistica*, October 1938, p. 789.

⁵ Commissariato per le migrazioni e la colonizzazione interna (Commissariat for Internal Migration and Colonisation), *Migrazioni in Africa orientale Italiana al 31 luglio 1937*, Archivio storico del ministero Affari Esteri (ASDMAE), ASMAI, ASG, b. 67.

⁶ The first ten Italian provinces of residence of the workers mobilised in the AOI were in order: Udine, Naples, Bologna, Modena, Treviso, Rovigo, Rome, Bari, Belluno and Brescia. See: PODESTÀ, Gianluca. *Il mito dell’Impero*. Turin: Giappichelli, 2004, pp. 336-338.

some effects of the labour transmigration from Italy to the Horn of Africa on the Italian labour force.

Provenance of Italian Workers to the AOI: 1936 and 1937

	<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Percentage of resident males aged 20-49</i>
Northern Italy	105.639	23,9
Central Italy	21.642	13,5
Southern Italy	36.748	19,8
Sicily and Sardinia	25.708	26,6

Source: TAGLIACARNE, Giovanni. "La partecipazione delle regioni d'Italia alla guerra d'Africa". In: *Giornale degli economisti e rivista statistica*, October 1938, p. 791.

According to the historical statistical data extrapolated from historical publications and reports, in 1939 the in-flux of labour force from Italy amounted to some 165 thousand workers (see the chart below), at a time when the population in Ethiopia was between 9 and 10 million.⁷ The three main regions of in-flux of Italian labour were Eritrea, Shoa (where the imperial capital Addis Ababa was located) and Somalia (colonized by Italy at the beginning of the XX century).

⁷ The estimate is derived by an average between available sources that talk about a minimum of 4 to a maximum of 15 million people in the 1920s and 1930s. Italian colonial sources talk about 7,5 million people, but these numbers tend to understate the population for political reasons: the Fascist regime used Ethiopia as a settling colony for the Italian poor. Furthermore the 7,5 million figure excludes Eritrea. See: ABATE, Alula. "Demography, Migration and Urbanization in Modern Ethiopia", In: BEKELE, Shiferaw. ed. *An Economic History of Modern Ethiopia*, vol. 1. Oxford: CODESRIA Book Series, 1995, p. 277. For Eritrean historical demography, see CIAMPI, Gabriele. "La popolazione dell'Eritrea". In: *Bollettino della Società geografica italiana*, issue 2, 1995, pp. 487-524.

Historical map of AOI



Italian residents in the AOI in 1939

Administrative Territory (Governorate)	Numbers	Percentage
Eritrea	72.408	44
Amhara	11.103	7
Shoa (Addis Ababa)	40.698	25
Galla-Sidama (Oromia)	11.823	7
Harar	10.035	6
Somalia	19.200	11
Total	165.267	100

Fonte: Ciferri, Raffaele, "I cereali dell'AOF", in *Rassegna economica dell'Africa italiana*,

January 1942, p. 12.

The largest number of Italian workers settled in areas where the largest investment in public structures was being made – this, in turn, depended, first, on historical links with Italy, as in the case of Eritrea and Somalia, and, second, on objective reasons, such as the presence of the largest urban conglomerate of the region, as in the case of Addis Ababa in the Shoa region. The table below shows the presence of mainly Italian industrial and commercial firms in the AOI in 1939.

Industrial and Commercial Firms in the AOI, 1939 (*million lira)

<i>Administrative Territory (Governorate)</i>	<i>Number of Industrial Firms</i>	<i>Capital Invested*</i>	<i>Number of Commercial Firms</i>	<i>Capital Invested*</i>
Eritrea	2.198	2.597	2.690	486
Somalia	584	75	659	22
Shoa (Addis Ababa)	561	305	634	498
Harar	223	60	166	37
Amara	163	21	510	38
Galla-Sidama (Oromia)	278	71	126	33
Total	4.007	3.129	4.785	1.114

Source (re-elaborated): VALORI, Francesco. "Le industrie e il commercio". In: *Gli annali dell'Africa Italiana*, III, 2, 1940, p. 1116.

Transnational and inter-regional mobility of Italian workers was made possible by incentives, among them primarily the higher wages. The absolute values of the salaries paid to Italian workers in Africa were significantly higher than in Italy. The minimum daily wage for the various categories set out in the rules applied to Italian workers in the AOI (*Regolamento dei rapporti di lavoro dei cittadini italiani equiparati nei territori dell'AOI*), issued on 10 March 1937, ranged from 33 to 55 lira per day, while drivers and driver-mechanics were respectively paid monthly wages of 1500 and 1700 lira.⁸ Moreover, although the cost of living was high in the AOI and it is difficult to pinpoint the exact difference in real wages for we do not have access to statistical data on the prices and salaries that would allow us to develop comparable data, the available documents and the reports of those who were directly involved allow us to say that the rate of payment in the AOI was notably superior to that applied in Italy, especially between 1935 and 1939.⁹

⁸ See *Rassegna economica delle colonie*, March 1937, pp. 368-383.

⁹ For example, Gianluca Podestà, points out that in the same period the wage of a FIAT worker (i.e. a specialised blue-collar worker) ranged between 4,000 and 4,400 lire, while the daily wage of agricultural workers was 12.5 or 14.0 lire for between eight and ten hours of work depending on the case (in AOI as we have seen, it was between 33 and 55 lire for an eight-hour day). PODESTÀ. *op. cit.*, 2004, p. 339.

A combination of two factors made the salaries high: (1) the keen competition between companies in the labour market; and (2) the additional allowances that raised the value of the basic pay. In the first instance, the shortage of labourers, especially skilled ones, made competition fierce between companies, in particular between construction companies engaged in public contracts, which sought to secure a suitable labour force in order to be able to finish the works within the timeframes established. In the second instance, workers employed in areas below an altitude of one thousand metres, where the climate was more difficult for Europeans to bear, and those who worked at altitudes above 3,000 metres, were entitled to an extra allowance of 6 lira per day to compensate for having to work in difficult locations. Those employed in Somalia and Harar were entitled to a 10 lira daily allowance, while for those who worked in the lowlands and near the border with British Sudan (where the salaries in GB pounds were even higher) the allowance rose to 15 lira per day. A decree issued in 1938 somewhat changed these figures. It eliminated payment based on piece work, individual work and team work, the rates of which had to be established in a way that would allow the worker to earn a minimum daily wage that exceeded the standard rate of payment by at least 25 per cent.

High salaries and the possibility to become reasonably well-off tempted workers to face the challenging living and working conditions in the area. Fascist authorities, from their point of view, could not allow workers to return to the homeland unsatisfied with the payment they had received, as this would have compromised the image of the “colonial worker bursting with pride for the Imperial glory” that Fascist propaganda had gone to great length to promote. Moreover, the economy of the AOI was constantly financed by public (i.e. state) funds, a sacrifice – so it was conceived – made by the nation as a whole to ensure the success of the empire in Africa, and, by extension, of those who played a key role in it, both workers and companies. The state therefore made funds available to private companies – which it controlled, by establishing contracts subject to tenders – to be invested in the colony for hiring national wage workers to produce infrastructures. Roads, in particular, were to be used for the circulation of the goods imported from and exported to the Horn of Africa, but also for the circulation of goods from circuits beyond the colonies, such as, for example, the nearby Arab peninsula.

Out-fluxes (1937-1939). The out-fluxes of the labour force from the AOI areas, shown in the following table, reveal the extension of the repatriation organized by the Italian authorities starting from 1937.

Fluxes of Italian Labour *in* and *out* of the AOI

	<i>In-Flux</i>	<i>Out-Flux</i>
1935 (October-December)	61.807	11.288
1936	102.548	45.647
1937	27.694	84.426
1938	7.333	51.338
1939 (January-June)	2.098	15.302
Total	201.480*	208.001*

Sources: *Gli annali dell'Africa italiana*, III, 2, 1940, p. 1075; IPSEN, Carl. *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 178.

* The positive balance between workers who had immigrated (in-fluxes) and repatriated workers (out-fluxes) is due to the fact that the Commissariat, which produced these figures, included among the "repatriated" also those soldiers demobilised after the Ethiopian War of 1934-35 and engaged as workers in the AOI.

Officially, the selection of the workers to be repatriated followed these criteria: those who had requested to return home; those who were not physically, "morally", politically or professionally fit; those who had concluded their contract or had been in the AOI for the longest length of time; those who did not have a family in the AOI.¹⁰ Repatriation was gradually reduced on the eve of the Second World War, in 1939, and with the opening of the military front in East Africa against the British, it was suspended as the workers could now serve as soldiers. However, Italian workers were increasingly disenchanted and this affected their moral as soldiers. No surprisingly, the African front was immediately lost to the Allied forces led by the British. All in all, the repatriation policy reveals the unsustainability of the Italian imperialist system, from both the economic and social-political point of view.

First, from an economic point of view, the decision to repatriate in 1937 was envisaged to control public spending as well as to reduce unemployment

¹⁰ Those who had participated in the Ethiopian military campaign and those who had a large family were more likely to be allowed to remain in the AOI. See PODESTÀ. *op. cit.*, p. 345.

among the settlers in AOI.¹¹ On the one hand, the Italian government's deficit spending had been high since the Ethiopian war and kept having a negative impact on public debt, because of the key role played by the state in funding economic development (the *valorizzazione*) of the African Empire. On the other hand, to put it simply, too many unskilled workers (mainly landless peasants) had arrived in the area, their unemployment rapidly soared and the lack of any social infrastructure and/or family safety net made it more problematic to deal with than that of their counterparts in Italy.¹²

Second, a social and political element explains the decision to repatriate workers: protest and unrest among the workers themselves. Already in 1935, the Governor of Eritrea, Emilio De Bono, had repeatedly reported the lack of discipline in the Italian labour force and threatened to use the strictest form of discipline.¹³ Delays in paying the workers' salaries and, to a lesser extent, the working conditions, were the main causes for minor incidents and insubordination that had occurred. The authorities tried to downplay these episodes in their official documents, but in some cases had to concede they did take place. An inspector named Battaglini, for instance, began a series of on-site visits on behalf of De Bono in May 1935. He wrote that the workers "had enough food and medicines" and that "it was not necessary to organise moral and spiritual support for the workers".¹⁴ However, he reported that in the locality of Palazzina the workers' organization was considerable, and that the officer in charge, Spadonaro, had told him that many workers refused to carry out the duties assigned to them – possibly evidence of the growing socialist and trade unionist influence in that locality. The military police (*carabinieri*) intervened: some protesters were repatriated at their own expense, and the workers' alleged leaders were sent to the detention camp in Assab – Battaglini himself defined it a "concentration camp". Yet another site of protest amongst the

¹¹ Consult *Crisi di assestamento*, 3 May XVIII (1939), Eritrean Government to MAI, 22 April 1938; HQ of the Police of Italian Africa to MAI, 25 February 1940, in ASDMAE, ASMAI, ASG, env. 67.

¹² See LOCATELLI, Francesca. "Oziosi, vagabondi e pregiudicati: Labor, Law, and Crime in Colonial Asmara, 1890-1941", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 40, issue 2, 2007, pp. 225-250.

¹³ PANKHURST, Richard. "Italian and 'Native' Labour During the Italian Fascist Occupation of Ethiopian", *Ghana Social Science Journal*, vol. 2, issue 2, pp. 44-45.

¹⁴ BATTAGLINI, Guido. *Con S.E. De Bono: nel turbinio di una preparazione*. Airoldi: Roma, 1938, pp. 111, 195.

workers was Ghinda, which the inspector described as a “place where the requests of the workers had Marxist reminiscences”, since they demanded an 8-hour working day and paid holidays.

Things were to deteriorate further in labour relations between Italian workers and employers due to the hiring of a large number of local workers, as we shall see in the next section. Repressive measures against the Italian workers were more frequently introduced, but did not necessarily succeed in curbing workers’ resistance. In January 1938, the British consul in Naples – one of the ports from which the Italian migrants left and to which they returned home – noted that the 800 Italian workers who had disembarked were handcuffed.¹⁵ Already in 1937, an employee of the British consulate in Addis Ababa, informed of this occurrence, had explained in a note: “For several months past the less desirable workmen have been repatriated in train loads of three to five hundred. [In] one entire train load [were] [...] [workers who] expressed their discontent at being sent home by singing the *Internationale* and giving the Communist salute”.¹⁶

Protesting against an employer or going on strike was not the only ways workers showed their opposition to those who exploited their labour power. Walking away, to be hired by another employer, proved yet another protest strategy.¹⁷ Tempted by higher salaries and aware of the worsening conditions in Eritrea, many Italian workers left the Italian colonies in the Horn of Africa, heading to Egypt, Yemen and even Syria, among the others.¹⁸ In nearby Sudan alone, thousands of Italian employees working for national companies showed no intention of going or returning to Eritrea, despite the fact that the authorities repeatedly requested them to donate their labour power to the national cause. An observer noted the presence of around 2,000 of them at the construction site of the Jebel Aulia dam, near Khartoum. He also reported that the standard wage in Sudan was higher than in Eritrea, and that many of these workers who sent part of their salary

¹⁵ The National Archives of the UK (ex-PRO), FO, 371/22028/131.

¹⁶ The National Archives of the UK, FO, 371/22028/141.

¹⁷ See VAN DER LINDEN, Marcel. *Workers of the World. Essays towards a Global Labour History*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008, p. 185.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 226-227. At the same time, Fossa notes how there were more than 870 Libyan workers and 200 workers from Sudan engaged in the building works for the Massawa-Decaméré road alone. FOSSA, Davide. *Lavoro italiano nell’Impero*. Milan: Mondadori, 1938, p. 329.

via remittance to Italy had no reason to deprive their families of money in order to favour the imperialist Fascist cause.¹⁹

To what extent is it possible to talk about “free” wage labour for the Italian workers in the AOI? The question is especially significant for those categories of workers, such as women, children and certain groups of landless agricultural workers, who were actually forced to accept from the Italian economic authorities the slave-like, feudal type of employment originating in the Abyssinian Empire. Moreover, especially in the construction industry – and particularly in road works – the transfer of workers from one employer to another had to be approved by the administration, but most of all it was agreed upon by the various employers without the worker having any say in the matter, even if it was not forbidden for him to forward his requests.²⁰ At least in these particular cases, the free wage workers’ “freedom” to choose his employer only existed in theory.

The changes in labour regimes: (free) wage labour

From 1935 onwards both Eritreans and Ethiopians were employed in large numbers as wage labourers.²¹ Contemporary observers noted that the related increase in both the prices of the goods and the availability of the labour force gradually began to change the life of thousands of local peasant-workers in the countryside, who had traditionally worked in farming.²² These transformations, however, were not homogeneous within the very territories of the AOI, nor were they uncritically accepted by the local population.

¹⁹ FARAGO, Ladislav. ed. *Abyssinian Stop Press*. London: Robert Hale, 1936, p. 227.

²⁰ See, for example, the decree of the governed territory of Amhara, dated 25 November 1937, in *Bollettino Ufficiale del Governo dell'Amhara*, II, 1937, pp. 521-522. It should also be remembered that in Ethiopia the salaries were considered “static” – even tips were illegal and employers were forbidden from paying any over-time.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 441-442. The introduction of the wage system in the region by the Italians apparently had an influence on the wages in nearby British Kenya as well. See SMITH, Alan. “The Open Market: The Economy of Kenya’s Northern Frontier Province and the Italo-Abyssinian War”, *East Africa*, Vol. 6, Issue 11, 1969, p. 39.

²² This also led to an increase in the economic burden for the Italian Government, since these workers were co-opted into jobs that were linked, either directly or indirectly, to the work in the colony and the positive portrayal of the Italian Government. In *Bollettino Ufficiale del Governo dell'Eritrea*, XLIV, 1935, p. 61.

With the Italian conquest of Ethiopia in 1935, Eritrea ceased to exist as an “independent” Italian colony and was annexed to the AOI as a governorate. However, Eritrea had a longer history of Italian colonialism and, from a labour history perspective, the Italian influence there was stronger and long lasting.²³ In particular, the increase in the number of wage labourers was higher in that region than in any other part of the Horn of Africa. It was, moreover, largely concentrated within the military, due to the considerably higher salaries in that sector: for while the average wage of an Eritrean was around 1.5 lira per day in the 1930s, a Royal Decree established in 1931 the wage of the “native” troops between 2 and 5 lira. Consequently, some 65,000 Eritrean men – nearly ten per cent of the local population as a whole – signed up in the Italian army as “native troops”. In turn, this made them accustomed to view wage work in a public institution as the best way to gain a decent return for their labour.

Furthermore, Italian employers paid their Eritrean workers in hard currency and this monetization of the local economies, similar to what happened in the French and British colonies, came to represent one of the main changes produced by Italian colonialism in the Horn of Africa.²⁴ Most importantly, this shift from a barter-based and tributary economy into a monetised market economy did not stop after the Second World War, and wages became a *sine qua non* condition for *abesha* workers – as the people from the Horn of Africa call themselves. An observer wrote in 1948: “[Italian activity] uprooted a large and important part of the community from their own social organisation, accustomed them to a form of work for which their community had no demand, and by so doing rendered them unfit to readapt themselves to the way of life and economy obtainable in Eritrea under even the best of normal conditions”.²⁵

However, the situation was different in the rest of the AOI, and especially in Ethiopia. Up until the Italian invasion, labour relations in the Ethiopian region had been mainly centred around the so-called tributary labour

²³ GUIDOTTI, R. and GUBELLINI, M. “Il problema dei salari nella mano d’opera di colore in Eritrea nel periodo pre- e post-bellico”. In: *L’agricoltura coloniale*, vol. XXX, 1946, p. 341. See also VOLTERRA, Alessandro. *Sudditi coloniali: Ascari Eritrei, 1935-1941*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2005.

²⁴ MESGHENNA, Yemane. “The Impact of the 1935-1941 Economic Boom on the Eritrean Labour Market”, *Africa*, vol. 58, issue 1, 2003, pp. 96-97.

²⁵ Consult GRAY, G.C., and SILKERMANN, L. *The Fate of Italy’s Colonies*. London: n.d., 1948, pp. 23-24.

system.²⁶ In the countryside, the work of peasants and their families was primarily of a subsistence nature, i.e. barely sufficient to cover their basic requirements, while the remaining gain went to the feudal owner of the land where they laboured. Besides fixed contract soldiers – who were very few in number there, but were nonetheless wage labourers to all effects – limited examples of commoditized labour based on free wage relations existed in the capital Addis Ababa and in some parts of the countryside. An observer reported, for instance, of wages being paid in MT thalers for the agricultural workers in a vaguely defined area of the Ethiopian upland.²⁷ And wages could be significantly higher in the very small number of plantations owned by foreign investors. As another witness noted: “Already at the end of the reign of emperor Menelik a Syrian farm near Gambela [...] was said to be paying his labourers 4 MT thalers per month [...] Workers in the gold and platinum mines of Walaga [...] received a monthly wage of 5 MT thalers [...] builders in pre-war Addis Ababa, mainly [from the ethnic group of] Guragés, earned a thaler for three days’ work, plus 1/32 of thaler lunch money per diem”.²⁸

After the Italian invasion, the first scale of wage rates in the history of the Horn of Africa was established for the local workers, distinguishing them as unskilled workers, craftsmen, and foremen.²⁹ Its main goal was not so much

²⁶ See: CRUMMEY, Donald. *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000 and PANKHURST, Richard. *An Economic History of Ethiopia: 1800-1935*. Addis Ababa: Haile Sellassie I University Press, 1968.

²⁷ GRIAULE, Marcel. *Burners of Men: Modern Ethiopia*. Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1935, p. 87.

²⁸ PANKHURST. *op. cit.*, 1968, pp. 42, 46-47.

²⁹ Governor of Galla and Sidama, decree dated 6 October 1937, in *Bollettino Ufficiale del Governo dei Galla e Sidama*, I, 1937, p. 252. In Eritrea, the oldest Italian colony, where the wages were higher than in the rest of the AOI, the governor’s decree of 9 October 1937, set forth the following table, in *Bollettino Ufficiale del Governo dell’Eritrea*, XLVI, 1937, pp. 1028-1029:

Type of Employment	Rate per day (Lira)
Servants	2.50
Day labourers	6
Skilled worker (masons, joiners, assistant smith, etc.)	9
Various categories (messenger boys, scullions, etc.)	2.50
Other skilled workers above the age of 12	7
Port workers	11.50
Yemenis and Sudanese	9

to reduce the cost of labour but to “convince” local workers to lend their labour to the colonial economy. For this was indeed a problem for the colonial authorities, and led to major differences in the resulting social and economic changes.

It proved initially difficult, for instance, to find labourers to build roads and perform similar manual jobs. The reason lay in the cultural attitude of the upper strata of the local population. An American journalist noted: “The natives living along the highway came to gaze in wonder at the road-builders – objects of derision, men who worked. No free self-respecting Ethiopian male ever exerted himself”.³⁰ Many other documents similarly show how, in a derogatory sense, the respected *abesha* men did not deem working on the roads to be a job for them, but for the lowest casts, such as the Guragé in the case of Amhara and Shoana societies. And because only the simplest and poorest men had traditionally worked in construction jobs in Ethiopia, seeing European white people working alongside the Africans proved a true culture shock for many of these local leaders.³¹

In the case of this economic sector, the increasing monetisation of the economy, and the convenience of entering a stable labour relation virtually forced many Ethiopians to enter into a wage labour system entailing manual labour. In the racially biased term one observer put it, these native workers then became “good, enthusiastic builders”, and in bigger numbers than what was actually required.³² They did not improve their immediate quality of life – on the contrary, in many cases social and living conditions probably deteriorated – but, because of their colonial connections, they felt themselves “protected” from any potential repercussions by their former masters and, under particular circumstances, were even able to claim rights over the white landowners.³³ It was perhaps for these reasons that the first

³⁰ WISE, Edward. “To Addis Ababa on the Conqueros’ Trail”, *New York Times*, 5 September 1937, p. 7.

³¹ Before Ethiopia was conquered by the Italians, Greek craftsmen in imperial Addis Ababa had been the only Europeans who had been employed in significant numbers in sectors of the economy such as construction. See KONOVALOV, Fedor E., *History of Ethiopia*, Stanford: Hoover Institution, (unpublished manuscript), p. 351.

³² POLSON NEWMAN, Edward W. *Italy’s conquest of Abyssinia*. London: T. Butterworth, 1937.

³³ TADDIA, Irma. “Sulla politica della *terra* nella colonia Eritrea”, *Rivista di storia contemporanea*, Vol. 12, issue 1, 1984, pp. 42-78; and BELLUCI, Stefano. “Gestione della terra ed evoluzione del mondo contadino nel Corno”. In: CALCHI NOVATI, Giampaolo.

strike of the Ethiopian workers in the German gold and platinum mines near the Dabus river was recorded in this period. A successful strike too, for the German owners were obliged to increase the workers' wages to 10 lira per day.³⁴

On the other hand, the very process by which agricultural workers left their feudal obligations in the plantation to work for the Italian companies in the building sector,³⁵ led to a shortage of labour in the plantations. In order to face this problem, the colonial authorities first unsuccessfully introduced laws that prohibited the use of "native" labour for other activities, in areas close to locations licensed for agricultural or mining purposes. Subsequently they were forced to start an experiment, originally introduced in the province of Harar, which combined European and African forms of labour exploitation. Three types of "hybrid" labour commoditization emerged as a consequence: (1) "co-ownership", a form of share-cropping by which the Italian owner or farmer prepared the land for planting and providing the seeds, while the "native" agricultural workers took care of the rest of the work. The harvest was then divided up according to the percentages that had been established beforehand, based on the initial investments made by the Italians. (2) In the second type of labour relation, the owner or licensee of a piece of land leased a house – which often also included a small piece of land – to the "native" worker and his family; in return, the latter worked in the Italian plantation. (3) The third type of labour relation consisted in casual or full-time wage work that was either partially or entirely paid in kind. In the first case, the cash payment was made weekly or once a fortnight, while the payment in kind (agricultural products) was made daily,

ed. *L'Africa d'Italia. Una storia coloniale e postcoloniale*. Rome: Carocci, 2011, pp. 265-290. Also consult, PRINZI, Daniele. "La manodopera indigena nella colonizzazione nazionale", *Rassegna economica dell'Africa Italiana*, vol. 25, 1937, p. 114; QUARENTA, Ferdinando. *Ethiopia, an Empire in the Making*. London: P.S. King & Son, Ltd., 1939, pp. 32-33. In this sense, some contemporary historians also talk of the revenge of the Oromos and other populations that were traditionally exploited by the Shoan-Amharic élites which took place thanks to the support (albeit indirect and due to a vested interests on the part of the Italians), of the peasant populations that the feudal system aimed to dominate completely.

³⁴ GUIGLIA, Giacomo. *Lineamenti economici del nuovo impero*. Genova: Emiliano degli Orfini e figli, 1938, p. 112.

³⁵ In some places, such as the Harar governorate, in September 1936, wages were still paid in MT thalers (which was a stronger currency than the Italian lira), and this attracted many workers towards enterprises run by Italians. See *Bollettino Ufficiale del Governo dell'Harar*, I, 1936, p. 257.

at the end of the working day, and consisted in a quantity of between 500 grams to one kilo of *durra* (an autochthonous type of barley), more than a set quantity of *chat* and some firewood.³⁶

Final remarks

This article has focussed on two aspects of labour history in the Horn of Africa, and especially in Ethiopia, during the 1930s. First, it has analysed the transnational fluxes of labour to and from the region during the Italian colonial rule. The Fascist regime claimed to have created an “empire of work” in Africa. However the system put in place in Africa was impossible to sustain, and, within a few years, the goal of transferring labour from Italy to Africa failed, as it proved both economically unfeasible, due to the high costs of the entire imperialist enterprise and of labour in particular, and socially and politically unfeasible, because of increasing protests and insubordination on the side of the Italian settlers.

Second, this research paper has sought to show how the Italian decision to invade Ethiopia favoured the introduction of a system of wage labour and transformed the labour regimes and relations in the African region far beyond the short period of the Italian colonial rule. From that time onwards, wage labour became part and parcel of the labour system, intertwined with other forms of labour relations. As noted, this process was uneven in its development within the very territories of the AOI, and entailed a considerable level of agency by the local populations, in the forms of resistance, adaptation and hybridisation.

Another aspect has remained outside the scope of the present article, but is certainly worth addressing in future research, namely, the consequences *in Italy* of Italian rule in Africa. How did the transnational flux of labour impact on the Italian economy and politics, for instance in terms of consensus or opposition to the Fascist regime? What were the social and cultural consequences of migration on the households of the settlers during and after their experience in the colony, for example in terms of the representation of work and labour and as far as consumption is concerned? By showing the multidirectional connections and influences created by and

³⁶ SANTAGATA, Fernando. *L'Harar: territorio di pace e di civiltà*. Milan, 1940, pp. 209-211.

within Italian colonialism, this perspective will strengthen our argument against Eurocentrism and for a transnational approach.

Gulag and Laogai: Ideology, economics and the dynamics of space and scale¹

Sanne Deckwitz

Introduction

The year 1973 saw the publication of two ground-breaking memoirs about life in a Communist forced labor camp. One of them was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, which revealed to the world the pain and suffering inside the Soviet *gulag*. The other one, Jean Pasqualini's *Prisonnier de Mao* (translated into English under the title *Prisoner of Mao*) was instrumental in exposing the *laogai*, the system of forced labor camps of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The publication of these memoirs initiated an on-going scholarly interest in the Communist forced labor camps, although both camp systems have, for the most part, been studied in isolation.² The aim of this article is therefore to open up a conversation about the similarities and differences between the history and development of the Soviet *gulag* and the Chinese *laogai*. Specifically, this article will start with a discussion about the ideological and economic role played by the Communist forced labor camps. It will show that, in the context of the *gulag* and the *laogai*, there was never a clear distinction between ideological considerations on the one hand and economic interests on the other. Finally,

¹ I would like to thank Christian De Vito for his many insightful comments and suggestions.

² The only comparative study about the Soviet *gulag* and the Chinese *laogai* that I know of is STEPANIC, Stanley J. (unpublished) doctoral dissertation entitled *The gulag and laogai: a comparative study of forced labor through camp literature*. University of Virginia, 2012. Stepanic examines the different attitudes found in survivor memoirs towards the Soviet and Chinese governments. No comparative work exists on the various functions the forced labor camps performed within the larger Communist system.

against the background of this rather flexible understanding of the connection between ideology and economy, the importance of a spatial perspective will be emphasized.

What, then, were the gulag and the laogai? The term gulag is an acronym for *Glavnoe upravlenie ispravitel'no-trudovyykh lagerei*, meaning Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps. It denoted an enormous penal system comprised of different types of camps, including prisons, corrective labor camps, corrective labor colonies, special camps like transit camps, POW camps and “political” complexes, and the internal forced migrations to remote exile villages referred to as “special settlements.” The term laogai is an abbreviation of *laodong gaizao*, which can be translated as “reform through labor”³ and represents a system of forced labor camps that stretches over China’s vast territory. The laogai system consists of various forms of incarceration, but the inmates of the camps were split into three groups: laogai (reform through labor), *laojiao* (re-education through labor), and *jiuye* (forced job placement). Additionally, there are detention centers, prisons and juvenile offender camps. Together, they function as the prison system of the CCP.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of the archives, numerous dissertations, monographs as well as new memoirs and documents about the gulag have been published. This has led to a greater empirical understanding of the Soviet system of forced labor. Moreover, recent scholarship has addressed the broader issue of the position of the gulag in the development of the Soviet socialist state. The new historiography has also provided new insights on matters of space and scale, dimensions this study will further build upon. Unlike the gulag, which is now a historical institution, the laogai is still in operation today. Consequently, even though several scholars have studied the Chinese prison system by examining internal documents, interviewing former prisoners, and visiting remote regions of China where labor camps abound,⁴ the laogai

³ In the People’s Republic of China, the term *gaizao* has long been interpreted as “remolding,” because it implies a more complete transformation than mere “reform.” See: WILLIAMS, P.F. & WU, Y. *The great wall of confinement: the Chinese prison camp through contemporary fiction and reportage*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, p. 40.

⁴ Among them are Richard Anderson, Jean-Luc Domenach and James D. Seymour. Harry Wu, founder of the Laogai Research Foundation, had the personal experience of spending 19 years in the laogai. After his release and emigration to the United States, he has made

remains a subject about which there is much unreliable information. Besides, even though Chinese state media announced in January 2013 that the laogai will soon be transformed, there is little hope that laogai archives will become available for research in the near future. So while this study has attempted to rely on clear and established facts, it cannot guarantee to be free of errors.

Isolating and reforming the enemies of the state

One of the main purposes of the gulag and the laogai was the isolation of enemies of the state. Inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the CCP defined themselves and their enemies in terms of class. Michael Mann has aptly put it as follows: “the people was the proletariat, and classes opposed to the proletariat were enemies of the people”.⁵ It was the task of the state to “cleanse” the proletariat of its enemies, so they could no longer get in the way of social and economic development. In doing so, the state focused less on targeting individuals than groups of people. Indeed, the future Communist society was to be based upon a proletarian people disengaged from the influence of the bourgeoisie. Theory, however, did not always correspond to reality and the largest numbers of prisoners in the gulag and the laogai were not necessarily members of exploiting classes, but peasants, workers and career criminals. Moreover, during and after the Second World War, the Soviet authorities transported entire nationalities to the forced labor camps. At the same time, however, by isolating masses of potential troublemakers, the Communist regimes in the Soviet Union and China also protected and strengthened their own position. Mao in fact stated that “our success in eliminating counterrevolutionaries is undoubtedly an important reason for the consolidation of our state”.⁶

several undercover trips back to China in order to obtain more information on the Chinese penal system. He is thus a considerable source of data.

⁵ MANN, M. *The dark side of democracy: explaining ethnic cleansing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 320.

⁶ ZEDONG, Mao. “On the correct handling of contradictions among the people”. In: *Selected works of Mao Tse-Tung*, transl. [from the Chinese], 5 vols. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1961-1965, p. 397.

Yet the mere isolation of enemies of the state was not enough.⁷ Unlike the Nazi concentration camps (which were truly genocidal institutions), the gulag and the laogai were never designed or intended to be centers of extermination. Even though there were a few Soviet camps on the Arctic islands of Nova Zemlya from which no one returned and while the concept of “annihilation through labor” was certainly applicable to individual Communist camps, there were no official “euthanasia” programs in the Soviet Union or China like the “Special Treatment 14f13” and the related “Action T4” campaigns that approved the killing of the mentally ill, disabled, and prisoners unable to work in the Nazi system. Instead, the official aim of the forced labor camps in the Soviet Union and China was to have a political effect on their prisoners. According to the 1930 law on the Corrective Labor Camps, the gulag was, first and foremost, an institution for rehabilitation, engaged in “a struggle for Communist morals” against ordinary criminals and counterrevolutionaries.⁸ Likewise, the most important task of the laogai was the transformation of offenders into productive, socially responsible citizens. The slogan “Reform first, production second” was displayed in many laogai camps.⁹

In both the Soviet Union and China, labor was seen as the most important way of transforming prisoners. Labor was extremely politicized – both inside and outside the camps. The CPSU and the CCP saw labor as nothing less than the defining feature of human life. This view was based on a small essay written by Friedrich Engels in 1876. Engels had pointed out how, through labor, the hands of early human beings were formed, how the human brain had developed through the coordination of the hands’ action when using tools, and how language had evolved in the process of teamwork, giving yet another boost to the brain. The constant improvements that labor had brought had eventually led humanity into modern

⁷ Steve Barnes has interestingly pointed out how criminality in the Soviet society can be viewed in terms of a disease of a unified social body. While isolation of the criminal could serve the cause of social sanitation, it was only through the healing of the criminal soul that the well-being of the whole social body could be ensured. See BARNES, S.A. *Death and redemption: the gulag and the shaping of Soviet society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, pp. 13-14.

⁸ OVERY, R. *The dictators: Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Russia*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004, p. 597.

⁹ Laogai Research Foundation (LRF). *Laogai Handbook 2007-2008*. Washington: Laogai Research Foundation, 2008, pp. 1, 9-10.

civilization.¹⁰ The meaning of labor for the Soviet and Chinese Communists therefore lay in its own transformative power. In this line of reasoning, labor was also seen as an essential method of transforming criminals. Contrary to the Nazi concentration camps, where a prisoner's work was defined as unproductive and humiliating, labor in the Communist camps was regarded as an opportunity for a criminal to reform himself in anticipation of his reinstatement into society.

The Soviet Union was the first country in the world to establish a unique type of criminal justice that combined Engels' and Marx's ideas about justice, crime and punishment as well as their characteristic interpretation of labor. The idea of labor as a means of reforming criminals was for the first time thoroughly discussed during the Sixth Soviet Congress in October 1918. From then onwards, it became the primary method for reforming prisoners in the Soviet Union.¹¹ Posters at the Solovetsky prison camp proclaimed that "Through work we shall return to society" and "Work redeems guilt."¹² In a similar fashion, Article 46 of China's Criminal Law (adopted in 1979 and revised in 1997) states that "any criminal who is sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment or life imprisonment shall serve his sentence in prison or another place for the execution. Anyone who is able to work shall do so to accept education and reform through labor". Moreover, the foreword to the 1992 White Paper entitled "Criminal Reform in China" stated that "China's basic goals in criminal reform are to turn offenders into a different kind of person, one who abides by the law and supports himself or herself with his or her own labor".¹³

In addition to the element of corrective labor, each camp in the Soviet Union had a Cultural-Education Department, or *Kulturno-Vospitatelnaya*

¹⁰ Engels' essay is entitled *Anteil der arbeit an der menschwerdung des affen*. See also KOLAKOWSKI, L. *Main currents of Marxism: its rise, growth, and dissolution*. vol. 1: The Founders. transl. [from the Polish] by P.S. Falla. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. 133-134. The connection between Engels' and Marx's ideas and the Communist forced labor camps is well described by MÜHLHAHN, Klaus. *Criminal justice in China: a history*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 149-151.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 153-154.

¹² BARNES. *Death and redemption*. op.cit., p. 59.

¹³ "Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China" (version 14 March 1997), <http://www.china.org.cn/english/government/207319.htm> (viewed on 4 April 2013); Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 'Criminal Reform in China' (version August 1992), <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/criminal/> (viewed on 6 April 2013).

Chast (KVCh). Inside the gulag, the KVCh organized the same types of cultural activities that simultaneously took place in Soviet society at large. They set up a campaign against illiteracy in the camps, made sure that every barrack received the messages of Radio Moscow, sponsored political lectures, handed out newspapers, put up slogans, photographs and illustrations, and, in a few cases, organized films, theatres and concerts. Besides, the special settlements saw the establishment of socialist re-education schools, which became the main tool for “reforging” the children of the special settlers. The Soviet schools provided the children with political and ideological education and prepared them to become active participants in socialist construction. As such, the re-education schools differentiated the children from their parents, whom the government did not consider susceptible to reform.¹⁴ Certainly, not all gulag prisoners were believed to be redeemable and educational staff put much more time and energy in those who had a greater chance to return to Soviet society. Educational activities were therefore also a way to distinguish prisoners from one another. Besides, limited resources forced camp authorities to focus re-education activities on those considered being redeemable. Indeed, KVCh activities were consistently understaffed and underfunded, which made it altogether a rather marginal undertaking.¹⁵

The Chinese penal system seems to have known a more pervasive “thought reform” program, which tended to be most intense in the detention centers – which were the gates of the laogai where prisoners waited until the charges against them were drawn up. Typically, the prisoners in a detention center were divided up into small teams called *dui*. There were between 10 and 15 prisoners in each *dui*, among whom two older prisoners were selected as group leaders. One of them chaired a weekly meeting regarding living conditions, health, and the distribution of small items like toiletries and cigarettes. The other leader chaired the daily study sessions. Under his

¹⁴ VIOLA, L. *The unknown gulag: the lost world of Stalin's special settlements*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 102-104. Other than the kulak youth, the children of the ethnic populations that were deported during and after WWII could never escape from their national identity and were consequently considered to be less redeemable.

¹⁵ BARNES. *Death and redemption. op.cit.* pp. 57-68. GETTY, J. Arch; RITTERSPORN, Gábor T. and ZEMSKOV, Viktor N. have demonstrated that in the period between 1934 and 1953, 20-40 percent of the inmates of the gulag were released each year. This supports the theory that (part of the) prisoners could be redeemed. See “Victims of the Soviet penal system in the pre-war years: a first approach on the basis of archival evidence” *The American Historical Review*, 98, October 1993, pp. 1017-1049.

direction, the other members were mobilized to extract confessions from new inmates by applying group pressure. Anyone who insisted on denying guilt was punished by being forced to undergo struggle sessions or by being placed in solitary confinement. It was the task of the leader to keep notes of each meeting and to report to the appropriate Public Security cadre.¹⁶ The purpose of these study sessions was not merely to aid in the extraction of confessions though; it was also a means to pass on the facts and ideology on which the prisoners were to base their new attitudes. As such, the daily study sessions combined confession with re-education. The sessions would usually start with one of the inmates reading a newspaper, a journal article, or the writings of Mao Zedong. Next, these materials gave rise to discussion and essay writing. The customary method for discussion in the laogai system was that known as “criticism and self-criticism.” This meant that everyone had to examine their own “reactionary” tendencies, and then search for the cause of these in their past life. Each inmate had to recall past “bourgeois” and “imperialistic” influences, as well as present “individualistic” traits. Meanwhile, the group leader encouraged the prisoners to criticize each other. If someone did not participate enthusiastically enough or showed any tendency to withstand full emotional involvement in the thought reform program, he or she was to be ruthlessly criticized.¹⁷

Whether or not it was truly possible to remodel the lifestyle and thoughts of counterrevolutionaries and criminals into enthusiastic members of the new Communist societies, both Soviet and Chinese central authorities took re-education activities seriously and there were undoubtedly efforts in this direction. According to Barnes, “prisoners did quickly learn at least to mouth the language of redemption. Perhaps this was all that was required.”¹⁸ This tendency towards conformist behavior was also found in the Soviet and Chinese societies as a whole. Indeed, the pervasive threat of punishment in the gulag or the laogai was used as a way to compel compliance with

¹⁶ Many of the techniques used to extract confessions from prisoners in the laogai closely resembled those used by the Soviets during the Great Terror. These methods included long and tedious interrogations and the major emphasis upon sin and guilt. See LIFTON, R.J. *Thought reform and the psychology of totalism: a study of brainwashing in China*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1961.

¹⁷ FYFIELD, J.A. *Re-educating Chinese anti-Communists*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982, pp. 77-99.

¹⁸ BARNES. *Death and redemption. op.cit.*, p. 65.

Communist rule.¹⁹ The forced labor camps in the Soviet Union and China were an institution of the totalitarian state.

Contributing to the economic goals of socialism

One of the basic problems of Soviet as well as Chinese Communists was how they would apply their revolutionary vision of a future industrial society to a country that at the time was predominantly agrarian.²⁰ In this line of thinking, the gulag and the laogai were seen as one way of accelerating industrialization. The forced labor camps were therefore not only to have a reformative function, but they also had to contribute to the realization of the economic goals of socialism.

In the Soviet Union, prison labor was already widely used before the Communist takeover and throughout the 1920s. However, by the end of that decade, the authorities established a fundamentally new system of the gulag economy. In 1923, Felix Dzerzhinsky, the first leader of the Cheka (the Bolshevik secret police),²¹ had already suggested that “we will have to organize forced labor (penal servitude) at camps for colonizing underdeveloped areas that will be run with iron discipline”.²² Five years later, Commissar of Justice Nikolai M. Janson repeated these ideas in a proposal to employ prisoners in the timber industry in the Soviet far north. His recommendations were based on the observation that it was almost impossible to maintain a free labor force in the north and the fact that existing prisons were bursting at their seams.²³ On 27 June 1929, the Politburo issued a foundational decree “On the Use of the Labor of

¹⁹ See for example, ADLER, N. “Enduring repression: narratives of loyalty to the Party before, during and after the gulag”. *Europe-Asia studies*, 62, 2010; WILLIAMS, P.F. & WU, Y. eds. *Remolding and resistance among writers of the Chinese prison camp: disciplined and published*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

²⁰ MANN. *The dark side of democracy. op.cit.*, p. 318.

²¹ The Bolshevik secret police was created on 20 December 1917. It was then named the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission to Combat the Counterrevolution, Speculation and Sabotage, abbreviated as Cheka. During the period until the collapse of the USSR in 1991, it would change its name to GPU (State Political Administration), OGPU (Unified State Political Administration), NKVD (People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs), MGB (Ministry of State Security), MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs), and eventually KGB (Committee on State Security).

²² IVANOVA, G.M. *Labor camp socialism: the gulag in the Soviet totalitarian system*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2000, p. 186.

²³ VIOLA. *The unknown gulag. op.cit.*, pp. 58-59.

Convicted Criminals” that provided for the establishment of a network of new camps in the Soviet Union’s northern and eastern territories for the purpose of colonization and economic exploitation.²⁴ At a conference of higher prison officials in October of that same year the following announcement was made:

The Five-Year Plan (...) requires tasks involving a great demand for unskilled labor. Local conditions sometimes present serious obstacles to the recruitment of labor. It is here that the places of confinement, having at their disposal excess labor in great quantities and engaged in production near the places of confinement, can come to the assistance of those economic enterprises which experience a labor shortage.²⁵

The 1929 resolution stated that the newly created camps would accommodate 50,000 inmates in total. Nevertheless, as a result of the policy of *dekulakization*, more than 500,000 peasants were sent into exile by May 1930 – 180,000 of whom ended up in the corrective labor camps. The big question for the OGPU was how to make economic use of all these new prisoners and special settlers. Oleg V. Khlevnyuk maintains that the development of the gulag economy was greatly influenced by its first major assignment: the White Sea Canal, an ambitious project carried out between 1930 and 1933 that connected the White Sea and the Baltic. For the first time, the “benefits” of using penal labor were revealed: large units of workers were quickly brought together in the right place and the OGPU could take advantage of the prisoners under any circumstances. Besides, the White Sea Canal gave the OGPU the opportunity to further develop its techniques for managing large projects. Thereafter, other major economic projects were set up or handed over to the OGPU. These included the prospecting of gold in Kolyma, the creation of a canal between the Volga and the Moskva River, the development of the Baikal-Amur Mainline in the Far East, and the formation of the Ukhta-Pechora Trust for the production of

²⁴ KHLEVNYUK, O.V. “The economy of the OGPU, NKVD, and MVD of the USSR, 1930-1953: the scale, structure, and trends of development”. In: GREGORY, P.R., & LAZAREV, V.V. eds. *The economics of forced labor: the Soviet Gulag*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2003, p. 45.

²⁵ DALLIN, D.J. & NICOLAEVSKY, B.I. *Forced labor in Soviet Russia*. London: Hollis and Carter, 1948, p. 208.

coal and oil.²⁶ In the second half of the 1930s, the NKVD began with the development of the Norilsk region for the production of nickel, platinum, cobalt and copper.²⁷

In China, the resolution adopted after the Third National Public Security Conference, which was held in May 1951, established the organizational structure for the development of the laogai. It was based on the penal system in the Soviet Union as well as on the concrete local history of the former revolutionary bases of the CCP in Jiangxi and Yan'an. Mao himself personally revised the document and added the following amendment:

The large number of people who are serving their sentences is an enormous source of labor. In order to reform them, in order to solve the problem of the prisons, in order that these sentenced counterrevolutionaries will not just sit there and be fed for nothing, we should begin to organize our laogai work. In the areas where this work already exists, it should be expanded.²⁸

Soon afterwards, Luo Ruiqing, founding Minister of Public Security, again emphasized the enormous labor potential of the laogai: "Looking at it from an economic perspective, these counterrevolutionary criminals, if not executed right off, are a source of labor, and if we organize them and force them into the service of the nation [...] they will have a definite effect on national development".²⁹ The same rationale appeared in various legal documents too. For example, Article 30 of the Labor Reform Regulations (promulgated in 1954) stated that "the production of labor reform should serve in the development of the national economy, and should be included in overall national production planning".³⁰

As in the Soviet Union, the forced labor camps in China carried out large-scale labor-intensive projects, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s. Among these were the building of a hydroelectric dam on the Hui River, a

²⁶ KHLEVNYUK, O.V. "The economy of the gulag". In: GREGORY, P.R. ed. *Behind the façade of Stalin's command economy: evidence from the Soviet state and party archives*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2001, p. 115.

²⁷ ERTZ, S. "Building Norilsk". In: GREGORY, P.R., & LAZAREV, V.V. eds. *The economics of forced labor: the Soviet gulag*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2003, pp. 127-150.

²⁸ LRF. *Laogai Handbook*. pp. 7-8.

²⁹ WU, H. *Laogai: the Chinese gulag*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1992, p. 34.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

wasteland reclamation project in the Heilongjiang River Valley, an irrigation project in Subei, the building of public roads and the cultivation of new lands in Xinjiang and Qinghai, various mining operations in Shanxi, and the construction of railway lines in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Gansu, Shaanxi, Szechuan and Yunnan.³¹

Yet how successful were the economic policies of the gulag and the laogai? Despite the scarcity of economy-wide data in both countries and while the available official statistics are beset by major problems, some analysis of the economic efficiency of the gulag and laogai is possible.³² For instance, the Great Terror of 1937 and 1938 seriously disturbed the reasonably successful growth of the gulag economy. Within a period of approximately two years, nearly 700,000 people were executed, a great part of which were physically strong and capable men as well as highly qualified experts. The NKVD constantly needed these people at their projects, but the primary goal of the Great Terror was the physical extermination of enemies of the state and not their use as “cheap” labor. This example thus clearly shows that ideological considerations took priority over economic interests. The gulag economy further deteriorated as a result of the arrests of many camp directors and a rapid increase in the mortality rate and physical exhaustion of prisoners. Consequently, despite the influx of new camp inmates during the years of the Great Terror (from 1.2 million to 1.7 million), the gulag economy was experiencing a severe crisis.³³

³¹ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

³² China regards all statistics related to the laogai as state secrets and has consistently denied international organizations like the Red Cross access to the camps. Besides, Carsten A. Holz and Yi-Min Lin call attention to three specific problems concerning available Chinese official data. First, they may have been misreported on purpose. Second, their economic significance is uncertain because of the way in which they are constructed. Third, economic variables and enterprise categories have frequently been redefined, which has led to inconsistencies in time series data. See HOLZ, Carsten A. and LIN, Yi-Min. “Pitfalls in China’s industrial statistics: inconsistencies and specification problems” *The China Review*, 1, 2001, p. 30. Despite the fact that information on the gulag is much better available since the opening of the archives, these problems are also applicable to the Soviet Union.

³³ KHLEVNYUK. “The economy of the OGPU, NKVD, and MVD of the USSR, 1930-1953”. *op.cit.*, pp. 48-49. In addition to the fact that many able-bodied men were executed, Barnes notices that gulag authorities were in fact “always running behind the curve, trying to find ways to make productive economic use of their burgeoning prisoner population” and he considers the arrests of children, the elderly and invalids as an argument against the idea that arrests were mainly driven by the need to obtain a greater labor force. See BARNES. *Death and redemption. op.cit.*, pp. 35-36.

As the Great Terror abated, the gulag economy steadily increased until early 1941. During the Second World War, the Soviet government handed over various plans on the construction of military enterprises and facilities to the NKVD. Throughout the war, gulag prisoners worked on the construction of railroads in the Far East and the European North, the development of hydraulic-engineering projects, the establishment of new oil installations and the formation and renovation of more than 250 airfields.³⁴ Nevertheless, as Edwin Bacon puts it, “from a purely economic point of view the resource of laborers in the camps was wasted through a failure to maintain their physical well-being”.³⁵ When it came to the provision of food, clothes, and medicines, prisoners continued to suffer a low priority. Besides, the government kept pushing the gulag authorities to “do more with less” and to make more efficient use of the existing prisoner work force. As a result, the overwhelming majority of prisoners were ill, emaciated and exhausted, and the mortality rate in the camps rose to exceptional heights. Between 1941 and 1945, 1,005,000 prisoners died in the gulag.³⁶

Overall, despite various efforts over the years to improve the gulag’s profitability, scholars generally agree that “the gulag was a financial catastrophe for the Soviet state. [...] One must consider that the gulag was in fact a penal institution first, and a productive institution second”.³⁷

In *New ghosts, old ghosts*, James D. Seymour and Richard Anderson have analyzed the laogai economy in China’s North-Western provinces of Gansu, Xinjiang and Qinghai. The latter two have long received many prisoners from eastern China. This has led to higher production levels in the laogai camps in Xinjiang and Qinghai, but not necessarily to more profit. Besides, in Qinghai, laogai enterprises have usually been less productive than similar privately managed enterprises. The grain production per capita at Ge’ermu Prison Farm, for example, was only 312 kilograms in 1964. Yet after the prison farm was converted into a local cooperative, productivity increased to

³⁴ KHLEVNYUK. “The economy of the OGPU, NKVD, and MVD of the USSR, 1930-1953”. *op.cit.*, pp. 49-50.

³⁵ BACON, E. *The gulag at war: Stalin’s forced labor system in the light of the archives*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994, p. 126.

³⁶ KHLEVNYUK. “The economy of the OGPU, NKVD, and MVD of the USSR, 1930-1953”. *op.cit.*, p. 51.

³⁷ BARNES. *Death and redemption*. *op.cit.*, p. 39. Also see for reference, GREGORY, P.R. & LAZAREV, V.V. Lazarev. eds. *The economics of forced labor: the Soviet Gulag*. *op.cit.*

2,983 kilograms per capita in 1993.³⁸ Qinghai province has, in fact, decided to increase per capita production by scaling down the laogai. Of the three provinces described in *New ghosts, old ghosts*, Gansu is the most similar to the rest of China. In this province, the share of the laogai in the entire agricultural and industrial output was 0.190 percent in 1993, 0.122 percent in 1994, and merely 0.079 percent in 1995. Since the mid-1990s, this percentage has further declined. Between 1995 and 1999, Gansu's economy grew at a rate of 9.6 percent, whereas laogai production grew only at 4.8.³⁹

Elsewhere, Seymour and Anderson actually claim that, from the outset, the costs of running the laogai have been much higher than what has been generated by prisoner labor.⁴⁰ Their conclusion (which is based on classified CCP statistics, Chinese and Western literature, and interviews with former inmates) stands in stark contrast with the official position of the Chinese government, which has long been that prisons were funded by their own enterprises. Besides, critics of the laogai have claimed that the forced labor camps produce huge profits for the Communist regime. Still, Seymour and Anderson point out that claims of laogai profitability tend to speak of "profit" when actually describing "cash flow" and that salaries of prison personnel, as well as the money invested to build the camps are often not included in the equation.⁴¹ In 1993, the CCP changed its position with regard to the laogai economy and adopted a resolution that stated that wages for prison wardens and guards as well as the costs for the maintenance of prisoners were from then on to be funded by the central government. Additionally, the government agreed to raise the salaries of prison personnel, create new funds for prisons and camps in poor regions, and increase the subsidies for construction and renovation. In 1994, these intentions were enshrined in the new Prison Law.⁴² In the end, the economic function of the laogai, like that of the gulag, turned out to be subordinate to its isolating and reforming tasks.

³⁸ SEYMOUR, J.D. & ANDERSON, R. *New ghosts, old ghosts: prisons and labor reform camps in China* Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1998, pp. 143-146.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 36; SEYMOUR, J.D. & ANDERSON, R. "Profit and loss in China's contemporary prison system". In: WILLIAMS, P.F., & WU, Y. eds., *Remolding and resistance among writers of the Chinese prison camp: disciplined and published. op.cit.*, pp. 161-162.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 170.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 158.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 163-164.

The dynamics of space and scale

Both the gulag and the laogai had an ideological as well as economic function. In fact, there were many similarities between the two systems of forced labor camps. This is not surprising, since the CPSU and the CCP adhered to the same political ideology and the development of the laogai was organized along and inspired by the gulag. Indeed, the Statute on Laogai, which formed the legal basis of the Chinese penal system, was created with the help of Soviet penologists. Nevertheless, in the context of the Communist forced labor camps, there was never really a strict separation between ideological considerations on the one hand and economic interests on the other. Even though at certain times there was considerable tension between these two objectives (e.g. during the Great Terror, when many able-bodied men were executed while their labor was needed in the camps), most of the time the dichotomy between ideology and economics became irrelevant. This was primarily the result of the specific meaning the Communists attached to the notion of labor, which “was not only the means but also the measure of an inmate’s reform”.⁴³ As such, the element of “corrective labor” or “reform through labor,” as it was respectively called in the Soviet Union and China, essentially bridged the gap between the ideological and economic components of the Communist penal system.⁴⁴

Furthermore, in both countries, the labor value of a prisoner varied greatly from farm to factory and depended on the geographical location of the camp. In fact, the ideological and economic functions of the gulag and the laogai were in various ways related to the dynamics of space and scale.

At one level, the localization of forced labor camps, colonies, and special settlements revealed ideological and economic goals. Generally speaking, the perceived level of dangerousness of prisoners determined the extent to which they had to be isolated from society. The most serious offenders did not even make it to the labor camps of the gulag and the laogai, but were

⁴³ BARNES. *Death and redemption. op.cit.* p. 16.

⁴⁴ Consult WAGNER, J.-C. Wagner. “Work and extermination in the concentration camps”. In: CAPLAN, J. & WACHSMANN, N. eds. *Concentration camps in Nazi Germany: the new histories*. London: Routledge, 2010. Jens-Christian Wagner has also proposed a more dynamic interpretation of the function of ideology and economics in the context of the Nazi concentration camps. According to Wagner, the balance between ideology and economics varied per time, place, and definition of prisoner.

held in solitary confinement in prisons. Compared to the camps, there was a greater degree of strictness and a higher level of security in the prisons. The second most dangerous prisoners ended up in the labor camps. In the Soviet Union, the corrective labor camps were typically located in the most distant parts of the country. Within this category, a further distinction was made on the basis of the remoteness of the camps. Those in particularly remote regions of Siberia, the Far North, and Kazakhstan received more dangerous prisoners, with Kolyma being reserved for the most dangerous ones. Inmates were, in fact, continuously threatened with relocation to Kolyma.⁴⁵ In China, the various institutions of the laogai were dispersed across its vast territory, but the largest camps (housing up to tens of thousands of prisoners) were located in the remote northwestern provinces of Xinjiang and Qinghai. With the exception of these two provinces (which have for long periods of time “imported” prisoners from the eastern part of China), however, it seems to have been more common for criminals to be sentenced to a penal institution in their own province.

From an economic point of view, the establishment of corrective labor camps, colonies, and particularly the special settlements in the Soviet Union was directly linked to the colonization of the remote resource-rich areas in the far north and east. These resources were desperately needed in order to carry out Stalin’s plans for industrialization and modernization and it had turned out that no permanent free labor force could be maintained there. Since the existing prisons were overcrowded and because labor was understood as a means of re-education, it seemed efficient to let the gulag prisoners do the work. After all, “prisoners sitting idly in isolation would have been contrary to the tenor of the age”.⁴⁶ Not much is known about the economic reasons behind internal prisoner migration in China, but Seymour and Anderson do point out that the many prisoners that were brought to the northwestern provinces in the 1950s were required to help with the agricultural reclamation of wasteland. The situation changed dramatically in the 1980s, when the central government actually paid the Xinjiang *bingtuan* (an economic and semi-military governmental organization) 500 million

⁴⁵ BARNES. *Death and redemption. op.cit.*, p. 17. Additionally, corrective labor colonies (which held prisoners with a sentence under three years and consequently very few political inmates) were usually less remote geographically.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 40. See also VIOLA. *The unknown gulag. op.cit.*, pp. 58-9.

yuan in order to assume responsibility for the transportation and incarceration of prisoners from the east.⁴⁷

At another level, there was the question of scale. The forced labor camps cannot be thoroughly understood purely based on the official ideology and directives emanating from the center. These instructions were in fact not always in agreement with one another and went through a complex structure of provincial and local authorities before they reached the camp administrators, who were subsequently left to decide which of the directives held priority. Therefore, in both the Soviet Union and China, considerable discrepancy existed between theory and practice. One example forms the establishment of the Soviet schools for the children of the special settlers, which usually had problems finding qualified teachers who were willing to work in the distant exile villages. As a result, many of the teaching positions were filled by the adult settlers, who were given the paradoxical task of reforming their own children.⁴⁸ More generally, however, a distinction can be made between the center, which prioritized the punitive and reformatory functions of the camps, and local camp directors, who typically considered the efforts aimed at reeducation to be a waste of time and material in reference to more concrete economic goals. Therefore, even though in theory the gulag and laogai were first and foremost institutions of rehabilitation and reformation, in everyday reality production usually proved to be more important. Moreover, in the case of the special settlement in the Soviet Union, a notable conflict of interest existed between the central government and local economic enterprises responsible for the construction of the exile villages. Whereas Moscow aimed for the establishment of long-lasting settlements and the development of the necessary infrastructure in the Soviet hinterlands, the industrial enterprises more often than not chose to exploit the most resource-rich areas for short periods of time and viewed the settlers as an inexhaustible form of cheap labor.⁴⁹

Finally, the separation between prisoners and non-prisoners was also not always as strict in practice as it was in theory. While geographic remoteness

⁴⁷ SEYMOUR & ANDERSON. *New ghosts, old ghosts. op.cit.*, pp. 114-116.

⁴⁸ VIOLA. *The unknown gulag. op.cit.* pp. 102-104. Anne Applebaum actually writes that many of the children who grew up in the gulag later became members of the Soviet Union's widespread criminal class. See *Gulag: a history of the Soviet camps*. London: Allen Lane, 2003, p. 333.

⁴⁹ VIOLA. *The unknown gulag. op.cit.* pp. 97-102.

seemed to ensure the isolation of prisoners from the rest of society, recent scholarship has demonstrated that social relations between prisoners and free workers actually existed on a regular basis. Alan Barenberg, for example, shows that a special category of prisoners called *zazonniki* was allowed to move and sometimes even live outside the territory of the gulag, which resulted in social interaction with the local population. *Zazonniki* also received a small salary, which served as an incentive to improve production.⁵⁰ Additionally, Wilson Bell describes a category of prisoners called *raskonvoirovannye*, or “de-convoyed,” which had the right to move outside the gulag without being escorted by a guard. In the case of these unescorted prisoners, economic considerations again played an important role. On the one hand, prisoners were de-convoyed because there was simply not enough prison personnel to guard them all. On the other, inmates were de-convoyed because they were needed in specialist positions.⁵¹ In China, there was also considerable integration of inmate and civilian workforces. Moreover, *laogai* and civilian projects were not always clearly distinguished from one another. In the case of Tang’gemu Labor Reform Farm, inmates are actually far outnumbered by the non-prisoner population.⁵²

A more dynamic understanding of the ideological and economic functions of the gulag and the *laogai*, in combination with an analysis of the elements of space and scale, allows for an interpretation of the forced labor camps as being an integral part of the Soviet and Chinese societies at large. Rather than forming an archipelago, or a closed universe, the aim of the gulag and *laogai* was to remake their prisoners into new persons that could be reinstated in socialist society – while making an economic contribution to that society in the process. Moreover, such an interpretation questions the isolating function of the forced labor camps as well as the absolute power of the CPSU and the CCP, since plans did not always correspond with possibility and theory with practice.

⁵⁰ BARENBERG, A. “Prisoners without borders: Zazonniki and the transformation of Vorkuta after Stalin”, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 57, 2009, pp. 513-534.

⁵¹ BELL, W.T. “Was the gulag an archipelago? De-convoyed prisoners and porous borders in camps of western Siberia”, *The Russian Review*, 72, January 2013, pp. 116-141.

⁵² SEYMOUR & ANDERSON. *New ghosts, old ghosts. op.cit.* pp. 159-160.

Forgiving the factory: the trial of Marghera and the memory of twentieth-century industrialization

Laura Cerasi

In 2002, a special issue of the *International Review of Social History* provided a broad framework for the historical study of de-industrialization.¹ Particularly Bert Altena's and Marcel van der Linden's preface and Christopher H. Johnson's introduction pointed to three desirable new directions for research in this field: first, to "integrate the concept of de-industrialization fully into the long-term history of economic globalism", thus exploring the phenomenon also before the Industrial Revolution; second, to understand that industrialization and de-industrialization are "two sides of the same coin" once they are considered in the global context; third, to investigate also the social, cultural, and political aspects of de-industrialization, instead of exploring exclusively its economic causes and outcomes.

Within this framework, this article stresses the importance of a further dimension, that of memory, for the study of de-industrialization and its consequences. In order to do so, it focuses on the industrial site of Porto Marghera, the area surrounding the historical city of Venice. This not only underwent a fundamental phase of industrialization during the twentieth century, but was followed by one of de-industrialization whose consequences are still largely felt. With its main chemical plant (Montedison, then Enichem) manufacturing at its peak almost half of the grand total of petrochemical production in Italy, it also stands as a

¹ ALTENA, B. And VAN DER LINDEN, M. eds. *De-Industrialization: Social, Cultural and Political Aspects*, "International Review of Social History Supplements", 10, 2002, pp. 3-33. The quotations in the text are, respectively, on p. 3 and on p. 2.

representative of those large-scale sites of heavy industry whose rise and subsequent dismissal has marked the history of Italian “Fordism”.²

Moreover, this contribution underlines the spatial dimension of memory and representation, by pointing to the controversial relationship between the factory and the city that has emerged as a key feature of twentieth-century modernization in the Venetian area. And it argues that the ultimate rejection of the “Fordist” industrial experience is linked to a process of dissociation between the factory, the workers and the local population, triggered by an important trial held against the management of the Enichem (the “petrolchimico”, as it was epitomized) for the death by cancer of hundreds of workers since the 1970s, due to the lack of security measures. Again, this shift from industrial relations to criminal law can be easily detected in cases that have recently occurred in other major industrial sites. For instance in Turin, the once prominent industrial city in north-west Italy, the death by fire of five workers in the Thyssen-Krupp metalwork branch would have had no consequence at all for the factory management responsible for the ill-maintenance of the machinery that caused the fatal accident, if the case had not been dragged in front of a jury that pronounced the management liable to conviction. Similarly in Taranto, the southern city with the largest petrochemical industrial plant in Italy, the intoxication of a very large part of the resident population with the poisonous emissions as a byproduct of the manufacturing process has been ignored for years, only to be pulled in front of public opinion by the local justice system, determined to treat it as a “crime”, and to punish it by closing down the factories.

Finally, this article stresses the fact that this “criminalization” of twentieth-century industrial history bears a profound analogy with the pattern of collective remembrance of war. Indeed, since the memory of the factory

² This has been attempted in my book, *Perdonare Marghera. La città del lavoro nella memoria post-industriale*, Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2007. This work arose from a group research project, “Memory and Place in the Twentieth-Century Italian City”, based at University College London, and, from 2001 up to 2005, under the direction of David Forgacs. The research focuses on a series of case studies, carried out *in situ*, of five Italian cities or popular districts or areas of these cities, where there have been, in the course of the twentieth century, sudden and dramatic changes (bombings, earthquakes) or more gradual ones (industrialization, deindustrialization) or both. The overall aim of the research was to understand how, in all these cases, the inhabitants’ memory interacts with the place, analysing the oral accounts as diverse, and sometimes conflicting, representations, significant in relation to the historical processes experienced by the places in question.

follows a pattern that resonates with the processing of traumas,³ a comparison can be made between the memory of the factory and the memory of war. This might also be considered as an ironic and untimely overturning of the visionary metaphor of the worker-soldier forged by Ernst Jünger in the 1920s.⁴ Indeed, extensive research has recently taken place that puts the relationship between labour and war in historical perspective.

The local historical background

The plan for a Greater Venice dates back to the early 1900s. It foresaw a strategy of “dual” development aiming at setting up heavy industry linked to the port in the coastal area of Bottenighi, west of the Mestre-Venice railway line, where Porto Marghera is now situated. The envisaged increase in heavy industrialization of the mainland was expected to attract traffic for the port activities and the railway lines in a way that industry would be kept away from the historic centre of Venice. The latter would specialize in commercial activities, the strengthening of the structures catering for tourism – like the big hotel chain Ciga founded in 1904 – and cultural initiatives such as the Biennale d’Arte and the Film Festival at the Lido, accentuating its museum-like and “anti-modern” character and therefore its reduction to a prestigious scenario for the financial, touristic and cultural activities of a cosmopolitan clientele. This dualism actually entailed a close interdependence and hierarchical organization of both elements: for without the tertiary-museum-touristic plan for the historic centre, the functional concentration of a heavy industrial site on the mainland – separated from the historic city but strategically subordinated to it – would not have played such a pivotal role in the twentieth-century Venetian history.⁵

Porto Marghera’s birth certificate was signed during the Great War, in the summer of 1917, with an agreement between public institutions – the State

³ See PETRUNGARO, Stefano. “A scuola di trauma, in Jugoslavia e poi”, *Passato e Presente*, 69, 2006, pp. 75-98.

⁴ JÜNGER, E. *L’operaio*. Parma: Guanda, 2004, (or. ed. *Der Arbeiter. Herrschaft und Gestalt*, 1932)

⁵ See CHINELLO, C. *Porto Marghera 1902-1926. Alle origini del “problema di Venezia*. Venice: Marsilio, 1979; DORIGO, W. *Una legge contro Venezia. Natura, storia, interessi nella questione della città e della laguna*. Roma: Officina ed, 1973. For an overall approach to Venetian history see ISNENGHI, M. And WOOLF, S. eds. *Storia di Venezia. L’Ottocento e il Novecento*. 3 vol., Roma: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 2002.

and the Municipal Administration of Venice – and a consortium of industrialists and bankers. The latter, under the name of the Company of the Industrial Port of Venice, was presided over by the financier and electrical power industrialist Giuseppe Volpi, who established an alliance between the local patrician élite represented by the mayor Count Filippo Grimani and economic-financial interest groups of national standing, such as Volpi himself, the nationalist Count Piero Foscari, and the financier Count Papadopoli. Entrepreneurs enjoyed decidedly advantageous conditions in terms of generous tax concessions and substantial public funding,⁶ and therefore the leading figures of Italian industrial capitalism – Ernesto Breda's shipyards, the Ansaldo Company, Terni's smelting works, the Orlando firm of Leghorn, Piombino's steelworks and the Agnelli family – soon rushed in. In 1926, with Volpi now Mussolini's finance minister, the considerable tax concessions further increased. Moreover, the administrative area of "Greater Venice" was created, so that the mainland territories, Mestre, Marghera and the adjacent villages, were amalgamated with the insular historic centre, thus constituting the present boundaries.

The industrial port's rapid growth in productivity accelerated in the 1930s because of the "autarchic" policy of the Fascist government. The increase in production and port trade also enabled the Venetian docks to face the trade slump following the Great Depression without experiencing too many setbacks. Moreover, the imminence of the war occasioned a further increase in productivity, thanks to the demands of the national war-time industry:⁷ on the eve of the conflict, about 15,000 people were employed at Porto Marghera, three-quarters of them in medium-sized and large firms.

⁶ See PETRI, Rolf. *La frontiera industriale. Territorio, Grande industria e leggi speciali prima della Cassa per il Mezzogiorno*. Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1990; PETRI, Rolf. *Storia economica d'Italia. Dal fascismo al miracolo economico (1918-1963)*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002. For other case studies see CERASI, L.; PETRI, R.; PETRUNGARO, S. *Porti di frontiera. Industria e commercio a Trieste, Fiume e Pola tra le due guerre mondiali*. Roma: Viella, 2008.

⁷ See PELI, S. "Le concentrazioni finanziarie industriali nell'economia di guerra: il caso di Porto Marghera" *Studi Storici*, 1975, n. 1, pp. 183-204; BIANCHI, B. "L'economia di guerra a Porto Marghera: produzione, occupazione, lavoro 1935-1945". In: PALADINI, G and REBERSCHAK, M. eds. *La Resistenza nel Veneziano, I, La società veneziana tra fascismo, resistenza repubblica*. Venezia: 1984, pp. 163-233; PETRI, R. "Strategie monopolistiche e "Veneto industriale". Porto Marghera alla vigilia della seconda guerra mondiale". *Venetica*, 1984, n. 2, pp. 5-39; PETRI, R. "La zona industriale di Marghera 1919-1939. Un'analisi quantitativa dello sviluppo tra le due guerre". *Centro tedesco di studi veneziani, Quaderni 32*. Venezia: 1985.

Although it was presented as a national “model” of industrialization, the creation of the industrial zone did not achieve all the declared objectives of the “Greater Venice” plan. In particular, there was a deep division between the territorial areas and their working sectors, starting with the labour market. As a matter of fact, the growth of Porto Marghera did not represent an employment opportunity for the Venetian working class; conversely, this witnessed the decline of the historic centre’s industrial plants and consequently began to feel alienated towards the big factory. The entrepreneurs preferred to hire peasant workers from the neighbouring villages – virtually unskilled, trained to carry out their tasks within the factory and prepared to accept the strenuous work pace and the strict internal organization – rather than turning to the island city working-class, that was more qualified and more skilled, but also organized in trade unions and often rooted in districts hostile to Fascism. Even when it came to recruiting technical and specialized staff, the entrepreneurs rather looked beyond the city itself, bringing workers in from other Italian regions.⁸

From a residential point of view, this non-integration had important repercussions. The municipal administration had heavily invested in the industrial zone with a view to alleviating the massive working-class unemployment which afflicted the historic centre; moreover, in order to reduce the chronic overcrowding of the island city’s most run-down districts, it had committed itself to setting up the neighbouring urban district of Marghera, planned next to the factories according to the Anglo-Saxon model of the “garden city”. However, Marghera in the 1930s never became the industrial suburb the authorities had envisaged, because the workers continued to live in the villages of the province: at Mirano, on the Brenta coast, near Castelfranco and Chioggia, within a radius of thirty to forty kilometres – the distance that could be covered by bicycle. The garden city would be therefore rather inhabited by shopkeepers, technical staff and white-collar workers, railwaymen and skilled workers often coming from other regions; its margins hosted a small working-class community of a few

⁸ See PIVA, F. “Il reclutamento della forza-lavoro: paesaggi sociali e politica imprenditoriale”. In: PIVA, F. and TATTARA, G. eds. *I primi operai di Marghera: mercato, reclutamento, occupazione 1917-1940*. Venezia: Marsilio, 1983, pp. 325-463, and RAVANNE, F. “Migrazioni interne e mobilità della forza lavoro. Venezia e Marghera”. In: SAPELLI, G. ed. *La classe operaia durante il fascismo*. Milano: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, 1981.

thousand people and a large village-ghetto – Ca' Emiliani – built by the municipal administration to house Venice's unemployed and the evicted tenants: an urban sub-proletariat with no links with the factory and which turned into a long-lasting, ultimate symbol of urban degradation. These divisions shaped the rifts between the factory and the city, work and residence, Porto Marghera and Marghera, and the mutual alienation of the different elements which contributed to the – sometimes even confrontational – development of Marghera, Mestre and Venice.

After the Second World War, the urban district of Marghera, together with the whole mainland area around Mestre, underwent a massive, rapid and disordered process of urban growth, which “exploded” in the 1950s and the 1960s. This made Marghera a mainly working-class district, albeit one with a remarkable social segregation among different areas. Meanwhile, the industrial port also expanded through the establishment of a “second zone” with primarily petrochemical plants. By the early 1970s, this industrial growth had spurred on the development of the mainland city and Porto Marghera had become an industrial colossus employing approximately 45,000 people, 15,000 of whom worked for *Petrolchimico*. During the great cycle of working-class struggles between the 1960s and the 1970s, it was one of the country's most mobilized industrial centres, provoking a deep impact on the townspeople in the surrounding area. In that period, between Mestre, its large “outskirts” and the factory, there emerged a veritable link which expressed itself through a political and trade union identity⁹.

Criminalization and trial

The production plants of Porto Marghera had a record of frequent accidents. Some were small, while others were very frightening for the resident population, as with the November 2002 discharge of a big “toxic cloud”, a phosgene leak that, if not immediately stopped, could have caused a disaster similar to the one occurred in 1984 at Bhopal, India, where approximately 8,000 people were killed. The number of accidents slowed down because of

⁹ See CHINELLO, C. *Classe, movimento, organizzazione. Le lotte operaie a Marghera/Venezia. I percorsi di una crisi. 1945-1955*. Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1984; CHINELLO, C. *Forze politiche e sviluppo capitalistico*. Roma: Editori riuniti, 1975; CHINELLO, C. *Sindacato, Pci, movimenti negli anni Sessanta. Porto Marghera-Venezia 1955-1970*. 2 vols. Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1996.

the progressive closure of important factories. However, even if the production was actually decreasing, the collective feeling against the industrial plants gradually increased.

The complex judicial case known as the “trial of the Petrolchimico” or the “trial of Marghera” proved to be a defining moment in this controversial process. After several years of hearings and alternating verdicts, it ended in May 2006 with the prosecution’s charges being upheld. The prosecution had claimed that the managers of Petrolchimico were directly responsible for the many deaths by cancer among the employees working with a particular chemical used in the production of plastics – VCM –, for although they had been aware of the dangers of those production processes since the 1970s, they had not implemented adequate safety measures. The point is, however, that the majority of the public opinion experienced the verdict not just as a part of a judicial proceeding, but as a reassessment of the cultural representation of the history of Venice in the twentieth century, viewed through the mechanism of the “criminalization” of the industrial economy. As one of the judges underlined, “These verdicts signal the crisis of the old production methods [...]. The emergence of Petrolchimico on the shores of the lagoon now reveals itself to be a *crime against humanity*”.¹⁰

The trial thus turned into a controversial mirror of self-identification for the Venetian population. The mechanism is well known. The public ritual of the trial, in fact, has been said to play a significant role in the formation of memories and collective identities, above all when the legal proceedings involve many individuals, and there are wide-ranging charges such as “environmental disaster” and “crime against humanity”. Starting with Hannah Arendt’s work on the Eichmann case,¹¹ “big trials” dealing with collective tragedies has been shown to produce dramatic clashes between parties and therefore, through the strong impact of the rhetoric utilized in the arguments, to provoke intense emotional response in the audience, resulting in the tragedy being turned into some “educational show”. The tragedy in question, through the reworking and re-presentation of the disputed facts in

¹⁰ BENATELLI, N; CANDIELO, G.; FAVARATO, G. *Laboratorio Marghera tra Venezia e il Nordest*. Venezia: Nuovadimensione, Portogruaro, 2006, pp. 18 e 16.

¹¹ QUAGLIONI, D. “La cultura giuridica e le “incertezze” dei diritti umani”. In: CORNI, G. and HIRSCHFELD, G. eds. *L’umanità offesa. Stermini e memorie nell’Europa del Novecento*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003, pp. 469-488.

the hearing, contributes to establishing a collective memory of what has happened, so much so that it appears a “basic myth” of a shared identity.¹²

In the case of the “trial of Marghera”, the projection of the responsibilities of the accused on to all the citizens remained implicit, if not in the judicial verdict, in the way it was perceived by local public opinion. Yet, a widely read book of interviews of the families of the deceased workers defined the episode as a “crime in peacetime”. In so doing, it unequivocally underlined the *criminal* nature of chemical production at Porto Marghera, suggesting that it should be dealt with by instruments of law and criminal proceedings. It also voiced the analogy with the expression “war crime”, making the *criminal* episode of the chemical works at Porto Marghera appear to be of such a scale and intensity that the destruction and divisions of a *state of war* could be evoked.

This *criminalization* of the factory goes hand in hand with the *victimization* of the workers. In published works, newspaper articles and television programmes, the workers were presented, above all, as victims. Or rather they are equated to “cannon fodder”, the waste of human lives on the battlefield as a consequence of the irresponsible exploitation of subordinates by military high commands. The reference to a wartime context is again explicit. The accounts of the hearings presented the images of the workers’ widows and children, especially their daughters. Through the gender distinction and the emphasis on women’s grief, the “families of the victims” – as they are frequently referred to in the media reports of dramatic events – a type of post-war scenario unfolded here. In these representations, persistently repeated by the media, a re-evocation takes place of the mass destruction produced by twentieth-century wars by means of the recurring war-time metaphor used to describe the “disaster” produced by industry.

The mechanism of victimization links the fate of the industrial workers with that of the resident population. Both have suffered from the devastating effects of the factory. This reveals a marked change of the cultural paradigm with respect to the twentieth-century cultural and political tradition of the workers: what was once claimed as an independent subjectivity, now ceases

¹² Also consult OSIEL, M. J. “Politica della punizione, memoria collettiva e diritto internazionale”. In: BALDISSARA, L. And PEZZINO, P. eds. *Giudicare e punire. I processi per crimini di guerra tra diritto e politica*. Napoli: L’Ancora del Mediterraneo. 2005, pp. 105-119.

to be an autonomous group and simply merges with other participants in the episode. Workers are associated either with the company executives, responsible for the “criminal” management of the production process depicted in the “trial at Marghera”, or with the citizens, the victims of violence. The “victim paradigm” addressed by the anthropologist René Girard resonates in this way to see both the workers and the citizens as “victims” of the violence produced by the large factory, and by extension by the industrial economy as such:¹³ the community that has been subjected to – and victim of – violence, perceives itself as *passive* and therefore as *innocent*. The self-representation as victims and the mechanism of collective victimization here imply a sense of self-exoneration and make the condition of passiveness to be perceived as close to the condition of innocence. In other words, workers can be considered innocent by the townspeople only as far as they are seen as victims of the factory; conversely they would be regarded as co-responsible in the crimes of the factory.

By virtue of these mechanisms, the whole history of twentieth-century industrial development and of twentieth-century industry in Venice is fundamentally re-written through the suffocating image of the *Petrolchimico* at Marghera – which, it should be remembered, is situated on the confines of the lagoon, outside Venice’s historical limits. Not only is the relationship between the townspeople and the workers redefined, but the history of Porto Marghera as the driving force and generator of the years of the “economic miracle” and then as a symbol of gradual disinvestment in the last decades is reconsidered. It is turned into a local metaphor of Italy’s type of industrial development and its impact on people’s lives. Porto Marghera then stands, on the one hand, as the synthesis of the high costs of Italian modernization, and on the other as *the* most specific and controversial aspect of Venice’s twentieth-century modernization.

Memory and place

There exists only one common theme in the different representations of the industrial zone. Everyone, including those who still work there, perceives

¹³ See also GIRARD, René. *Delle cose nascoste sin dalla fondazione del mondo*. Milano: Adelphi, 1983, pp. 17-68. Original: *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*. Paris: Grasset, 1978.

the industrial zone as a *completed* cycle, as a story that has reached its conclusion. Porto Marghera is understood not only as being physically *delimited*, surrounded by boundary walls and the great arterial highways; it is also *delimited* in time, finished, like the Fordist cycle of which it was, to a great extent, the historical expression. The *segregation*, in time and space, makes the factory and the industrial zone a striking “event”, something that has spanned over several generations, but whose clear and well-defined contours separate it now completely from the rest of life. One can only remember something which has happened and belongs to the past, and Porto Marghera, in this sense, is a past “event”.

Besides this single common feature, no shared memory emerges. It is virtually impossible to be in the district of Marghera without “seeing” or at least realizing that one is close to one of the biggest industrial complexes in Italy, among the most important ones in the 1900s. Yet there exists no common representation of its relationship with the adjacent industrial zone, on account of which it was created. To this day, Marghera has not emerged as the reference point of a collective history, one that could be celebrated through important moments and commemorative ceremonies. There exists also no institutional body responsible for keeping alive the memory of a homogeneous and collective recognition of Marghera’s role and thus make the industrial zone a ‘place of memory’ and of identity constructed by recalling the past.

For Marghera, then, the constructivist key of “collective memory” – which can be traced back from Maurice Halbwachs to the “places of memory” of Pierre Nora and Mario Isnenghi – is not appropriate and we are forced to turn to a less formalized dimension.¹⁴ Paul Ricoeur has noted that besides the two recognized dimensions of memory – the individual and the collective – there is a third one, concerning the concrete relationships of proximity between people that emerge in the course of time: “Between the two poles of individual memory and collective memory, isn’t there perhaps an intermediate reference level, in which there is a concrete exchange between individuals’ living memory and the public memory of the communities to which we belong?”¹⁵ In our case then, as Winter and Sivan

¹⁴ NORA, P. (sous la direction de) *Les lieux de Mémoire*. 3 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1997; ISNEGHI, M. *I luoghi della memoria. Personaggi e date dell’Italia unita*. 2nd Edition. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2011.

¹⁵ RICOEUR, Paul. *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli*. Paris: Seuil, 2000.

have suggested, it is appropriate to enter the more informal sphere of this *communicative memory*, related to the recent past, not very formalized, and tied to generational experiences: half way between individual-psychological remembering and socially-defined remembering, between individual and collective memories, and sensitive to the importance of the act of remembering and its relational aspects.¹⁶ Through this theoretical tool we may therefore discern the existence of conflicting attitudes in defining the place Marghera, the differences in defining the sense of belonging, the different views emerging in different groups when referring to the same place.

The absence of a shared, official, institutional memory of the place that represents Venice's industrial twentieth century, favours an attitude of oblivion, *forgetfulness*, alienation. Those who have lived close to the factories, don't know them; those who worked there, talk of them in different ways depending on their biographies and personal experiences; those who live in Marghera today experience it as a foreign body. One can sense a natural alienation between the different conditions; a form of *repression*, with regard to the industrial zone, that goes through all groups of residents. Different representations of the factories, by the workers and the residents, are implicit in their different experiences of it; yet, the repression of such a macroscopic phenomenon, so manifestly present in each person's life, needs closer examination.

In the process of identity formation, and particularly of those collective identities which define themselves through the dialectic of memory and forgetfulness, violence plays a fundamental role: "At the root of the pathologies of memory – Ricoeur insisted – one always finds the fundamental relationship between memory and history with violence."¹⁷ Once it has been segregated in space and time, the cycle of the Fordist factory is perceived merely as a traumatic event. And the appropriate solution for *trauma* is repression, that is as well one of the fundamental elements in the creation of memory/forgetfulness.¹⁸ Moreover, as those who

¹⁶ WINTER, Jay; SIVAN, Emmanuel. "Setting the framework". In: WINTER, Jay and SIVAN, Emmanuel. eds. *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 10.

¹⁷ RICOEUR, Paul. *Ricordare, dimenticare, perdonare. L'enigma del passato*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004, p. 72.

¹⁸ WINTER, Jay and SIVAN, Emmanuel. "Setting the framework". *op. cit.*, p. 15.

undergo repression find it difficult to view themselves as active participants in a process/event, they are more easily prone to see themselves as being passive, as those who have merely undergone the experience. They are its victims.

Divided memories

Violence, trauma, victim, repression. It is at this point that this discourse evokes the analogy with another central event of twentieth-century history, i.e. war and the memory of war. Through this perspective, the contrast between the workers' memories and those of the residents becomes understandable: those who actively "participate" in war, those who fight, are also the ones who narrate it, recount it, and make it a fundamental element of memory; while those who have to bear it have a different perception. Again with the words of Ricoeur: "Victimhood and agency have always been and remain in problematic juxtaposition; they form a duality with different meanings in different historical settings".¹⁹ The analogy between the workers and the soldiers, on the one hand, and the victimized "civilians", on the other hand, should not, however, be taken too far. The correlation between soldiers and workers is a key element of the twentieth-century culture of war, when the use of vast armies and huge amounts of war materials made the experience of a total and industrial war comparable to the hard, forced "labour" in the trenches; but the opposite does not hold true, because the concept of working class stems from the left-wing tradition of politicization and internationalism.

We might rather want to refer here to the concept of "divided memory", in the same way as it is used to distinguish between the memory of the partisan-combatants, that have created the public memory, and the private memory of the families of the victims of the Nazi massacres perpetrated in Central Italy in 1944. Different aspects of the conflicts operating in the sphere of memory then emerge, beginning with those between different dimensions and levels of memory: "official"/private; national/local; combatants/civilians; male/female; agents/victims. Here some interesting characteristic mechanisms can be observed. First, the *repression* of the efficient cause of the massacre: memories do not focus on the German

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

troops who carried out the slaughter. Second, the shifting of the blame in accordance with the scapegoat-principle,²⁰ so that the responsibility for the massacre is not attributed to those who have carried it out, but to the partisans, whose actions are regarded as having unleashed the violence of the German troops, thus indicating not the effective agents, the Germans, powerful and alien, but people from the same village, closer and more familiar. Third, the “naturalization” of the violence wrought by the German troops, whose “cruelty” is displaced from the human sphere, ascribed to the state of nature and so “removed from the realm of moral judgement”.²¹ The latter is the paradigm of the *innocence* of the victim, whose existence belongs to the natural order of things, which has been overturned by the senseless intervention of those who have unleashed the violence:²² as Eric Leed has observed, “one should not yield to the natural identification with these victims. In fact, for many, their wounds exempted them from any moral obligation, becoming a source of innocence, a means by which many felt relieved of any responsibility about these events which had caused their sufferings”.²³

It is necessary to reflect on the association of the victim and the witness in the procedures to validate our knowledge of the past. Through their own pain, those who have suffered violence testify the truth transmitted by memory. However, this entails a fundamental weakening of one of the most important assumptions about the reconstructive nature of memory in historical research – the renouncement of a merely “realistic” view of the analysis of eye-witness’ accounts, in order to frame them in the conversational and pragmatic context in which they are formulated. Entrusting the transmission of truth to the witness/victim results in a clash with the principles of historical research that has rightly attracted attention.²⁴ Moreover, the victim’s redemption is necessarily accomplished through a

²⁰ CONTINI, Giovanni. *La memoria divisa*. Milano: Rizzoli, 1997, p. 210 sgg. Contini refers to GIRARD, René. *Le Bouc émissaire*. Paris: Grasset, 1982.

²¹ PORTELLI, Alessandro. “Lutto, senso comune, mito e politica nella memoria della strage di Civitella”. In: PAGGI, L. ed. *Storia e memoria di un massacro ordinario*. Roma: Manifestolibri, 1995, pp. 85-104.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 90-95

²³ LEED, Eric J. “La legge della violenza e il linguaggio della guerra”. In: LEONI, Diego and ZADRA, Camillo. eds. *La Grande Guerra. Esperienza, memoria, immagini*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986, pp. 21-22.

²⁴ WIEVIORKA, Annette. *L'Ère du témoin*. Paris: Hachette, 2002.

mechanism that can render justice – a trial – and through an act that can erase the evil – forgiveness.

Forgiveness

The characteristic features of the twentieth-century modernization of the lagoon regional capital and the phases of the urban and industrial development of the metropolitan city originated in the controversial relationship between the factory and the city – experienced by the inhabitants and the workers alike – and its repercussions on memory. From the very beginning, division and alienation have emerged as the fundamental elements by which the inhabitants and the industrial world represented the “place” Marghera. This feature was temporarily overcome during the years of the full “Fordist” development, because of the key role played by the factory in providing employment and giving the place an identity. However, an increasing repression and hostility again emerged starting with the period of the factory’s decline.

Considering the spatial dimension of memory and representation has enabled us to decipher the nuances, divisions and conflicts that emerged in the construction of identity. Marghera does not appear to be a “place of memory”, a reference point of a shared history capable of triggering processes of identity recognition based upon the reconstructive nature of a community’s collective memory. Conversely, Marghera seems part of a “transmitted”, unofficial memory, that has different meanings for each generation, gender, social class and individual; it stands between forgetfulness and memory, but is characterized, for everyone, by the spatial delimitation of the factory. The latter makes it remain constantly aside from the life of the inhabitants, hidden behind enclosing walls, separated by impassable boundaries – “a world in itself”, “a city within a city”, “like going to Mars”.

The spatial segregation of the factory results in the perception of industrial history as something that has come to an end. Something, also, that is to be repressed as a trauma, naturalized as a disaster and personified as a source of violence. At “the time of the factory”, represented as “war-time”, the personified factory exercised its violence on civilians. In turn, this discourse triggers the mechanism of simplification and displacement from which the “divided memory” stems, through the identification of the agents of violence not with those who are responsible, but with the closest and most visible participants: the workers. Likened to soldiers, the latter accept for themselves the role of “scapegoats” for the redemption of the civilian

victims, who protest their innocence. The metaphor of war-time and the “victim paradigm” acts throughout the whole work of memory and fundamentally affects the representation of the present. Through the sustained impact of the “Petrochimico trial”, the analogy with the war-time context manifests itself both as an impetus towards the criminalization of the industrial episode and as a “culturalization” of a judicial episode that therefore comes to operate as an “educational show” producing a basic myth of identity.

In this case, identity works through the equation of the workers with the townspeople as victims of “crimes of peace”, chemical disaster and environmental pollution. Only as victims of the factory can the workers recover the innocence and establish a communication with the townspeople; conversely, they would be viewed as responsible for the harm produced by the factory, and thus condemned together with it. This is a major change in the representation of work and its social function, one that has emerged at the perceived end of the industrial “modernity” in the Western world and that retrospectively overturns the perception of the whole of twentieth-century culture.

Throughout the trial of Marghera, the escalating spiral of criminalization and victimization surrounding the factory raised the problem of the resolving mechanism that could “render justice” for the “crime of peace”. A reconciliation between the factory and the city through the decommissioning of the industrial zone seemed then the only way to achieve it. However, we believe that the mechanism of “resorting to the law” and the related perspective of reconciliation should be avoided if this episode is to be understood within the historical context in which the representations are rooted, therefore pointing at the very concrete and material peculiarities of the twentieth-century modernization of the lagoon city.

Legal mechanisms necessarily entail a judgement of the past and therefore an ethical project of using the past in the present. Reconciling the divided memories and the contrasting representations regarding the relationship between the factory and the city, would mean to hypostasize and perpetuate the rejection of the industrial past and to “normalize” the unusual nature of industry in the lagoon by equating it to development of the whole surrounding north-eastern Italian region. Conversely, it seems more

appropriate to remain in the sphere of the “irreparable” – the event which has occurred in the past and cannot be modified in the present, being bound to its own irreducible temporality.²⁵ For it is only if we approach the divided memory as a trace of a specific relationship with twentieth-century industrial modernization in Venice-Marghera that we are able to narrate its contradictions and developmental costs, and how they have impacted on people’s lives.

²⁵ “It will never be possible to understand forgiveness without realizing the importance of this being-past, of a being-past that never let itself be reduced, modified or framed into a past present or a presentable and changeable past. It is a being-past that does not go by, so to speak”. My translation from DERRIDA, J. *Perdonare. L'imperdonabile e l'imprescrittibile*. Milano: Cortina Editore, 2004, p.51. Original: *Pardoner. L'impardonnabile et l'imprescriptible*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2004. In this text, Derrida addresses Vladimir Jankélévitch’s arguments, presented in the pamphlet *L'imprescriptible* in the context of the debate on the prescription of Nazi crimes in France in the early 1970s. In this way, he refused the sequence of the admission of guilt, expiation and reconciliation that is implicit in the request for historical pardon, and advanced the idea of unconditional and unrequested pardon. Thus he accepted the logic of “hyperbolic ethics”, which “would conversely entail that pardon, even for the most radical of evils, is given when it is neither demanded nor deserved. Pardon therefore becomes meaningful [...], it becomes able to pardon only when it is called to do the impossible and to pardon the un-pardonable”, p. 46.

Transforming place, work and society: the salmon industry in Southern Chile

Dasten Julián Vejar

I Introduction

The relationship between the state, capital and investment was modified after the introduction of the military dictatorship in Chile in 1973, which meant political, social and economic changes, accompanied by a new neoliberal relationship between the state and the processes of capitalist accumulation and transnational investment. With the irruption of neoliberalism, the hegemony of private over state initiative was reestablished, a reverse from the previous epoch. The opening of markets and the movement of goods, services and capitals were encouraged, offsetting the protectionist trends that had occurred in the international trade and capital markets between the 1930s and the 1970s. The hegemony of the neoliberal project was secured through a policy of economic shock and the application of global monetarism.¹

The original expression of the neoliberal economic model in Chile, installed during the military dictatorship (1973-1990), was a process of: a) industrial restructuring with a strong duality in the productive structure; b) a configuration of new social actors; c) a process of demographic changes and transformation of the territories and socio-productive spaces; d) installation of a model of primitive accumulation of capital that articulated a new economic geography; e) a strong and unregulated introduction of

¹ GAMBINA, July. "El capitalismo entre la crisis del '70 y la actual. De la ofensiva del capital a la emergencia de la resistencia mundializada". Studies and Training Center of the Argentine Judicial Federation - CEFJA. *Gallo Rojo*. Madrid Spain, Madrid, 2003.

transnational capital and privatization of the public system; f) a structural heterogeneity and social, political, economic, ethnic and gender inequality, with serious consequences and impacts on matters relating to social welfare.

Despite the beginnings of the aquaculture sector in the nineteenth century, it was not until the twentieth century that it was industrially developed, with greater vigor and expansion.² The industrial aquaculture sector is marked by the action and imprint of changes and economic restructuring that occurred in the context of the implementation of the neoliberal economic model in Chile in the 1970s and 1980s, which is reflected in the dynamism of its growth and investment.

The localization of the process of production was marked by a change in the spatial division of labor worldwide.³ Shifts in the previous limits of capitalism and the transformation of the capitalist periphery formed part of the expansive leap of capitalist forces to break into the process of the "adaptation of space" and of *Landnahme* in various local, regional and national contexts by means of the power of transnational and financial capital arranged for accumulation.⁴

In our view, the evolution of the aquaculture industry may be seen as a process of "capital accumulation by dispossession",⁵ which we understand as the continuation and proliferation of accumulation practices that Marx had designated as "primitive" or "original" during the rise of capitalism, and which are bound to a deep spatial, social, cultural and productive transformation, as dimensions of social reproduction.

² DEL CAMPO, Basualdo. *El largo viaje de los salmones. Una crónica olvidada*. Santiago, Chile: Government of Chile, 2003.

³ MASSEY, Doreen. *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994; HARVEY, David. "The 'New' Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession". In: PANITCH, Leo and LEYS, Colin. eds. *The New Imperial Challenge*. London: Monthly Review Press, 2004.

⁴ *Landnahme* means first of all, expansion of capitalistic production methods internally and externally. It was a large-scale industry which finally provided a permanent basis for capitalist agriculture; it completed the separation of farming and rural domestic trades and "conquers for industrial capital the entire home market". DÖRRE, Klaus. "Social Class in the Process of Capitalism Landnahme. On the relevance of secondary exploitation". *Socialist Studies/Études socialistes*, vol. 6, no.2, 2010, pp. 43-74.

⁵ HARVEY. "The 'New' Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession". *op.cit.*

In the following article, we present a review of the process of spatial transformation that accounts for the process of the emergence, evolution, transformation and depletion of the salmon industry, focusing on the productive, labor and organizational dimensions of the work process. In addition, we provide a relational synthesis of the spatial transformation of regions that were affected by investment in and operation of the salmon industry in Chile.

II. Transforming and adapting place

Capital managed to venture into the south of Chile, specifically in the Region de los Lagos (Annex 1), due to a number of comparative advantages in relation to the development of the global division of labor. The characteristics of the zone showed:

- a) Family agriculture, small-scale fishing and a traditional trade economy, with the limited presence of public institutions, a weak class of services and low wages;
- b) The absence of a working-class culture, an organized and unionized working class, as a potential source of labor disputes that would obstruct the logic of over-exploitation of labor, and;
- c) A pristine area with geographical conditions ideal for the realization of extensive exploitation and the introduction of farms and processing plants.

These factors, in reference to a set of spatial variations, are the ones that would mobilize capital in the localization process, because "capitalism is subject to the impulse to eliminate all spatial barriers, 'annihilate space through time' as Marx said, but it can only be done through the production of an adapted space",⁶ and in the case of the Region de los Lagos, the conditions for the adaptation of a malleable space in a specific historical context were provided, facilitating the bases of accumulation.⁷

This process was encouraged by the restructuring of a mixed, mono-exporting economy oriented to a small domestic market and a shift to an

⁶ HARVEY, David. *Espacios de Esperanza*. Madrid: Akal, 2007, p.77.

⁷ The geographical peculiarity of this region is really interesting, specifically in the province of Chiloé (Annex 2), which joins a group of islands that despite a concentration of production was also tied to the nerve centers of regional administration in Llanquihue Province and the city of Puerto Montt.

open economy based on the diversification of exploitation and the export of natural resources, which was only possible thanks to the initial boost of the state (the support of state organizations and a number of institutional mediations) that gave salmon farming the possibility to build up a process of accumulation by dispossession.⁸ This industrial restructuring was part of the logic of the dictatorial state and its strategy of neoliberalization, which encompassed the whole of social and spatial relations that were reflected in the dynamics of change and mutation of the place.

The massive intervention and sustained state support to the aquaculture industry, in general, and to salmon, in particular, was ideologically justified through two objectives:

- a) The idea of generating a greater control of fishery resources that were facing a process of over-exploitation, due to the high demand for consumption, and;
- b) The confidence to develop a productive activity that would prevent migration toward the north of the country, through the generation of an engine of regional development.

State intervention that promoted the localization of the process of production was characterized in different dimensions that markedly redefined social space:

- a) Deregulation of transnational investment in the country, accompanied by monetary incentives and subsidies to strengthen foreign investment and capital attraction, based on an extractive logic.
- b) Environmental deregulation and commodification of natural resources, which prompted a process of expansion of the geographical limits of production, previously established by capitalism through regulations for the protection of natural resources.
- c) Deregulation and labor flexibility, resulting in a structural weakening of labour.
- d) The creation of infrastructure, telecommunications and connectivity between the production areas, and its fragmented productive chain, and the places of export and marketing.

⁸ HARVEY, David. "The 'New' Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession". *op.cit.*

- e) The relations of exchange and free trade that facilitated chaining and technology and products transfer, helping the installation process of the sector, as a localized basis of a transnational chain of production.

This series of institutional structures mediated the "problematic relationship between the local and particular conditions and the universality of the achieved values in the world market ... dictating a pattern of an uneven geographical development through its concentration and capital flows",⁹ as a synthesis of the relationship between social classes, which would accelerate the dynamics of regional relations of productive chains, and would expand the geographical limits and colonization of territories in the sector.¹⁰

Finally, this process represented a leap from the quality of marginal commercial exploitation of aquaculture to a specifically capitalist system of production, in a brief period, which was articulated with national trends in the transformation of the relationship between the state and capital, as in the provisions and openings of a new pattern of flexible accumulation at the global level.

This new model of accumulation configured the anatomy of the salmon industry, which can be characterized by:

- a) *High transnationalization*: The participation of foreign capital in the industry is significant. It is estimated that by 2002 it reached 36% and could be higher. Francisco Pinto notes that, of 24 companies involved in salmon farming in 2007, 5 are of foreign capital (17% of all companies). However, they have a stake of around 38% in total production.¹¹
- b) *High concentration of production and ownership*: an indicator in this regard is the decrease in the number of companies since the mid-1990s. According to one of the studies consulted, companies involved in salmon farming went from about 100 to 50 and, subsequently, to 40.¹²

⁹ HARVEY. *Espacios de Esperanza*. op.cit., p. 51

¹⁰ DÖRRE. "Social Class in the Process of Capitalism Landnahme". op.cit.

¹¹ PINTO, Francisco. *Salmonicultura chilena: entre el éxito comercial y la insustentabilidad*. Santiago: Fundación TERRAM, 2007. www.terram.cl

¹² DÍAZ, Estrella. *Transnacionalización de la industria salmonera. Aspectos socio-laborales de un proceso en curso*. Oxford: Oxfam, 2003, p.12. The background information provided by Díaz, for example, shows that, of all companies, 10 or 12 would have had control over 50% of exports in 2000. Another source shows that in 2007, companies involved in salmon farming had been reduced to 24. .

- c) *A process of mergers and takeovers:* Several cases show these trends in recent years,¹³ mainly capital mergers permitted by the new global regulations.
- d) *A segmented productive structure:* Three types of companies can be distinguished: first, the largest businesses that integrated the productive process such as transnational firms (Marine Harvest, Nutreco, Fjord Seafood, Cermaq) and national companies (Aqua Chile, Camanchaca and Multiexport). Second, there was a group of companies of national capital with intermediate levels of production belonging to multi-sectorial consortia (Aguas Claras, fjords, and Invertec). Finally, there were small and medium-sized enterprises of regional and national capital that have managed to find market niches or have incorporated greater added value to production (Salmopesnac, Trusal SA, Pacific Star, Ventisqueros).

This hierarchy of business actors shows a model that despite having being structurally segmented by the conditions of ownership and productive capacity was directly linked to the regional problems of coupling and chaining of industries and companies of the sector in an integrated process of exploitation and production at the regional level. Thereby it was directly interwoven with the impulse of capitalism to eliminate all spatial barriers and regulatory obstacles, through production of an adapted space.

If we reject the notion that “space” is simply “static” (or the still life of landscape), we can make an epistemological leap in understanding the transformations that have produced the process of industrialization and geographic reorganization in the development of the salmon industry, as part of a complex and global process of space production “by the dynamics of capital accumulation and class struggle”.¹⁴

¹³ For example, in 2004 AquaChile purchased 100% of the ownership of Aguas Claras, formerly controlled by AntarFisch and White Fjord, 100% owned by Pesquera Camanchaca (controlled by Jose Fernandez and Jose Cifuentes). In 2005, Aqua Chile also acquired 60% of the ownership of Robinson Crusoe and Salmon Chiloé. AquaChile, belonging to the Puchi family, was founded in 1999, as a result of an alliance with South Pacific Salmon, which is the largest national producer. Another more recent case, in 2012, is the acquisition valued at US\$100 million of Cultivos Marinos of Chiloé by the Norwegian Cermaq and its Chilean operator, Mainstream, leaving the multinational with 55% of its salmon business in Chile.

¹⁴ HARVEY. *Espacios de Esperanza*. op.cit., p. 77

III. Maintaining place in global space-time

Territorialization and reterritorialization as contradictory processes of the spatial expression of power¹⁵ help us understand the problems posed by the salmon industry in an area such as southern Chile. A population, a territory and a socio-productive structure that remained in certain conditions of: a) Isolation in the process of the creation of salaried jobs and commodification of social relations; b) a low-skilled workforce with high rates of poverty; and c) a suitable geographic component for the installation of an industry such as salmon which was boosted by the catalyst of the entry of capitalist relations of production promoted by the policies of the state and transnational capital, transforming the productive structure of the area, and subjecting it to an international chaining.¹⁶ This was constructed in accordance with the objective of the resolution of regional problems of unemployment and productive inactivity, but at the same time, weakened local territorial strategies and installed a new stage of the production of the space.

The migration of capital to the aquaculture industry in the south of Chile from industrial capitalist countries such as the USA, Canada, Norway and Japan was a process that was stimulated "by a gradual worsening of the conditions of valorization in the advanced capitalist societies, together with those existing at the periphery with seemingly endless supplies of low-wage, unorganized labor".¹⁷ This generated the foundations for a process of capital insertion in contexts where the strategy of profit gain was subject to the endogenous conditions of power relations that crossed the (potential) conformation of the territory in relation to an "exogenous space" mostly regulated and difficult to manipulate or accommodate by means of the powers of the business classes. This dialectic of "an inside" and "an outside" of the localization process shaped the subjective conditions of the location.

¹⁵ DELEUZE, G., & GUATARRI, F. I. *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

¹⁶ HELEN, R. & RAMIREZ, P. "Bringing social institutions into global value chain analysis: the case of salmon farming in Chile". *Work, Employment & Society*. vol. 26, no.5, 2012, pp. 789-805.

¹⁷ HENDERSON, Jeffrey. *The Globalisation of High Technology Production*. New York & London: Routledge, 1991.

In this logic of spatial subjection, we must understand space as a set of multiple and heterogeneous social interactions that were carried out over a long time through a permanent construction,¹⁸ which was tied to a global chain of relations of correspondence and synchronization. These would accelerate a “violent destruction” as well as a “creative” construction that accompanied the process of the production of space in capitalism, a new social sphere of the production of life, identity, everyday life, society and culture, i.e. an implicit adaptation and dialectical tension between the relationship of the construction of space and place.

In this dialectic, “place” can be seen not only as a territory, but also as a lived and located experience in connection with new and foreign networks of flows, exchanges and influences as “global senses of place”,¹⁹ where power relationships (conflict, cooperation, discipline, etc.) and social production are contingent and in development. The subjective becomes a complex and uneven process in which space is attached to the *subject-of-capital*, both in its movement and temporality, which involves defining an array of acceleration, adaptation and constant and permanent reformulation by means of the criteria for the sorting, intervention and destruction and creation of the space and the socio-temporal bases of the process of localization.

Worldwide, this trend is reproduced in the process of mergers of transnational capital and the transmission of supply lines and extension of production chains to local levels, toward the formation of productive clusters of a regional nature, where communities and territories constitute organs of the reproduction of a global model of spatial subjection and unequal division of labor that strengthens the abstract nature of capital while it invigorates concrete and contradictory bases of its power.

The logic of dispossession, which we believe operated dramatically in the case of the salmon industry in Chile, marked the transformation of space and the way it was chained or coupled to an international network of exchanges, along with having a profound impact on the redefinition of the

¹⁸ MASSEY, Doreen. *For space*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2005.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

socio-ecological environments, lifestyles, communities and local people.²⁰ From the installation of farms (land and water), to the establishment of processing plants, a logic of modernization and industrialization was brought to the once "peaceful" river towns, composed of indigenous (Huilliche) and peasant populations. These structural processes of transformation, absorption and productive domestication, boosted and mutated the constructions of collective, community and individual identity as part of a complex process of *glocalization*.²¹

The dismantling of "pre-existing" production ties, based on the subsistence economy of family and home, was subject to a transformation of the conditions of reproduction of the whole of life, mainly associated to the time-space cycle of agricultural activity, which constituted the central axis of the conditions for recognition and conformations of sense. This was reinforced by a successful coercive coupling of a certain hybrid and symbiotic transition between activities associated with harvesting and farming cycles that replicated its circular temporality in the production of salmon and aquaculture.²²

The changes introduced by the industry to the cultural, environmental and economic-productive dimensions dynamited the configuration of the "pre-existing" social structure in the constant "boost to accelerate time of rotation and movement of capital and, consequently, revolutionize the horizons of development"²³ of capitalism. This productive-export strategy boosted the Chilean salmon industry to second place in the world in production and

²⁰ Claude, Oporto, Ibanez, Brieva, Espinosa and Arqueros note that "communities of Chiloe have moved away from the land and the subsistence economy, and their habits are changing radically with the advent of farms and processing plants" since "with the rapid industrial development, the workforce of the island, which at first was almost the whole family, has been concentrating on youth, who have abandoned gradually work on their own land, in many cases selling it and working in different types of industries and commerce". *La ineficiencia de la salmonicultura en Chile. Aspectos sociales, económicos y ambientales*. Santiago: Terram, 2000, p. 43-44.

²¹ FLØYSAND, Arnt; BARTON, Jonathan R; ROMÁN, Álvaro. "La doble jerarquía del desarrollo económico y gobierno local en Chile: El caso de la salmonicultura y los municipios chilotes". *Eure*. vol. XXXVI, no. 108, 2010, pp. 123-148. In this study we can observe the process of tension between the global and the local through the fragile and limited role of local institutions in reference to spatial transformation trends.

²² Concerning this phenomenon Cecilia Montero notes that "farming platforms in lakes and inland seas introduced into the sea, lakes and seashores a typical facet of agriculture: sowing, fattening cycles, crops. It was intensified the traffic by land and sea between hatcheries, farms, processing plants and ports."

²³ HARVEY. *Espacios de Esperanza*. *op.cit.*, p. 67.

volume of exports in 2005. This trend was reflected and was the result of the process of re-territorialization that took place in many areas of the periphery and underdeveloped south, following an intensive exploitation of natural and labor resources, the introduction of wage work to women as a mechanism of exploitation (with a redefinition of gender constructions), a transformation of the socio-productive historical activities in the region, a change in the morphology of the space, an apparatus of disciplining and controlling in the workplace and without and in the structure of property and the significance of the relationship to the land.

The extraordinary environmental, geographical and political conditions existing in Chile, were designed to encourage large investments and exports,²⁴ with the lowest production costs in the global industry. And one of the few areas where there could be a rapid geographical and productive expansion through a successful neo-extractive exporter model was the salmon industry in Chile, with a strong transnational component, and the lowest labour, environmental and health standards of this industry on a global level.²⁵

The productive process involved in the salmon industry is related to a series of stages, typical of the salmon life cycle. This process is carried out in different geographical areas and involves different companies, professionals and workers regionally and internationally. The chaining in this level makes clear three central stages in the so-called salmon cluster:

Phase A: the first corresponds to the hatchery, where the eggs, fry and smolt are produced;

Phase B: In the second, there are the farms that receive the goods (or inputs) of the first stage and proceed to farming, weight gaining and harvesting, and;

²⁴ Between 1970 and 1989, the number of exported products rose from 1200 to 1490 and in 1990-2002 rose from 2.300 to 3.750. Regarding to the opening of new markets, we find that the number of destination countries of Chilean exports increased from 31 in 1970 to over 150 in 2002.

²⁵ PINTO, Francisco; KREMERMAN, Marco; PIZARRO, Rodrigo. *Cultivando pobreza. Condiciones laborales en la salmonicultura*. Santiago: Terram Foundation, 2005. MELILLANCA, Patrick & DIAZ, Isabel. *Radiografía de la Industria del Salmón en Chile bajo la mirada de estándares de RSE*. Puerto Montt: Ecoceanos, 2007. www.ecoceanos.cl

Phase C: Finally, there are processing plants that receive the raw material from the second stage (salmon and trout) and add value to the product from different treatments (filleted, smoked, frozen).

The chaining of these phases tends to be linked to international processes and cycles. According to Andrade, "at the global level, we can note the presence of a salmon industry based on the interdependence between companies and local suppliers with transnational companies that are 'global players'. Around the world, the former tend to be reduced numerically, while the second increase their presence."²⁶ Thus, the chain of processes exhibits a logic of interdependencies and a planetary relationship of production, which culminates in holding a space strategically located and selected for its participation in a global, uneven and spatial division of work.

While the industry since its inception has been linked to the bonds of dependency and global exchange, this has been changing gradually, moving to an integrated process of localization and regionalization of production. Due to the acquisition of eggs, which are genetically generated or selected, the industry has been tied to the U.S., Japan, Italy and Norway, as these are the main suppliers and have an extensive history in the scenario of global production as well as experience as the basis of the transnational companies operating in the area. The eggs brought from the headquarters, where were developed through biogenetic research & development, are reared in hatcheries (phase A) and farms (phase B) installed in the southern region of Chile, which was accompanied by transport processes and infrastructure in order to facilitate the mobilization and exchange of goods on a transoceanic level.

Within the context of the acceleration of the global processes of flexible accumulation, the 1980s marked the beginning of the actual development of the Chilean salmon industry, with the multiplication of farms (Phase B), which can be perceived by comparing production figures: at the beginning of the 1980s production reached 80 tons; in 1984 totaled 500 tons; in 1988, 5,500 tons and in 1997 reached 247,970 tons.²⁷ The size of the production and the profit strategy in the sector created the need to develop Phase C of

²⁶ ANDRADE, Estrella Díaz. Transnacionalización de la industria salmonera. Aspectos socio-laborales de un proceso en curso. Santiago: Hexagram e Oxfam, 2003, p.12.

²⁷ This data includes the salmon species: Pacific, Atlantic, King, turbot, rainbow and brown trout.

the production process in higher proportions since the generation and culmination of the value chain, as a *maquiladora*-type process, promoted regional correlation and a more integrated spatial model. This became a strategy of the dissolution of the planetary space of production and a concentration of place as the focus of integration of the overall profitability matrix. Sixty processing plants (2008) were constructed by 2008, which were distributed in 18 communities in the Los Lagos region, and became an important source of employment. In this region, 78% of total Chilean salmon production was concentrated.

Production was integrally linked to changes in the global demand of the food industry such as the systemic pressure in the countries where capital investment originated to generate products in a higher quantity and quality, focusing the industry on a process of acceleration and intensification in the exploitation of geographical, environmental and human resources. The deep export logic of the productive model of the salmon industry managed to position it for the sale of its products at an international level, consolidating the U.S. as its largest buyer, a phenomenon which would be exacerbated by the elimination of tariff barriers through the signing of a free trade agreement between the two countries in 2003.²⁸

Technological efficiency and technical devices were mobilized through studies to determine the economic and technical feasibility of the confined farming of salmon species, which provoked a process of the adaptation of the techniques used in the United States and Scandinavian countries to accelerate the process of Phase B (still dependent on Phase A), as part of a spatial division of labor. The limited transmission of this "know-how" created new mechanisms of international dependence and set up a new modeling device of the space. At the same time, the groundwork for the development of Phase A in the same regional context began, opening the possibility of an integrated cluster at the regional level, generating a new disciplinary framework of emerging institutions (labor courts, fish secretariats , etc..) and of the scientific and technological capabilities related

²⁸ In 2005, total exports were 383,700 tons, reaching a value of U.S. \$1.721 billion. This figure exceeds the values recorded at the beginning of the 1990s. For example, in 1991, there was US\$ 159 million in shipments. In 2010, other estimations were made from 2005 data which placed the value of exports of the sector in this year at around U.S. \$ 2-3 billion. SalmonChile, Salmon Economic Report. Santiago. www.salmonchile.cl, 2005.

to the productive process.²⁹ On the other hand, Phase C formed the basis of an accelerated industrialization, a transformation of working conditions, a more “classic” working-class and a new source of the generation and acceleration of the conditions of integration into the regional chain of production.

The main engine of development of the sector has been investment in physical capital, the provision of an army of non-salaried workers (with the potential to be salaried) and the availability of natural resources, guaranteed by the state and the policy of aquaculture concessions to the industry.³⁰ All of this was to the detriment of the ecosystem and the development of endogenous technological advances.³¹ There is a direct connection here with the problems that the sector has had in continuing its expansionary logic and growth since 2008 in relation to the world productive context, since its strategy of profit generation obviated the requirement of establishing a “sustainable” relationship with the environment through the adoption of “green technologies” and agreements of “clean production”, as well as the refusal to improve its international competitiveness through technological innovation.³² In this regard, it is possible to indicate that the low productivity of work is generally caused by a low level of physical capital per worker, with little effectiveness or introduction of technological advances, but also with low levels of skilled occupations, and lack of skilled workers in Research & Development on the part of the firms.³³ This resulted in outsourcing to universities or independent research centers that were set up on the periphery of the industry as providers of services.

²⁹ Regional Development Institute, Working Paper. “Challenges and Capacities for Science, Technology and Innovation in Aquaculture in Chile”. *Emerging Scientific and Technological Platforms Sectors with growth potential in Chile*. National Innovation Council (CNIC), Santiago, 2009.

³⁰ In July 2005, the Chamber of Deputies released a report on the companies that were asking for concessions in aquaculture in the south of Chile. The multinational Marine Harvest and Pescanova possesses the greatest marine-surface property in Chile through aquaculture concessions, and it continues to request the largest number of these permissions (Annex 3).

³¹ Regional Development Institute, “Challenges and Capacities for Science, Technology and Innovation in Aquaculture in Chile”. *Ibid.*

³² FERNANDEZ, Jorge & BRIONES, Luis. “Estudio de la Cadena Productiva del Salmón, a través de un Análisis Estratégico de Costos”. *Capic Review*, vol.3, 2005, 37p.

³³ Among the main sectors that sell fishing supplies, we find the production of animal food (which is basic in aquaculture, compared to extractive fishing) and business service activities (which includes technical consultancy, computer, accounting and management and advertising services, etc.).

Therefore the subjection of space, as part of the strategy of expansion and growth of the sector, is reflected in the creation of a new "hard-core" concentration and governance of the Chilean industrial entrepreneurial class, which through large increases in profit in two decades and by means of its acquired economic power, would design a new plan of expansion of the industry, and to act as a collective actor in the redefinition of policies and institutions in matters of environmental and labour regulation and control.

This phenomenon of the direct lack of protection of the environment resulted in the comprehensive deregulation of the relationship between capital-labor and capital-nature, which is loaded with an important structural asymmetry. First, the lack of protection, unemployment and vulnerability, which makes work a deeply disciplining practice and second, imposition of a model of indiscriminate growth that enhances the use of water, space, geography and invigorates (and finally detonates) an ecological crisis.

Transforming the work. Localization and precariousness

The emergence of an aquaculture industrial economic activity in a territory such as the province of Chiloé (Annex 4) which did not have an industrial working tradition and a "wage culture"³⁴, is an historical fact having a technological, economic, sociological and cultural interest for the processes of primitive accumulation of capital and dispossession, such as those shown in the homologous trend of the establishment of the neoliberal model in all Latin America.³⁵ This phenomenon completely transformed the socio-productive matrix of the region and constituted one of the strategic bases of the orientation of the localization of production in the area.

Additionally, the localization of the industry involved the positioning and negotiation of the installation of the conditions of production and the relationships and practices between social classes (dominated and dominant), which is captured and synthesized in the process of labor and social insecurity. Its expansion, as a diversification of the phenomena of

³⁴ REBOLLEDO, Loreto. "Resistencia y cambios identitarios en trabajadores/as del salmón en Quellón". *Polis*. vol.31, 2012. <http://polis.revues.org/3714>; DOI: 10.4000/polis.3714

³⁵ ARCEO, Enrique. "El impacto de la globalización en la periferia y las nuevas y viejas formas de la dependencia en América Latina". *Cuadernos del Cendes*, vol. 22, no. 60, 2005, pp. 25-61.

precarious work is directly related to models of organization and regulation of work. This included an institutional framework regarding public policies for employment, and in flexible labor relations systems that seem to expand worldwide, as parts of the consolidation of the diversification of components of the profit strategy and the dynamics of the accumulation of spatial subjection and localization of production of a capitalist class interested in restoring its power bases.³⁶

The emergence of the industry in south of Chile, mainly in the region of Los Lagos, has caused dramatic changes in the labor market, transforming the geography and traditional productive structure of the area, because the presence of the industrial complex has become a pole of attraction for a workforce with low qualifications in this and other regions of the south, encouraging migration processes and (sub) proletarianization³⁷, a floating workforce in a place that was originally an important reservoir of an unskilled labor force.

In 2000, the farms alone provided work for nearly 23,000 people (15,000 in direct jobs and 8,000 in indirect jobs).³⁸ The TERRAM Foundation, a non-governmental organization that works on the issue of sustainable development and public policy, indicates that between 1993 and 2002, direct and indirect jobs in the industry grew by more than 4 times, reaching 45,000 (of which 70% would be direct). By 2006, the figure reached 53,000 jobs with an unemployment rate of 4% at the regional level in the region of Los Lagos, and 4.3% in the Aysen region (Appendix 5).

The characteristics of employment in the sector are related to climatic and seasonal factors as well as cost-cutting strategies, streamlining, organization and the productive adaptation of enterprises to the systemic imperatives of accelerated competition in the global economy. This is how phenomena such as the possibility of employment, more extensive working hours, lower

³⁶ HARVEY. *Breve Historia del Neoliberalismo. op.cit.*

³⁷ ARAVENA, Antonio. "La industria del salmón en Chile: ¿crecimiento social o explotación laboral? *Alternativa*. no. 24. ICAL, Alejandro Lipschutz Sciences Institute: Santiago, Chile, 2006, pp.8-35.

³⁸ CLAUDE, Marcel; PORTO, Jorge; IBÁÑEZ, Ciro; BRIEVA, Lila; ESPINOSA, Consuelo; ARCHERS, Marcela. *La ineficiencia de la salmonicultura en Chile. Aspectos sociales, económicos y ambientales*. Santiago: Terram, 2000. Added to this is an informal sector, which is not included in the official figures, consisting of some 200 farms and freshwater artisanal hatcheries and seawater salmon farms that were operating illegally or with temporary authorizations.

and flexible establishment of wages (Appendix 6), high rates of accidents and mortality, intensification of the rhythms of work and a high infraction of current labor legislation (in comparison with the industry in general at the national level) were reproduced. It thus constituted a strong core of labor precariousness, which is expressed in the instability, insecurity and impoverishment of workers and their working conditions.

Since its inception, the economic and productive expansion of the industry did not imply a strategy of the generation of high-quality jobs or employability and refinement. On the contrary, the focus of local growth was based on the imposition of precarious labour conditions on a population with the potential to be salaried, and to encourage a sustained and intensified process of exploitation of a low-skilled workforce. This situation is captured when contrasted with the evolution of production and the relationship between labor infractions in the sector,³⁹ added to the difficult ergonomic conditions of work, the constant logic of persecution and monitoring of labour union activity, the intensification of workdays, and the policy of the state in promoting recruitment through "social dumping".⁴⁰

The main features of labour infractions in this sector were: a) labour informality; b) Failure to comply with hygiene and safety rules (high levels of moisture and low temperatures, accident statistics, non-delivery of implements for personal protection, among others); c) lack of safe conditions for working under the sea; d) failure to comply with maternity protection rules; and e) anti-union practices.⁴¹

Moreover, working hours tend to exceed 8 hours per day and can be as high as 10 or 12 hours. Then we may add the time for transfer from homes to workplaces, and vice versa, which often may be one or two hours. Workers of this industry are in the group of employees who work most hours nationwide: one of every five workers (22.8%) works more than 50 hours a

³⁹ During the years 2003-2006, a total of 953 scheduled audits were made by the Labour Inspectorate of the Region of Lagos, of which 540 ended with a fine, equivalent to 57, 2% of the audits. MELILLANCA & DÍAZ. *Radiografía de la Industria del Salmón en Chile...op.cit.*

⁴⁰ Dumping is materialized through the subsidy that the Chilean state brings to salmon companies because it hires workers in a region of the country considered an "end zone."

⁴¹ DÍAZ. *Transnacionalización de la industria salmonera. Aspectos socio-laborales de un proceso en curso. op.cit.*

week.⁴² It is thus clear that the length of the work day (extensions, breaks, etc.) assumes a strategic dimension for the creation of value in the sector, and thus a regime of absolute extraction of surplus value is installed, which at the same time generates new forms of coercion, control and consent in the working relationship.

On the other hand, there were different segments of workers who were organized to conform to flexible models of production: a) casual workers constituted a functional group for the various productive needs of the companies and, therefore, its presence is often associated with periods of peak production; b) subcontracting: the outsourcing trend in recent years has meant that workers are at great disadvantage in defining or negotiating their terms and conditions of employment,⁴³; and c) women: processing plants are composed of a 70% female workforce, which speaks to the restructuring of relationships and gender roles, kinship and family in relation to the area of production, together with a subordinated chaining of the "family" as base unit of a previous matrix of production to the core of capitalist relations of production.⁴⁴

Violation of the fragile legislation of 1979 which resulted in reduced labour rights to workers and that was functional to the activity of the company, was an important part of the strategy of the expansion of the sector, with the consequent weakening of workers' organizations and their tools and forms of protest and resistance against business and managerial policies. It is clear that this situation was also marked by the productive transformation and innovation in the sector that atomized and fragmented workspaces and interaction of workers, through of strategies of subcontracting, process automation and outsourcing of production. Thus, flexibility, labour precariousness and the mechanisms of over-exploitation of labour in the processes of productive localization and spatial subjection, as in the case of

⁴² PINTO; KREMERMAN; PIZARRO. *Cultivando pobreza. Condiciones laborales en la salmonicultura. op.cit.*

⁴³ There is a distinction in terms of wages and contracts between plant workers and the subcontracted. While the former can achieve in "leading" companies of the sector, wages of close to 180,000 pesos (U.S. \$ 260), while current studies show that the salaries of outsourced workers are lower than those of regular employees and are located near the minimum wage.

⁴⁴ BRAVO, M. *La cultura chilota y su expresión territorial en el contexto de la globalización de la economía*. Tesis título profesional de Geógrafo. Santiago: Escuela de Geografía, Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo, Universidad de Chile, Chile, 2004.

the salmon industry in Chile, were constituted in the dynamic axes of this new pattern of accumulation.

Conclusions: limits of the transformation

The paradox of the localization process in the salmon industry gave form to a new working class, which began, with difficulty, to impose criteria for collective bargaining and the creation of labour unions as a way to earn higher wages and redefine working conditions. As we know, labour unions have a relative importance in the formation of labour relations, because they are partners against state institutions and companies.

Although union organizations in this sector were formed at different levels and in a hierarchy, and were mostly concentrated in the capital of the region (Puerto Montt with 52 labor unions), it was observed that insufficient cohesion was marshalled to match forces against the corporate actor and to enforce, at all times, labour rights that were instituted in the Labour Code, especially the Subcontracting Act of 2007, and at the same time, move forward in a redefinition of the architecture of the legal framework.

Unfortunately, the union movement focused on the larger industries,⁴⁵ and was accompanied by a crisis of the sector, which was both linked to this new scenario of labour relations (where there are already organizations of workers willing to contest the distribution of profits), and to an ecological crisis in the area, due to the introduction of the ISA virus at the end of 2007,⁴⁶ with an overall loss of investments, coupled with the destruction of farms, limitation of international demand, financial debts and bank losses, and the almost total dismantling of the sector.

⁴⁵ SALINAS, Leonardo. "Transnational Corporations and the Development of Labour Movements: The case of the salmon industry workers in Puerto Montt and Chiloé. Lund University, Faculty of Social Sciences. Master of Science in Global Studies. England, 2011.

⁴⁶ OECD, An Appraisal of the Chilean Fisheries sector. [Online] 2009, http://books.google.de/books?id=LmAS79EdtWEC&pg=PA99&dq=virus+ISA+chile&hl=es&sa=X&ei=i376UK_6B4rVtAaGs4GgAw&ved=0CC4Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=virus%20ISA%20chile&f=false

It is clear that to explain industrial displacement in terms of a "work factor" measured only on the basis of wages and unionization rates has not been entirely satisfactory. This is due to the fact that other complex phenomena also operated and to the complexity of relationships in the process of the localization of production, which we have tried to outline in this text, and which spatially links the relationship between state, capital, labor, social classes and nature, as joint links in the chain of an uneven global-spatial division of work and production.

In this way, localization is posed as a problematic focus for the production of space and the expansion of the limits of capitalism, which generates new questions about the possibilities and the mechanisms of capital *realization*, since the crisis in this industry prompted changes in the matrix and in the productive models, as well as prompting new geographical expansion of capital to the regions of Aysen and Magallanes, in order to maintain growth rates and production volumes.

Overproduction generated serious multi-systemic consequences that must be clearly understood from a regulatory perspective that accounts for the adoption of an indiscriminate and predatory process in social space, which endangered levels of bio-safety and greater powers to environmental and labor institutions, and to civil society in general.

The process of localization, accumulation and insecurity that we have described here as part of the spatial division of work, exhibits new challenges for the action and coordination of the working class in the twenty-first century. The features of labour relationships and fragmentation of work in the area, the creation of a new core of the industrial working class, and changes in productive regulation, produces a new challenge for the construction of workers' organizations and the development of the labour movement on a planetary production scale with a transnational and international strategic logic.

Ethanol workers in Brazil: the other side of wealth

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Introduction

Sugarcane has been in Brazil since Portuguese colonial rule and has gone through various development stages. The country's insertion in the global dynamics of mercantile capitalism in the sixteenth century was as a Portuguese colony, and as a supplier of raw materials and farm products, especially sugarcane, to European countries. Recently, this economic sector has shifted, through state incentives, not to produce sugar, but ethanol, a bio fuel alternative to petroleum. Within this context, the sugar and alcohol sector has been undergoing a restructuring process that involves redefining geographical-spatial production units, and the introduction of new technologies in the production process, which requires new skills from workers. At the same time, a significant number of manual workers in poor working conditions remain at the base of the production chain. In order to better understand this apparent contradiction, an analysis of the dynamics of the development of this sector within the international division of labour and capitalist accumulation becomes fundamentally important.

The article is divided into two parts and the conclusion. The first part overviews the sugarcane sector in Brazil, from its beginnings until today, when the ethanol by-product of cane sugar became an international commodity. The aim is to demonstrate how the sector is going through a restructuring process involving geographic relocation and foreign capital inflow, with adverse implications for local communities and the environment. The second part properly discusses labour within the sector, particularly during the sugarcane harvest, which is marked by seasonality, informality, and poor working conditions.

1.1 – The Brazilian sugar and ethanol agro-industry

The colonization of Brazil started through a system of granting hereditary captaincies, which, when proven ineffective, was replaced by the Sesmarias¹, an allotment regime. The Sesmarias system was imposed by the metropolis, and remained in force for 300 years, and was only repealed in 1822, with the country's independence.² Brazil, as a colony, was characterised by concentrated land ownership, export monoculture, and slave labour. After independence in 1822, the country was under a government controlled by the rural aristocracy, who created the Land Law of 1850, an important strategy of state intervention which hindered the acquisition of lands by former slaves and farm workers.

This period was marked by large rural properties, export-oriented monoculture, and strong state intervention. From the standpoint of the international division of labour, an agrarian economy was constituted, maintaining ties of dependence on the central economies, and entering global capitalism as a supplier of primary commodities.

Within this context, the emergence of the peasantry occurred in two ways. The first was through immigration, as a solution to the problem of a workforce shortage after the abolition of slavery. This process brought millions of poor peasants from Europe to live and work in agriculture, especially in the Southeast and South of the country. The second originated in the crossbred populations between whites, blacks, and natives that were formed during colonization. These were workers who, prevented by the Land Law of 1850 to become smallholders, began a long journey in the countryside, populating it as well other parts of the territory, where they were engaged in subsistence agriculture.³

¹ *Sesmaria* is a Portuguese legal institution, present in legislation since 1375. It regulates the distribution of land for production. This system arose in Portugal during the fourteenth century when an agricultural crisis hit the country. The newly formed state had no skills to organize food production so it decided to bequeath this function to deserving nobles. When the conquest of Brazilian territory became effective from 1530 onwards, the Portuguese state decided to use this system in the colony.

² FURTADO, Celso. *Formação Econômica do Brasil*. 34th Edition. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Cia das Letras, 2000.

³ STEDILE, João Paulo. *A questão agrária no Brasil. O debate tradicional: 1500 – 1960*. São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2005.

The modernization of the Brazilian agrarian economy became more systematic after a model of dependent industrialisation was adopted in 1930, directed by Getúlio Vargas and the industrial bourgeoisie, whose main feature was the subordination of agriculture to industry. It is noteworthy that the association between "modernity" and "agriculture" in Brazil has a long history. It can be ascertained that since the second half of the nineteenth century, proposals for the modernization of rural agriculture or industry had been strongly opposed by a would-be traditional agriculture, or by the traditional practices of agricultural enterprises. This was the case with the replacement of sugar processing mills in the northeast region of the country, which were highly favoured by state governments, claiming the country needed modernisation,⁴ and, in terms of labour relations, with the replacement of slave labour by immigrant wage work.

In the 1950s, the country experienced the impacts of the post Second World War international need for capitalist accumulation⁵ and, in the 1960s, went through the so-called Green Revolution, when third world countries started to play the role of "world storehouses", offering food needed for the reconstruction of war-torn nations. The growth of the sector was strongly driven by the development of sugar exports, especially after the Cuban trade embargo.⁶

During this time, a number of technological changes were introduced to agricultural production, namely, the intensive use of modified seeds (particularly hybrid seeds), industrial inputs (fertilisers and pesticides), and the use of mechanization in planting, irrigation, and harvesting. Such changes brought about the need for the adequacy of the peasant population to the new production model, based on intensive exploitation of labour for extraction of surplus value. At the same time, under the influence of strikes among different categories of urban workers in São Paulo, the different categories of rural workers, such as sharecroppers, tenants, neighbours,

⁴ HEREDIA, B.; PALMEIRA, M.; & LEITE, S. P. "Sociedade e Economia do 'Agronegócio' no Brasil. *RBCS – Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*. São Paulo: Anpocs. vol. 25, n. 74, October 2010, pp.159-196.

⁵ FURTADO, Celso. *Formação Econômica do Brasil*. op.cit.

⁶ CARVALHO, Eduardo. *As transformações Socioterritoriais Do Capital Sucroalcooleiro em Iturama, Pontal Do Triângulo Mineiro*. Unpublished Master's Dissertation, Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, 2008.

comrades, and squatters, started to organize themselves to fight against social inequalities in the country by placing the issue of land concentration and land reform at the centre of the political debate.⁷

Stein⁸ highlights the strong presence of the Brazilian Communist Party – PCB, and of the Catholic Church, in the process of organising farm workers, which culminated in the formation of the Brazilian Farmers and Agricultural Workers Union – ULTAB, and the emergence of the Peasant Leagues, both in 1954. Another important event was the creation of the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers – CONTAG, in 1963. However, these movements were harshly repressed and criminalized with the establishment of the military dictatorship in 1964.⁹

A policy of agricultural modernization began in the 1970s, as the export of agricultural and agribusiness products internationally assumed great importance, and also as capital from different sources, including foreign, was used for such enterprises.¹⁰ In 1975, the PROALCOOL – National Alcohol Program, was created by a Decree-Law in order to stimulate the production of ethanol to replace petroleum, which was popular in the international market. There was an impulse to expand sugarcane planting, replacing rural food production areas, where cassava and beans were produced, for example, and expanding the agricultural frontier into the central areas of Brazil. Three phases of the program deserve special highlight: the first phase, 1975-1979, when the effort to create anhydrous ethanol for blending with gasoline was marked. During the second phase, 1980-1986, the government began to systematically invest in the sector, creating bodies such as the National Alcohol Council – CNAL and the National Alcohol Executive Committee – CENAL, as well as encouraging the manufacture of alcohol-fuelled cars, thus creating a demand for ethanol. The third phase started in the late 1980s and continues today, with the

⁷ SCOPINHO, Rosemeire & VALARELLI, Leandro. Orgs. *Modernização e impactos sociais: o caso da agricultura sucroalcooleira na região de Ribeirão Preto/ SP*. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. FASE, 1995. And STEIN, Leila de Menezes. *Trabalho, círculos operários e política: a construção do sindicato de trabalhadores agrícolas no Brasil (1954 a 1964)*. São Paulo: Annablume/Fapesp, 2008.

⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁹ Military rule began with a coup by the Armed Forces in 1964 and ended with the resumption of democratic government in 1985.

¹⁰ SZMRECSÁNYI, Tamás. *O planejamento da agroindústria canavieira no Brasil (1930 – 1975)*. São Paulo: Hucitec, 1979. And HEREDIA, B.; PALMEIRA, M.; & LEITE, S. P. “Sociedade e Economia do ‘Agronegócio’ no Brasil. *op.cit.*

deregulation of the sector by the state; in other words, when markets, faced with globalization, were opened up for internal and international competition.

It is noteworthy that the modernization policy did not include the issue of land reform. In the 1970s, less than 1% of landowners owned more than half of all rural properties. The agricultural census of 1975 showed that 52% of the country's farms had less than 10 hectares, occupying only 2.8% of all land used. In contrast, 0.8% of the establishments had more than 1000 hectares, occupying 42.6%. That is, land concentration summed up to more than half of the land owned by less than 1% of the owners.¹¹

As changes were disseminated, rural-urban migration processes were intensified, favouring the emergence of temporary farm workers, a category of salaried rural workers working in various fields, but not owning their own land.¹² These workers, largely bereft of labour rights, even migrated to distant regions of the country, and still make up the vast majority employed in sugarcane harvesting today. At the same time, the social forms of rural land occupation were maintained, such as the riverside populations, the Quilombolas,¹³ indigenous peoples, small-scale subsistence farmers, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and settlers who yielded to the most diverse employment contract forms.¹⁴

In this sense, the economic development policies that have stimulated the advancement of industrialisation in the field did not represent an improvement in working conditions and income of the peasant population,

¹¹MARTINS, José Souza. *Expropriação e violência: a questão agrária no campo*. 2nd Edition. São Paulo: Ed. Hucitec, 1982.

¹²SILVA, Maria Ap. Moraes. *Errantes do fim do século*. 2nd Edition. São Paulo: Ed. UNESP, 1999.

¹³ Quilombos were communities formed by runaway black slaves in Brazil during the slavery period. They were also common in other Latin American countries that used such a workforce between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The Brazilian Constitution currently recognises the right of the Quilombolas to inherit the land occupied by their ancestors. However, of the three thousand existing communities, only 200 had their land titles secured by 2008. (CPT, 2008). CPISP – Comissão Pró-Índio de São Paulo – CPISP. <www.cpis.org.br/comunidades/html/i_brasil.html> Accessed February 19, 2013.

¹⁴BESERRA, Luiz. & DAMASCENO, M. N. "Estudos sobre educação rural no Brasil: estado da arte e perspectivas". *Educação e Pesquisa*, v. 30, no. 1., jan.-abr. 2004, pp. 73-89.

but rather contributed instead to their displacement from the rural areas and to an even higher concentration of land ownership.

In the 1980s, the Brazilian government began to redefine its role as an interventionist player in the sugar and alcohol sector. This context was marked by mergers, acquisitions,¹⁵ and intense efforts to standardize ethanol in order to make it a new *commodity*.¹⁶

It is worth mentioning that this period was marked by an intense internationalization and globalization process of economic sectors under the aegis of neoliberalism. The need for capitalist accumulation beyond the limits of the nation state in the late 1970s in the core economies resulted in an expansion process via globalization, aiming to conquer new markets and witnessed the development of complex domination and dependence relations among peoples from different countries and regions.¹⁷

The central features of the globalization process were: (a) greater interpenetration and interdependence of central economies, along with a higher degree of competition, resulting in an enterprise specialisation process, and (b) a new international division of labour that tended to overlap the one based on the exchange between raw materials and manufactured products, developing a division founded in the opposition of industries and sectors.¹⁸

Gereffi¹⁹ proposes a new approach to the analysis of such a world-transforming process, based on the concept of a global commodity chain.

¹⁵ It is noteworthy that six corporations control 85% of the grain market (including Cargill / USA, Mitsui / Japan, and Louis Dreyfus/ France); fifteen control about 90% of the cotton trade, and seven account for about 60 % of the coffee trade. Mark, 2008. MARCOS, Valéria de. "Agricultura e mercado: impasses e perspectivas para o agronegócio e a produção camponesa no campo latino-americano". In: PAULINI, Eliane Tomiasi and FABRINI, João Edmilson. orgs. *Campesinato e territórios em disputa*. São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2008, pp. 191-212.

¹⁶ Goods with little or no degree of industrial processing, such as minerals and agricultural products, are mass-produced and internationally commercialized with prices regulated by the world market through specific stock exchanges.

¹⁷ HARVEY, David. *Condição Pós-Moderna*. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 1998; BIHR, Allan. *Da Grande Noite à Alternativa: o movimento operário europeu em crise*. São Paulo: Ed. Boitempo, 1998.

¹⁸ COX, Kevin R. "Introduction: globalization and Its Politics in Question". In: COX, K. R. ed. *Spaces of Globalization: reasserting the power of the local*. London: Guilford, 1997.

¹⁹ GEREFFI, Gary. "International Trade and Industrial upgrading in the apparel commodity chain". *Journal of International Economics*, vol. 48, no. 1, 1999, pp. 37-70.

The commodity chain approach aims to study global capitalism, and not national development, since the prospects of development of countries are conditioned by the form of its incorporation in global industries. Commodity chains are thus “ties between the successive stages of raw materials supply, manufacturing, distribution, and sales, which result in the final product available for individual consumption”.²⁰ Countries thus enter global commodity chains by providing goods and services to the world economy.

In the case of economically peripheral countries, such as Brazil, the author stresses that these have five major exporter roles:

- a) The export of primary products;
- b) Export processing zones – labour-intensive assembly of manufactured products from simple imported components, typically in foreign factories (the large foreign company is fully responsible for providing the input);
- c) Subcontracting to supply components – manufacturing and exporting components in technologically advanced industries in newly industrialised countries, with final assembly usually conducted in developed countries (the large foreign company is fully responsible for the purchase of the components);
- d) Original equipment manufacturing – manufacturing of finished consumer goods by hired producers, often in domestic factories. The supply of raw materials and the manufacture of the final product are the responsibility of the contractor, and the product is distributed and marketed abroad by large commercial enterprises, foreign retail chains, and brand marketers;

Original brand manufacturing – the final stage of the development of an export economy, as there is a brand-owned establishment that allows exporters a more visible presence among local and foreign retailers.

In light of such categories, it can be said that the impact of globalization on Brazilian agriculture relates to the reconstruction of agricultural product export platforms, geared towards intensifying the primary export model, with emphasis on opportunities for great flexibility in distribution and services that aggregate the product.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

The mechanical innovations introduced in the field had four types of effects: (1) reduced time to perform certain tasks; (2) reduced demand for the workforce employed to carry out these tasks; (3) decrease of the need for resident employees; and (4) introduction of a qualitative change in the demand for workers, as people with higher qualifications and skills are needed, especially tractor drivers, drivers, and agricultural machinery operators. This significantly reduced the sugarcane harvest workforce demand, especially in the southeastern region of the country.

If the main export of the national economy was primary products, in this new context only countries with advanced technology could survive in the international market in light of standardization, quality, and price requirements. Thus, technological investments in agribusinesses now represents a large part of national investment in agricultural production. Given the high levels of land concentration in Brazil, only agricultural exporting sectors, such as soy and sugarcane, benefit from these investments.

Moreover, it should be noted that land ownership enjoyed an intense process of recovery, and became a property with a store of value, which Kageyama²¹ called “capital territorialization”, further accentuating land concentration. With the increase in land value, small production was weak in the face of capital pressures, causing many small farmers to give up their land. It is estimated that thirty million Brazilians traded the countryside for the city in the period between 1960-1980.²²

Until the 1990s, the sugar and alcohol sector was concentrated in the northeastern states, such as Pernambuco and Alagoas, and in the mid-South, especially in the state of São Paulo, the largest producer in the country. There is currently an expansion movement towards other regions in Brazil, such as Goiás, Minas Gerais, and Mato Grosso, but, so far, with little or no representation in this activity. These regions encompass the Cerrado and Pantanal biomes, as well as a large number of populations of indigenous people and Quilombolas. The repossession of these regions implies the replacement of local crops, such as cassava and beans for the domestic

²¹ KAGEYAMA, Angela et al. *O novo padrão agrícola brasileiro: do complexo rural aos complexos agroindustriais*. In: DELGADO, G. C. et al. orgs. *Agricultura e políticas públicas*. Brasília: IPEA, (Series IPEA, 127), 1990, pp. 113 – 223.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 115.

market, by the planting of export-oriented sugarcane. Another consequence of such repossession is the change in the migration process of the workforce employed in the sugarcane harvest. Until the 1980s, the population that migrated to the sugar plantations in São Paulo came from the Jequitinhonha Valley (Minas Gerais) and the northeastern states of Brazil, such as Alagoas, Pernambuco, Piauí, Bahia, and Paraíba. With the relocation of the sector, this migration flow has been altered to suit most crops in the Midwestern region, redefining the land occupation process.

It is worth highlighting that the notion of territory must be understood in the context of power relations, control and forms of resistance from the social groups involved. In this sense, from the late 1990s and especially in the 2000s, the rise of social conflicts in these regions can be clearly seen, as well as the ousting of local populations. In the state of Minas Gerais alone there are about 494 Quilombola communities, and of these, only one had achieved official recognition of their land by 2007.²³

In this context, the state, which acted by regulating prices and production quotas, labour rights, and the relations between mill owners and suppliers, began a process of deregulation, specifically in 1999, introducing the system of free production and marketing of sugarcane, sugar, and alcohol. Despite the sector's deregulation, the state remained present through grants and funding for research on genetic sugarcane improvement, and the implementation and expansion of ethanol production plants. All of this was based on the new international demand, namely, energy alternatives to reduce global warming and environmental problems. The investments from national public funding through the National Bank for Economic and Social Development – BNDES and the Bank for the Development of Minas Gerais – BDMG were very significant. The BNDES, after 2000, started strengthening its credit lines for the sugar and ethanol sector. In May 2012, the bank launched the Sugar and Ethanol Sector Support Program – PASS, in order to finance the storage of ethanol fuel, providing R\$500 million for the sector.

²³ Data from the Federação das Comunidades Quilombolas do Estado de Minas Gerais (CedeFes).

<http://www.cpis.org.br/comunidades/html/brasil/mg/mg_lista_comunidades.html>
Accessed on 19 Feb. 2013.

Table 1 below shows the new momentum the Brazilian government is providing for the cultivation of sugarcane for ethanol production, as of the harvest of 2004/2005. It appears that sugarcane cultivation reached the states of Rondônia and Acre, located in the northern region of the country, thus increasing deforestation of the Amazon rainforest. Note the expansion of cultivation in the state of Minas Gerais, with a 152% increase of the amount of sugarcane tonnage processed in the period from the 2004/2005 until the 2010/2011 harvests.

Table 1: Sugarcane Processed by Brazilian Mills (t) 2004-2011

 SUGARCANE PROCESSED BY BRAZILIAN MILLS (t) 2004-2011							
STATE / HARVEST	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
AC	0	0	0	0			33.834
RO	0	0	0	0	106.292	111.252	136.690
AM	267.767	252.672	224.700	318.141	303.350	211.750	346.992
PA	580.999	510.086	697.400	575.525	626.865	623.409	521.847
TO		95.314	179.300		55.456	45.160	238.983
MA	1.275.119	1.797.490	1.660.300	2.134.604	2.280.160	2.209.385	2.327.485
PI	349.329	492.369	706.000	689.130	900.181	1.014.076	836.696
CE	79.444	40.709	27.400	8.250	122.355	154.471	36.262
RN	2.917.677	2.356.268	2.397.400	2.047.750	3.186.768	3.515.678	2.729.169
PB	5.474.229	4.291.473	5.107.700	5.555.712	5.885.978	6.241.756	5.246.317
PE	16.684.867	13.858.319	15.293.700	17.535.548	18.949.518	18.259.333	16.923.679
AL	26.029.770	22.532.291	23.635.100	29.444.408	27.309.285	24.269.759	28.958.180
SE	1.465.185	1.109.052	1.136.100	1.367.813	1.831.714	1.480.831	2.058.963
BA	2.268.369	2.391.415	2.185.600	2.522.923	2.541.816	2.094.547	2.791.971
NE AND NW REGIONS	57.392.755	49.727.458	53.250.700	62.199.804	64.099.738	60.231.407	63.187.068
MG	21.649.744	24.543.456	29.034.195	35.723.246	42.480.968	50.573.227	54.629.096
ES	3.900.307	3.804.231	2.894.421	3.938.757	4.373.248	4.009.626	3.524.817
RJ	5.638.063	4.799.351	3.445.154	3.831.652	4.018.840	3.258.726	2.092.723
SP	230.280.444	243.767.347	263.870.142	296.313.957	346.292.969	361.260.727	359.438.092

PR	28.997.547	24.808.908	31.994.581	40.369.063	44.829.652	45.578.529	43.320.725
SC	0	0	0	0	0		
RS	77.997	57.976	91.919	128.980	107.184	48.346	81.780
MT	14.447.155	12.335.471	13.179.510	14.928.015	15.283.134	14.045.632	13.660.681
MS	9.700.048	9.037.918	11.635.096	14.869.066	18.090.388	23.111.237	33.519.668
GO	14.006.057	14.559.760	16.140.043	21.082.012	29.486.508	40.075.735	46.612.721
MID-SOUTH REGION	328.697.362	337.714.418	372.285.061	431.184.748	504.962.891	541.961.785	556.880.303
BRAZIL	386.090.117	387.441.876	425.535.761	493.384.552	569.062.629	603.056.367	623.731.376

Source: SIAMIG – Association of Sugar and Ethanol Industries in Minas Gerais (2012).

It is worthwhile highlighting that such production does not happen by itself, but requires a significant seasonal workforce volume. As with all planted areas, workers who manipulate the sugarcane move around the country in search of farm work and temporary income, living in makeshift camps in neighbouring towns. These shifts must be analysed so as to understand the working relationships that are established in the sugarcane cycle, which have singularities that allow for thorough exploitation of the workers.

2.1 – Labour in the sugar and ethanol sector

In Brazil, workers “consent” to migrate due to the absence of work in their native cities. That is, they are forced to migrate to other areas for survival.

The search for agricultural work is rarely accomplished together with one’s family, as was common in Brazil during the 1970s and 1980s, when entire families sought housing and work in the industrialized south-eastern centres.²⁴ The search is generally done by young males who start working with few resources to support them outside their homes. They venture out in precarious transportation, usually with the “father’s blessing”, and transform

²⁴SADER, Emir. *Quando novos personagens entram em cena: experiências e lutas dos trabalhadores da grande São Paulo, 1970-1980*. 3rd edition. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Paz e Terra, 1988, pp. 61-115.

the search for work into a rite of passage to adulthood and financial independence.²⁵

In contrast with the paradigms that the term “migration” usually imply, and as previous research glimpsed at in São Paulo has shown,²⁶ we used the notion of a transitional movement of workers. The living conditions that lead to the search for work comprise the list of production relationships of sugarcane workers, for example. The transition from one place to another generates debts for, among other requirements, transport, food, initial accommodation and medicine. Besides it is clear that seasonal shifting has not been conducive to networking and living in the workplace, as workers spend “some time” living in an improvised manner distant from their families.²⁷

Seasonality, in turn, has moved thousands of people to work in sugarcane production, to harvest oranges, to do reforestation work, and finally, forwards them to rural or even urban work activities, with or without a regulated contract. Thus, workers leave their homes aiming for a quick profitable compensation, but due to the scarce income, they end up constantly moving to other places searching for more work. They follow crop harvests, engage in various activities, move around during certain periods of the year looking for an [often] uncertain occupation as a wage labourer.²⁸

In this respect, it should be noted that the region of the *Triângulo Mineiro*²⁹ in the state of Minas Gerais was one of the areas hardest hit by the expansion of the sugarcane agro industry. In our study, taped interviews were conducted with workers and trade unionists working in this region, trying to understand what qualifications are currently required to work

²⁵ MARTINS, José Souza. “A escravidão nas sociedades contemporânea – A reprodução ampliada anômala do capital e a degradação das relações de trabalho”. In: MARTINS, J. S. *A sociedade vista do abismo: novos estudos sobre exclusão, pobreza e classes sociais*. Petrópolis: Ed.Vozes, 2002, pp. 151-162.

²⁶ DURHAM, Eunice. *A caminho da cidade: a vida rural e a migração para São Paulo*. 2nd edition. São Paulo: Ed. Perspectiva, 1984, pp.19-44.

²⁷ MORAIS, Sergio Paulo & ALMEIDA, Paulo Roberto de. “Em movimento: trabalho em canaviais e trajetórias de trabalhadores no Triângulo Mineiro nas últimas décadas”. *Revista Mundos do Trabalho*. Florianópolis: v. 4, 2012, pp. 146-162.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-152

²⁹ The Triângulo Mineiro region is one of the ten regions of the state of Minas Gerais. It consists of 35 municipalities and 4 microregions. It is located between the rivers Grande and Paranaíba, which form the Paraná River.

cutting sugarcane, an activity that attracts about 70,000 workers to the region.³⁰ The material shows that the hiring done by the contractor derives from a visual assessment, relying only on indications of physical force and "health". In the words of an interviewee:

the "guy" who is coaxing cutters. He goes like [...] He looks at a lad. [The lad puffs up his chest, 'cause he thinks: "this one will give me work"]... If the worker only has a medical clearance, the contractor suspects him – he has to SEE the person. If the lad is weak, he thinks "he won't be able to handle the work [...] cutting sugarcane". Because to handle all the cutting... you have to be mighty healthy. They only choose the big boys of around [...] twenty or thirty, I think. That's it. Because you have to be "tough" to handle all the work. So, it isn't really the doctor who does the exam, it's the coaxers' "eye meter". So, lad's there... [imitates a weak person]: "I wanna go cut sugarcane", he says: "we're already done, mate; we're already full". The big boy's there too, the coaxer says: "gimme your papers", looks at him... so healthy... so, the doctor only really signs the clearance...³¹

Work in sugarcane and unskilled agricultural activity is highlighted by the demand for physical strength and good overall flexibility, as indicated by the "what you have to do" situations which evidently dispense with any requirements of knowledge, expertise, or even previous work experience.

Selection criteria that dispenses skills and experiences, focusing on the strongest and youngest etc., coupled with being in another city, without any resources and looked down on by residents, allow for situations of extreme labour exploitation. Worker flows required for sugarcane regions has strongly impacted bordering towns, plantations and industries, causing

³⁰ ALMEIDA, Paulo Roberto; RESENDE, R. C. & MORAIS, Sérgio Paulo. Interview with Eurípedes Batista Ferreira, President of the Family Farmers and Rural Workers Union in Centralina and Araporã, Minas Gerais, Brazil. *Revista História e Perspectivas*. Uberlândia. n. 41, 2009, pp. 213-227.

³¹ Interview conducted in 2009 from *Histórias, Memórias e Cidadania: Estudo Sobre os Fluxos Migratórios de Trabalhadores para o Triângulo Mineiro nas últimas décadas*. Supported by FAPEMIG – Foundation for Research Support of the State of Minas Gerais (2008-2010).

decreased food supply, the growth of underemployed rural and urban workers, and increased rent values.³²

Such a situation has resulted in several worrying consequences. Many sources indicate a precariousness in housing and the use of urban services (such as hospitals), as well as constant strikes, in which workers fight to receive unpaid wages at the end of their contracts, dispute the criteria for weighing and accounting for the tons of sugarcane cut,³³ die from overwork³⁴ and are even subjected to modern slavery.

Regarding legislation, among all agreements signed between the Federal Public Ministry, the Ministry of Labour, trade unions, and entrepreneurs are the "Contratos de Safra" (Harvest Contracts), created to constrain instances of enslavement of sugarcane workers. Under "Recruitment and Selection of Employees" it reads:

It is advisable that worker recruitment is done in the very region where the farm is located. However, whenever that is not possible due to the shortage of necessary or adequate manpower, worker recruitment in another region or state must occur taking into account some cautionary measures, to avoid future labour and legal problems. The following steps and precautions are suggested: (a) recruitment should be done directly by the prospective employer or through an agent (representative). The use of "contractors" is outlawed, leading, inevitably, to situations of fraud to labour legislation and to legal problems; (b) the employer must arrange the listing of selected workers, identifying them by their Employment and Social Security affiliation number (if not possessing an employment record book), home address (at least the city), detailed information about the function to be performed, the amount of the salary adjusted to the crop in reference, identification of the company / employer, and location. This listing must be made in two copies. One must be delivered to the nearest unit of the Ministry of

³² ALMEIDA, Paulo. Roberto.; RESENDE, R. C. & MORAIS, Sérgio. Paulo. Interview with Eurípedes Batista Ferreira. *op.cit.* p.221.

³³ SOUZA, Andreza Gomes & CLEPS JR., João. "Concentração de poder no agronegócio e (des)territorialização: os impactos da expansão recente do capital sucroalcooleiro no Triângulo Mineiro". *Caminhos de Geografia*. Uberlândia: Ed. Edufu. v. 10, n. 31, Set. 2009, pp. 249-264.

³⁴ ALVES, Francisco. "Porque morram os cortadores de cana?". *Revista Saúde e Sociedade*. USP. São Paulo. V. 15, n. 3, Set.-Dec, 2006, pp. 90-98.

Labour and Employment (state or region of origin of workers), and the receipt must be retained. The duplicate of the list, together with the receipt, shall be checked by Labour Inspection; (c) the transport of workers to the workplace (in a vehicle suitable for carrying passengers), food, lodging, and return transportation, should be borne by the employer, being forbidden any discounts on workers' wages (see Art . 207, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code); (d) people under 18 years of age are prevented from exercising arduous, unhealthy or dangerous rural activities, and people under 16 are forbidden to work; (e) upon offering the job, the employer or agent shall first thoroughly inform the employee what the real working conditions and salary shall be. Thus, the employee should be aware of their workplace, lodgings (if any), employer, amount and form of payment, etc. before starting activities. It should be noted that recruiting workers under false pretence is a crime (see art. 207, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code).³⁵

Based on the Brazilian Penal Code, and not only in labour legislation, the above relates to living space and working conditions, highlighting that it is "advisable" that the workforce be recruited among people living in the vicinity of the crop, something that the dynamics of predatory labour exploitation has avoided. For, as already indicated, transposition, debt, and the flexibility of the economic activity, among other factors in the temporary nature of the seasonal work, have established, on one hand, strong mechanisms of social control and the economic domination of thousands of workers, and, on the other, enhanced profits for mill owners and workforce recruiters.

Thus, reports of large numbers of slaves rescued from sugarcane plantations have been recently reported in the Brazilian press and in studies by various human rights agencies. In 2008, in one sugarcane mill alone, 401 sugarcane workers were found to be working and living in degrading situations. In this and other monocultures, hundreds of other workers were "rescued", because

³⁵Contrato de Safra: *Manual*. Brasília: MTE – Ministério do Trabalho e Emprego / SIT – Secretaria de Inspeção do Trabalho, 2002, pp 20-21.

they were not effectively free to leave the field and had no adequate food and drinking water.³⁶

It is commonplace to find that these plants do not comply with labour laws, for example, and operate with excessive working hours, unpaid overtime, no rest periods, lack of breaks, arbitrary termination of employment contracts, Sunday working hours, irregular protective equipment, and the lack of risk assessment and occupational health and safety measures. Sanitation problems are also common; e.g. unhygienic toilets and substandard accommodation.

In Minas Gerais, the "Memorandum of Intention to Eliminate the Burning of Sugarcane in the Sugar and Ethanol Sector", signed in August 2008 by the sector and the state, indicated the intention to "eliminate fires" and further mechanize the harvest. This would officially mean "environmental benefits, such as reducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, encouraging the use of the straw for energy production, and the sustainable development of the sugar and ethanol sector."³⁷

The mechanization of sugarcane plantations, in theory, would cause a strong decrease in the number of employees in the fields in the coming years. However, the exploitation sometimes found in manual cutting has yet to be changed, for the recurrence of slave conditions on lands planted and cut by machines is still significant, as recorded in Goiatuba, a town near the Triângulo Mineiro:

Thirty-nine workers were rescued under a regime similar to slavery during an operation carried out in the municipalities of Vicentinópolis and Goiatuba. The workers were hired for the harvest and transport of sugarcane, and were submitted to workdays of over 24 uninterrupted hours of exhaustive work. The operation was held between September 27 and October 14, and was headed by the Regional Superintendence of Labour and Employment in Goiás (SRTE), in partnership with the Ministry of Labour (MPT), the Federal Police (PF) and the Federal

³⁶ PYL, Bianca; SANTINI, Daniel; HASHIZUME, Maurício. "Atualizada, 'lista suja' do trabalho escravo chega a 294 nomes". *Repórter Brasil*. 30/12/2011. <<http://www.reporterbrasil.org.br/exibe.php?id=1978>> Accessed 18 April 2012.

³⁷ Secretária de Estado de Agricultura, Pecuária e Abastecimento de Minas Gerais. Agência Minas. Protocolo Regula Queima da Cana-de Açúcar em Minas. 2008. <<http://www.agricultura.mg.gov.br/noticias/719>> Accessed 24 Oct. 2012.

Highway Police (DPRF). The workers occupied roles in mechanized sugarcane harvesting, operating machinery, tractors, and trucks. The property owner had only two teams that took turns in either 12-hour work days (12 hours working and 12 off), or in relay weekly shifts, sometimes in 24 hours shifts (24 hours work and 24 off). Adding up the shift hours of journey, each worker covered from 15 to 27 daily work hours. The working hours exceeded by more than one hundred percent the ones established by law. Currently, every shift worker can work 6 hours a day, and regular, fixed schedule workers, 8 hours daily. Despite earning wages, workers did not get paid overtime or paid weekends. According to the auditors, workers were already feeling the effects of overwork. At least two accidents had taken place on the property, both involving drivers. In one incident, a worker fell asleep on the wheel of a truck loaded with sugarcane. By the time he woke up he had already hit the contour. Working an employee to exhaustion is considered to be analogous to slavery. The labour auditors have issued thirty-nine unemployment insurance applications for each of the workers, who will receive three instalments of a minimum wage each. In addition, they will receive severance payments totalling R\$ 946,000, plus payroll taxes.³⁸

Some researchers have dealt with the issue of slavery in the Brazilian agribusiness³⁹ and others have shown interest in examining the mechanisms and the enforcement actions that have been conducted in different regions of the country.⁴⁰

The problem deserves, however, greater attention from humanities scholars for, as we see it, the "green economy", and other positive attributes resulting from the use of sugarcane as ethanol needs to be analysed from different

³⁸ "Fiscalização resgata 39 pessoas em trabalho escravo em Goiás". *Rede Brasil Atual*. 17/10/2011. <<http://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/trabalho/2011/10/fiscalizacao-resgata-39-pessoas-em-trabalho-escravo-em-goias>> Accessed 12 May 2013.

³⁹ MARTINS, J. S. *Fronteira. A degradação do outro nos confins do humano*. São Paulo: Ed. Hucitec, 1997, p. 30.

⁴⁰ BARELLI, Walter & VILELA, Ruth. "Trabalho Escravo Hoje. Depoimento de Walter Barelli e Ruth Vilela. *Estudos Avançados*. v.14, n. 38, Abril 2000, pp. 78-81. COSTA, Patrícia Trindade Maranhão. *Combatendo o trabalho escravo contemporâneo: o exemplo do Brasil*. ILO – International Labour Organization, Brazil Office. Brasília: Satellite Editors, 2010, p.57.

angles, both academically and politically. A few critics have called attention to dissonance around the "green" environmental element. James Lovelock, the British scientist who formulated the "Gaia Theory", elaborated, in 2006, on the production of bio fuels. According to him,

to produce sugarcane [...] one must either occupy the space devoted to food production, or cut down trees, which help regulate the climate. This is counterproductive. A few years ago, many scientists thought that bio fuel was the right fuel. Now that we know how serious the problem of global warming is, we realise that this is not the best solution. We scientists owe the Brazilian people an apology.⁴¹

In addition, there is still something that needs to be taken into account: namely, the evaluation of economic growth and profit accumulation versus productive relationships that cause impoverishment, deaths, and the enslavement of thousands of workers in Brazil.

3 – Closing remarks

We may say that the pattern of rural development in Brazil has maintained the impossibility of access to the land and severe concentration of land ownership. Such a framework does not encourage poverty reduction and intensifies social exclusion in rural areas. Changes are confined to mechanized harvesting, biotechnology, genetic engineering, and information technology. While these innovations could create new jobs and occupations previously non-existent in rural areas, they involve highly selective workforce recruitment with few prospects for workers with low professional qualifications.

Taking into account the aspects mentioned above, the influence exerted by the old colonial metropolises, the modernization of rural areas, and the encouragement of large agro-businesses are factors that underlie the current condition of Brazil as a commodities exporter. The initial reasons why sugarcane was brought to Brazil kept on being strengthened during the

⁴¹ LOVELOCK, James. In: SILVA, Maria Ap. & MARTINS, Rodrigo Constante. "A Modernidade da Economia Junker à Moda Contemporânea do rural paulista: a degradação social do trabalho e da natureza". *Retratos do trabalho no Brasil*. Uberlândia: Edufu, 2009, pp.279-328.

development of capitalism in the country, maintaining a source of huge profit extraction and an unequal and exclusionary land ownership structure.

The expansion of the sugarcane agribusiness in the Triângulo Mineiro must be observed not as an isolated event, but as part of an agricultural policy that prioritizes the expansion of the sector in a country which is closely integrated in the international labour division.

Piqueteros: The unemployed movement in Argentina. An interview with Nicolás Iñigo Carrera and Maria Celia Cotarelo¹

Interviewers: Alcides Santos, Ana Rajado, Duarte Guerreiro, Raquel Varela

In this interview from October 2012, we cover the origins of the picketers' (piqueteros) movement in Argentina, its social composition and its forms of collective action until the present. We also discuss the research methodology of these two researchers from PIMSA as well as the database that their team has constructed for almost two decades on Argentinian social movements that has already registered around 30,000 conflicts.

How did the picketers' movement arise?

Nicolás Iñigo Carrera (NIC): The first thing you need to take into account is that in Argentina the workers' and popular movements have been very strong since the beginning of the twentieth century. When the recession began at the end of the 1990s, more or less 1998, and then exploded in 2000 and 2001, thousands of unemployed workers began to appear, many of whom had union experience that they transmitted to these unemployed organizations. The unemployed organizations are led by the same people who had been union representatives or on workers' commission before and included in some cases union leaders. This is one dimension that I should

¹ Nicolás Iñigo Carrera and Maria Celia Cotarelo are researchers from PIMSA – The Program of Investigation about the Movement of Argentinian Society (Programa de Investigación sobre el Movimiento de la Sociedad Argentina), a member of the International Association of Strikes and Social Conflicts.

emphasize. That is, the picketers' movement had substantial previous experience of union organization.

The other dimension is the organization of the residents of poor neighbourhoods, the "tin can neighbourhoods", that also had a long tradition since the 1970s. These neighbourhoods were severely repressed by the dictatorship from 1976 onwards. More or less from the start of the 1980s, a phenomenon began which may be called land occupations – people who had no home to live in began to occupy empty lots. Nowadays these areas are not exactly "tin can neighbourhoods", but brick houses, even though they are very poor. In this social fraction, unemployment was always high with much precariousness, much instability.

Maria Celia Cotarelo (MCC): I should add something: the organization of the homeless began exactly in 1998, 1999 and 2000. This relates to what Nicolas just affirmed, the experience of union organization as much as the organization of poor peoples' movements, but it was also due to certain processes of collective action, street mobilizations, which initially consisted of road blocks, which would act as triggers. Take for example the roadblocks in the province of Neuquén, in the city of Cutral Có, in 1996 and 1997.

But how did the first actions arise?

MCC: Cutral Có, in 1996, was the first roadblock with a national impact (there were others before, but they remained local). It began with a complaint about the installation of a foreign company, Agrium, in the Cutral Có zone. The installation was delayed by political questions with the provincial government and it was hoped that it would be a source of work for all the workers who had become unemployed after the privatization of the oil company YPF. In the protest, the unemployed and teachers participated as well as businesspersons who also hoped for the reactivation of activity after the installation of the company. There were up to 20, 000 people on the roadblock. Police were mobilized, but the mobilization was so massive that they retreated. The judge who ordered the dispersal said that it was too much, a riot, a crime against the security of the state. So they made an agreement with the provincial government, that included: the sending of clothes and food; the reestablishment of gas and electricity for those who had it cut because they couldn't pay; the installation of companies that would generate employment; the creation of schools and a hospital; paving of the street, credit for local businesspeople.

But how did this first protest get started?

NIC: I think that the case of Cutral Có is exemplary and similar to what occurred in other places. The people were unemployed, a commission was formed by the unemployed (which could be with the support of a union or not). In Salta, in the Mosconi-Tartagal zone, the protest was very radical with a massive roadblock. There were also ex-oil workers who organized because they were left unemployed, promised severance payments and, in some cases received severance. But later they realized they had no work.

In this case, the leading core had previous experience – the oil workers – but spontaneous leaders also arose, natural leaders. In Cutral Có there was a professor and a worker who had no previous experience. Afterwards, left-wing parties also intervened.

The case of Jujuy is different because there were two unions: the municipal employees' union, who had a left-wing leadership, and the state workers' union who had a left-wing Peronist leadership. In this case, it was the unions who convoked the unemployed to the marches.

There is another case in the province of Jujuy, in a city called Libertador General San Martín, where there is a sugar-cane mill. There were also many unemployed there and a small group of militants and the unemployed initiated a roadblock. The police attacked us, even houses, neighborhoods, but instead of retreating, fleeing, the majority of the city joined the mobilization.

How was this constructed? There was a very great transformation in Argentina from a European welfare state, which gave support to people, to a situation increasingly worse after the 1976 coup and afterwards with the return of a democratic regime this was not resolved. There was much lingering anger, we believe. And people protested because really there was no other alternative. Historically, the rate of unemployment, since statistics began (in the 1960s) was between 3 and 6% (the historical maximum). In 2000, in an economically active population of 10 or 11 million, unemployment was 12% and then increased to 22%. In the middle of the 1990s, when neoliberal politics began to be strongly felt, unemployment was 16, 17, 18%, and declined afterwards to 12% - even so, it was double the previous historical maximum (6%). When the 2001 crisis blew up, it reached 22%.

The emblematic tactic of the picketers is the roadblock. Has this tactic damaged the public image of these groups in relation to other sectors of the population? Have other forms of action arisen?

NIC: Let me make a correction. Roadblocks are instruments that everybody uses. Not only the unemployed or the picketers, but also employed workers. There is a tradition of roadblocks. Also small rural proprietors, who are small capitalists, truck drivers, students. For students, the roadblock is banal. That is, the roadblock is an old Argentinian tradition. In the database that we constructed, from December 1993 until today, employed workers most used the roadblocks before 2001.

How is the labour force composed?

Currently the active population reaches approximately 46% of the population of 14 years or older. The population employed in an informal manner (work without rights and/or taxes) is around 36% of the active population, but during the crisis reached 50%. During the crisis, unemployment reached an historical high of 22% and for the underemployed was around 20%; it began to fall after 2003 and today the unemployment rate as well as underemployment is in the order of 7% each. But, it must be taken into account that an important volume of the population that appears as employed is in fact in social programs financed by the government or occupies posts in the state apparatus doing unnecessary work and there are even those who are employed in private companies, but receive salaries from the state. But what appears more important to us than the unemployment rate is the existence of a relative super population, that is, the population who are in excess for capital, that could appear as employed, but for capital are superfluous. It is also important to note that a part of salaried employees, since the neoliberal politics of the 1990s, have become contracted out, that is, employed in subcontracted companies of big companies, in worse conditions. As a result, for the same task, there could be two workers with different conditions and salaries.

How do the unemployed live? Do they have some type of support?

NIC: At the beginning no. In Argentina, there is unemployment insurance that practically nobody uses, or before nobody used, because there was no tradition of using it.

MCC: Because it was for workers with a certain seniority, and for formal work, and therefore there were few with the conditions to receive it.

NIC: And therefore, when they organized roadblocks, they begin to demand some type of assistance, for support from the national, provincial or municipal government.

MCC: Actually, in the beginning they demanded jobs...

NIC: Yes, that's true.

MCC: The demand for assistance came later, around 2000, 2001.

NIC: First, the demand was "we want work". Then it went jointly with "we want state support". When the protests in the form of roadblocks began, in 2000, in Buenos Aires, South Zone, which is the most popular, poorest, and they organized a big roadblock, then they began to give support. But in exchange for work, that is, they had to do some kind of work to receive support. In reality, this work ended up being for the municipality and, many times, it was never even done.

But was there an obligation to work a certain number of hours?

NIC: Theoretically yes. In practice, no.

MCC: What happened is that the question of the demand for work began to be organized within the unemployed organizations, as they consolidated. In the micro-businesses that were developing, which is the case of community canteens, in seamstress' shops, in bakeries, everything that they were developing as a source of autonomous work.

For subsistence...

MCC: Exactly.

NIC: For subsistence and sometimes to sell. Why? Responding to the question "How did people come together? People joined together to protest, even before support existed. And afterwards they began to organize themselves.

In the case of Jujuy, there is an organization that began as the unemployed and at that moment had 70 thousand members, and it is the third largest employer in the province: the first is the provincial state, the second a very large private company, which we already referred to, which has the sugar-cane mill, and then there is this organization called TupacAmaru.

How do they organize themselves? They did something called “cup of milk”. They went to shop owners or others who had a bit of money, asked for donations of milk and organized a canteen for the children, to which they gave milk and bread. This kept growing and the “cup of milk” was converted into a restaurant and then they served lunch and dinner. Another thing that they did was the “clothers”: they asked for used and old clothing which they then fixed up and then sold cheap after. This was another form of getting people together.

All this happened simultaneously with political formation. This generated a great discussion. The groups affirm that political formation was a success, but this seems very relative to me.

Why do you think the success was relative?

NIC: Because several of these same organizers told us that the majority went for food. But that doesn’t mean that it was not also for political formation.

Which political organizations were involved in this movement?

NIC: At the national level, there were dozens of organizations. In general, they were from the Marxist left or the Peronist left. In Argentina, there are dozens of left-wing organizations. Almost all the political organizations that were in the picketers’ movement were divided, whether around the polemics in the face of the Kirchner government or because the local government favored one group in detriment to another.

With all these tendencies, how did they organize themselves?

NIC: In some cases, they made agreements. In many cases, leaders arose from the same mobilization and they became close to some political organizations. But in general one organization predominated in a determined place. For example, in Jujuy, at the beginning of the picketers’ movement, the CCC, the Classist and Combative Current, which was Maoist, predominated, that is, the leaders came from Maoism. After the first stage, with much support of the government to TupacAmaru, which comes from a more nationalist, indigenous and Peronist current, the CTA arose, the Argentinian Workers’ Central, which is a progressive version of Peronism. They were linked through their ideological origins to social Christianity, to social democracy, which afterwards took on an indigenous character since

there are many indigenous people in Jujuy. At this moment, the CCC and the TupacAmaru began to function as allies. They mobilized together. But there was always one that predominated.

MCC: For example, in Greater Buenos Aires, there are different organizations in the same neighborhoods, or different organizations in contiguous neighborhoods, each one with its own members and they have never been able to construct a general organization with different groupings. But there are moments, which I believe came from the increase in struggle, where they were able to achieve unity in action. And then they had assemblies with representatives from different organizations where they discussed documents or types of protests. Generally they live in harmony in the neighborhoods. To the contrary to what happens in the union movement where this is an intense internal struggle, very strong, this never happened in the picketers' movement.

NIC: But there is an interesting thing: as the Kirchner government was advancing, there were more and more organizations linked to the politics of the government. However, every time there was an attack on the picketers' movement (for example, from the police), they always agreed to respond collectively, which is still maintained. As much as they fight amongst themselves, when it's necessary, they united to fight attacks against the picketers. We have tried to confirm if there is some form of perceiving the differences in the structural position of the distinct actors mobilized by the different movements. That is, if it was possible to see if one determined organization mobilized a particular type of unemployed, and if another mobilized another type. But we didn't identify anything. They're very homogenous.

MCC: We would even have to see if we can talk of 10% of the unemployed organized in this form. The majority are not organized and there is an enormous quantity that are organized by the church, in parochial canteens, and other who are organized by political leaders, particularly from the Peronist party, and from the right-wing.

NIC: Yes, when we speak of the picketer's movement, it is important to understand that we are talking of 10% of the unemployed.

MCC: But they have acquired a very important political weight, which doesn't happen when they are organized by the church or by the parties, by the parties of the regime.

So what distinguishes the picketers from other unemployed people?

MCC: Their form of organization, their appeal to mobilization and the street actions that achieve their objectives. Even those linked to the government can sometimes do these. The unemployed who receive aid or food from the church and the political chiefs do not mobilize on the streets. Also in their discourse: the militants of the unemployed organizations defend social emancipation and in some organizations they support the installation of new social and human relations, demand more horizontal decision-making in assemblies, not vertical as in the church and with the politicians. That is, there is a possible, different, construction.

What were politics that the picketers had in terms of the question of public debt?

NIC: This was a common flag of all the organizations. Now our doubt is how many people mobilized against payment of the debt and how many mobilized for a cup of milk or a plate of food. In confidence, the leaders recognized that many people – but not all – came for the food. However, this was creating a reserve of anti-imperialist struggle, which the discourse of Kirchner later took on as its own.

What was the educational level of picketers?

NIC: Among the militants there are some with university origins and others from working-class backgrounds, but not from the poorest sections. In some exceptional cases, there are priests. The base is more heterogeneous and could have elementary school and, less, secondary education. In general, they were poor, very poor. The example of the TupacAmaru organization is impressive, some come from a lumpen origin, young, poor, thieves and drug addicts, who left these activities to become militants.

Are there middle-class sectors involved with the picketers?

NIC: At the moment of the gravest part of the crisis, there was sympathy. But this only lasted 6 months...

MCC: In 2002, after the fall of the government in 2001, in summer, there was a slogan: “picket and casserole: it’s one struggle only”. The pickets were an instrument of the unemployed, the casseroles of the middle class [protests where participants bang pots and pans]. They mobilized together. Unemployed marches came from greater Buenos Aires to the center, and the

casserole protesters received us with breakfast since we arrived really tired. There were various shows of solidarity. In the neighborhood, vicinity and popular assemblies (the three different names because they were known as such), integrated by the middle class, they discussed the politics of job creation and approximated the unemployed. But in June 2002, when an incident happened at Puente Pueyrredón where the police killed 2 picketers, Kosteki and Santillán, the fracture increased between the picketers and the middle class. At this point, a climate of isolation of the picketers had already been created which made repression possible. Even if in the following days there was a great repudiation of the repression, their paths had already diverged.

Why did the “middle class” and the picketers split?

NIC: I think there are two elements. One is historical: the fear of the poor on the part of the middle class. The other is that there was a very strong campaign by the means of communication, from the government, from all the organizations of the establishment against the roadblock as an instrument. They said they were poor, that they didn't want to work and they wanted assistance to not work. Or they said that the demands were legitimate, but the methods were wrong because they shouldn't block roads.

But did the government, in some form, privilege the middle class?

NIC: It doesn't appear to me. After getting out of the crisis, the middle class quickly found themselves in a better situation than the poor. In addition to government policies, you have to take into account economic cycles. At the worst moment of the crisis, everybody was bad off. But when the recovery began, those who had some property, some business, quickly began to orient themselves. However, the poorest, if they had no assistance or the cooperatives that they constructed, really had no place to go. I believe that it is similar to what happens in Europe today. It's that a great part of the population has no part in the capitalist economy. It doesn't matter what they do. They say that they have to invest more. But more investment implies more technology. But more technology expels workers. So more capitalist investment implies less work. So, this mass of poor people has no other choice if not assistance, state employment as a public servant with nothing to do. In Argentina, there are folkloric examples such as the health clinic that has one nurse and eighteen other staff, in which it is clear that the eighteen workers don't work because they don't even go to the workplace.

In Chaco province, where we also went to research, one day, a person from the unemployed movement had calculated how many workers appeared as employed people in the central building of the provincial government...and they said that if one day all of them arrived to work, on this same day the building would collapse...because it could not stand such weight. These are also hidden forms of a relative excess population, an industrial reserve army.

In your opinion, does the mobilization of the population depend more on the efforts of the population that is furious or more on the social assistance programs of the picketers' movement?

NIC: It's a combination of these two things. It begins with revolt. It begins with rebellion because at this moment there is no support. In the first roadblocks in 1996, 1997 and 1998, the response was repression. In 1997, the first concessions began, which were not effectively delivered. When state intervention increased through social assistance, the picketer's movement increased.

Because people see in the movement a form of social assistance...

NIC: Of course. And it's this that demobilizes the picketers' movement. Because in relation to the Kirchner government, the organizations that established a good relationship with the government received much assistance, while the organizations that, for ideological or political reasons, did not want to negotiate with the government or did not want to establish a relationship of support for the government, began to lose people since people go where there is assistance. All the organizations of the left that didn't negotiate with the government said that, in any case, they won and grew. It's possible. But they grew up to a certain point.

Let's return to the demands: when were they advanced? What were the demands?

NIC: Initially, they demanded work. Later, assistance (or plans for assistance) and food packages. They also demanded materials to build houses. Sometimes, land so that they could build houses.

MCC: Later, more political demands: non-payment of the external debt, rupture with the IMF, which unified all groups. In 2002, during the Duhalde government, and even later during the Kirchner government, there were

differences that led to fragmentation, initially between the two big groups: those who supported the government and those that didn't. And in this situation there was no possibility of consensus. There was a group of organizations that were interested in considering social assistance, which we referred to, and another group, that in general was linked to a left-wing party, that included demands against the government.

Before receiving social assistance from the government, how did they organize? Where did the money from the first actions come from? How did they begin?

NIC: They functioned almost without money. They functioned with donations. Depending on the place, they functioned with some sector of the church. Sometimes, with the support of some political sector.

MCC: Depends on the place. For example, in Jujuy, when there was no social assistance, they were sustained by the Union of Municipal Workers and the Union of State Workers. In Cutral Có, the first roadblock had the support of a sector of the government party, of their provincial party, from the Neuquén Popular Movement and they were on the side of the opposition to the government. But gradually this support was withdrawn as the protest radicalized, especially with the intervention of adolescents, of young people considered marginal.

NIC: But it's what they used to say before. There is an old tradition [in Argentina]. You go to the baker and say to him: "tomorrow you won't be able to sell the bread that you have tonight, why don't you give it to me because we have none."

The picketers have had a great political impact in the principal countries of Latin America. How did they achieve such a dynamic that resulted in four presidents resigning in such a short period?

NIC: They had the help of the presidents! And you can't just reduce this to the picketers' movement. It was a much, much wider mobilization. Various things came together. The fall of De La Rúa expressed the great general discontent with his politics that had been carried over from the discontent with the politics of Menem, neoliberal politics. When elections were held in 1999 and De La Rúa won, the three most voted candidates (who together obtained 90% of votes) said that they wanted to maintain the economic plan of Cavallo and Menem (convertibility of the *peso*). At this moment, there

was discontentment with the results, but there were still no roadblocks. Moreover, De La Rúa presented himself as one who proceed with the same politics, but with honesty, without corruption. But the first thing he did was bribe senators so that they would vote for a work flexibilization law. This produced a very rapid loss of prestige. It's clear that he was an incapable politician!

But to this generalized discontent it must be added the fact that the Justicialist Party (JP), Peronist, had decided to put an end to his mandate and so there was a plot. They also had a network that participated in the 2001 mobilizations. What was said, and it's true, is that Duhalde, who was the president who succeeded him, was involved in the plot to remove De La Rúa. The sequence was: De La Rúa fell due to discontentment and the plot; Rodriguez Saa fell because he was not able to gain the support of the JP since there was an internal struggle within the JP to see who could take the reins and who led this was Duhalde; Duhalde appears with the idea of achieving what was lacking in De La Rue's mandate, but begins to perceive when he can repress, because since December, or a little before, since July 2001 until March 2002, there were demonstrations every day for different motives with people banging on pots, people marching, in the morning, afternoon, night...the banks were boarded up with metal protectors because if not people would destroy them. Politicians could not go out in the streets. If they saw a known politician on the street, they would beat them. Because of this they began to see how to disarticulate this pressure. Sometimes, giving concessions, other times, repressing.

How did governments act with the leaders of the picketers? Was there the classic tactic of cooptation of the leaders?

NIC: This also happened. But there was so much mobilization on the streets that there was little space for this. This was clear in some of the roadblocks in Jujuy. In the assemblies of the unemployed, they elected a representative who went to negotiate with the government who ended up giving him a series of things but when he returned, they threw him out and put in another because they were not happy with what they had been given. This happened a lot. Now when the street mobilizations were at their peak, between July 2001 and March 20002, the government began, on the one hand, to give assistance, and, on the other, to repress. In June 2002, there was a roadblock which cut off all access to the capital. And in one of the access routes, Puente Pueyrredón, which runs all the way from the south, which is the poorest and most popular zone, they sent police, gendarmes and federal police to repress it. In the repression, they killed two picketers from the

Movement of Unemployed Workers (MTD) and tried to manipulate and hide the fact that they had killed them. This was denounced in photographs. With the appearance of these photographs, the lack of credibility was so great that it generated a mobilization of 50 thousand people. And it was then that Duhalde said he would call elections and so did not achieve his project which would have to wait until the end of 2003.

We're dealing here with a moment of very great mobilizations. But even so there were two things which were missing, I believe: the first is a political strategy (not even revolutionary because in this case we have to compare the world and Argentina as it was 40 years ago...there was an abyss since 40 years ago questions of revolutionary strategy were on the table whereas today nobody sees this possibility since it is absolutely out of the question). The other is that the regime of domination – liberal democracy – reacts with plasticity: they concede on some points, call elections and receive the support of the political parties, of the business organizations, of the union movement, of human rights organizations, of the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish churches, of consumer organizations, that is, from the trenches of the regime. They activated an Argentinian Dialogue Forum in which all organizations participated.

What are the factors that determined the retreat of the movement?

Argentina has a tradition of street mobilization that shows signs of insurrection. And in 2001 this is what happened. And, in fact, with the Kirchner government, they were able to neutralize in great part many of these movements, accepting the demands of the picketers' movement and putting them in practice: reactivation of the economy, a great cut in the debt payment, and plenty of social assistance. Unemployment was reduced from 22% in 2001 to 7% today. Even if this includes the employed with government assistance (2%). There is economic activity. The country recovered. It recuperated with a policy of job creation, a more protectionist trade policy, the obligation to produce determined products in Argentina. On the other hand, the relation that the Kirchner government established with the most important unemployed organizations resulted in almost all of them ending up supporting the government. In the same way as almost the whole union movement, the human rights movement.

What were the methods you used in your research?

NIC: At PIMSA we investigated two large areas, totally interlinked: the movement of the economic structures of society (understood as a relation of objective forces with a disposition of forces) and social conflict, that brought on shifts in these structures. Specifically about the conflicts of the 1990s and the beginning of the next decade, we investigated each of the most important events (vulgarly known as the *Santiagazo*, *Cutralcazo*, *Jujeñazo*, Plaza de la Dignidad en Corrientes and general strikes) culminating in the investigation of the insurrection of December 2001, which some call the *Argentinazo*. Our method consisted of a minute description of the facts to analyze them in terms of the confrontation of social forces (alliances), aiming to construct periodizations from the indicators of unity or fracture of political cadres and of classes and of degrees of alliance or separation. These investigations of concrete cases were carried out with information collected from our database.

Tell us a little about your database

MCC: Since the end of 1993, we have registered in a systematic and standardized form (through a code) all the “facts of rebellion”, that is, every fact that implies a retreat from an existing situation, realized by a collective subject (in the sense of the demands that they made and not the quantity of people) published in the four principal national daily papers (even though they are edited in Buenos Aires). The variables we used are: place, date, fact, who organized it, type of organization, who they organized against, their objectives, the support they received, the duration, the intervention or not of the police and other opponents, if there was a street action or not, number of deaths, number of wounded or arrested the immediate result (triumph or defeat). Up until now we have registered more than 30 thousand acts of rebellion.

With this data we analyzed the tendencies of the period, above all in relation to those who where the principal subjects of the rebellion, what instruments of struggle they used, what type of organization they built and what were the objectives. Some of the results are available on the site of PIMSA www.pimsa.secyt.gov.ar

Thanks!

Abstracts

European workers between order and revolt. Labourers in feudal society (eleventh to the thirteenth century)

Mathieu Arnoux

The well-known "Three Orders scheme", which was from the twelfth century and served as a model for the feudal societies of northern Europe has been thus far commented on from the point of view of the rulers, ecclesiastical and seigniorial. The paper aims to reappraise it from the point of view of the third order: the workers. Far from bringing evidence of an irresistible process of domination, the author emphasizes evidence of a conflictual situation, where the peaceful organization of the orders was constructed through symbolic and actual compensations. This process of settlement of a major social struggle made possible a first stage of the "industrious revolution" and a long trend of economic growth in Europe.

Italian transnational fluxes of labour and the changing of labour relations in the Horn of Africa, 1935-1939

Stefano Bellucci

Italian colonialism in Africa reached its dramatic peak during the Fascist invasion and occupation of Ethiopia and the creation of Italian East Africa (AOI). Labour is a critical factor, distinguishing Italian colonialism from that of other European powers. In a few years, from 1935 to 1939, workers from Italy poured into the so-called AOI. More than 150,000 workers arrived as immigrants in this region of Africa, only to repatriate a few short years later. This enormous movement of labour – in-flux and out-flux of Italian workers – represents an interesting case in global labour history: it was transnational in nature, and changed the nature of labour in the Horn of Africa, introducing into the region the capitalist mode of production based on wage labour. Some cases of hybridisation in labour relations were also formed, and this paper seeks to analyse these transformations as well as the connections between different labour regimes and workers from diverse regions of the world, which are at the basis of the social and economic transformation of the people in the Horn of Africa.

Forgiving the factory. The trial of Marghera and the memory of twentieth century industrialization

Laura Cerasi

This article deals with the importance of memory for the study of de-industrialization and its consequences, focusing on the industrial site of Porto Marghera, the area surrounding the historical city of Venice, which can be acknowledged as a representative of those large-scale sites of heavy industry whose rise and subsequent decline has marked the history of Italian “Fordism”. By giving attention to the spatial dimension of memory and representation, this contribution points out the controversial relationship between the factory and the city that has emerged as a key feature of twentieth-century modernization in the Venetian area, triggered by an important trial held against the management of the main factory of the area. Eventually, it is argued that this “criminalization” of twentieth-century industrial history bears a profound analogy with the pattern of collective remembrance of war.

Gulag and Laogai: Ideology, economics and the dynamics of space and scale.

Sanne Deckwitz

The main purpose of this article is to start a conversation about comparing the Communist forced labour camps in the Soviet Union and China: gulag and laogai. More specifically, this article deals with the ideological and economic functions that the gulag and the laogai had within Soviet and Chinese society at large. Other than giving priority to ideological considerations on the one hand or economic interests on the other, a more flexible understanding of these components is put forward. Finally, this article will show how both functions related to the dynamics of space and scale, particularly concerning the localization of the camps, conflicting interests of central and local authorities, and social relations between prisoners and non-prisoners.

What can we find in Augusto’s trunk? About little things and global labour history

Henrique Espada Lima

The main purpose of this article is to discuss the possible congruencies between a global and a micro-analytical perspective taking the large field of

labor history as a privileged standpoint. The story of the “liberated african” Augusto, who lived and worked in the Island of Santa Catarina in Southern Brazil in the mid-nineteenth century, is connected to the current debate on the emergence of Global History, exploring the tension between the demand for a “Big Picture” and the close analysis of singular cases such as his, as well as the place that his story might occupy in a larger discussion of the history of labor.

Transforming place, work and society. The industrial aquaculture sector in Southern Chile

Dasten Alfonso Julián Vejar

The transformation of Southern Chile, through the installation of the salmon industry, is a predatory and contradictory process that is ongoing. In this article we explain how the process of the localization of production in the southern Chile, in a broad sense, was articulated as a strategy of labor precariousness and an ecosystem degradation, which ultimately dynamized its own crisis in 2009. Here we see the consequences and implications of this process from the perspective of the spatial division of labor and labor precariousness.

Industriousness in an imperial economy. Delineating new research on colonial connections and household labour relations in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies.

Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk

This article delineates new research on the entangled histories of household labour, particularly women’s and children’s work, in the Netherlands and its colonies on Java. It offers suggestions for future empirical studies and how we may disentangle the workings of colonial connections on labour relations. A first analysis of the debates on Dutch and Javanese women’s and children’s work shows many ambivalences and tensions, for instance, between ideology and practice. Despite the ideal of the male breadwinner in the Netherlands, many married women and children still worked in the first half of the twentieth century. Regarding Javanese women and children too, we can discern tensions between the attempts on the one hand to “Westernize” them, and introduce the ideal of domesticity. On the other hand, inherent differences between Dutch and Indonesian women and children were stressed. This “grammar of difference” helped justify why

Dutch women and children should not perform (heavy) labour and why their Javanese counterparts could indeed perform it.

Towards a history of the convict labour system in the 19th century Cape.

Nigel Penn

From the 1840s onwards an extensive and well-regulated system of convict labour was instituted in the Cape Colony of South Africa. At the time, the system was lauded for both its material achievements – the building of roads and mountain passes – and its reformatory and rehabilitative influence on indigenous criminals. This article seeks to explain that the system had its origins in penal experiments in Australia, rather than Cape conditions. It also seeks to sketch a historiographical approach to writing a history of the convict experience within a system marked by tremendous diversity amongst the convict population and by disparate conditions across time and space.

Ethanol workers in Brazil: The other side of wealth

Fabiane Santana Previtali, Sérgio Paulo Morais, Cilson César Fagiani

The article examines the transformations that the agrarian capitalism in Brazil has been going through, focusing on the sugar and alcohol sector, primarily in the last decades of the twentieth century. The text presents reflections on the migration of the workforce involved in sugarcane farming, especially during the harvest, and shows the persistence of poorly paid manual workers who lack legal rights, which is the predominant reason why the country fits into the globalisation context. Only partial results are presented, because the research is still in progress. The article is divided into two parts and a conclusion. The first part presents the characteristics of the sugar and ethanol sector in Brazil, from its beginnings until today, where ethanol, a by-product of sugarcane, is an international commodity. The aim is to demonstrate how the sector has been restructuring the production process, involving technological innovation, geographic relocation, and foreign capital inflows. The second part discusses labour within the sector, which is marked by seasonality, informality, and poor working conditions, particularly during the sugarcane harvest.

Multiplicity of labour relationships in coastal Karnataka

Nagendra Rao

In the micro study region – South Kanara – there was an emergence of multiple labor relations. A theory of ‘extended subalterns’ has been used to examine this phenomenon. In the pre- modern period, one can note a typical feudal society with its elements such as serfdom and the dependency of workers on masters. A comparison with Gujarat and Kerala, other parts of the western coast of India, has further clarified the argument of the domination of unfree labor. In reality, there was a movement from free labor to unfree labor. The article attempts to go beyond traditional Marxist notions and tools of analysis by showing that free labor did not replace unfree labor. Studies of the global context have enriched the research concerning this region.

Human capital formation in medieval Islam

Maya Shatzmiller

This paper suggests that human capital, together with the division of labour, contributed to economic growth in the Islamic Middle East, from the seventh to the eleventh centuries. Skills and knowledge were transmitted through three mediums: apprenticeship, written professional manuals, and mobility of artisans. The contextual setting of each medium was different. Early formulation of labour law in the case of apprenticeship; the rise in income and standards of living resulting in literacy of the workforce in the case of the manuals; and intensive urbanization in the case of the mobility of artisans.

Workers of the ancient world: analyzing labour in classical antiquity

Arjan Zuiderhoek

This paper introduces, and briefly discusses, some of the main theories that have been formulated on labour relations and the exploitation of labour in classical antiquity. Each of these theories approaches labour from a totalizing perspective, with the market, class, or status taking a central place. As an alternative, it is suggested here that an institutional-economic analysis of ancient labour might be a profitable way forward.

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