

## **New perspectives on global labour history. Introduction**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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 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.

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## KEYWORDS

Global labour history, Origins and key concepts, New perspectives, Free and unfree labour

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 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.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 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-

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 its creation in 1935.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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,

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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).

<sup>3</sup> Information on the IISH can be found in the internet site: [www.iisg.nl](http://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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

notwithstanding his familiarity with Indian culture and history and his fundamental internationalist commitment.<sup>5</sup>

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 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.<sup>6</sup>

The outcomes of that intellectual encounter are visible in the late 1990s works of the IISH researchers.<sup>7</sup> 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,<sup>8</sup> 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

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

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

history of commodified labour and seeks to investigate all its forms on a global scale:<sup>9</sup> wage labour, but also serfdom and slavery, self-employed, domestic and “reproductive” labour and the various forms of subsistence and cooperative labour.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> This, in turn, leads them to

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<sup>9</sup> 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; BRASS, T. and VAN DER LINDEN, M. eds., *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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. “Working at the Ichapur Gunpowder Factory in the 1790s (Part II)”, *Indian Historical Review*, 39, 2, 2012, pp. 251-271.

chronologically expand the 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.<sup>12</sup>

*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 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.<sup>13</sup>

The publications that directly stem from the collective projects provide useful information on the expansion of the network of *Global labour history*, as well

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<sup>12</sup> 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.

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

as on its present limitations.<sup>14</sup> 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 Sefhis programme – first hosted at the IISH and now moving to São Paulo – fosters systematic South-South exchange.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the restructuring 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.<sup>16</sup> 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).

In the last months *Global labour history* has received growing attention in “the West” as well.<sup>17</sup> 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

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<sup>14</sup> 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). [www.sephis.org/](http://www.sephis.org/) [all websites quoted in this article have been accessed on 3 April 2013].

<sup>15</sup> 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.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/sis Slav/>

<sup>17</sup> 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 (Sis Slav) <http://storialavoro.wordpress.com/>

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* (Sislay) 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.

### *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.<sup>18</sup> The related “collective research

<sup>18</sup> 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



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.<sup>19</sup> 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 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.<sup>20</sup> 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

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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.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> 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.

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.<sup>21</sup> The reconceptualization of space that has followed, sometimes referred to as the “spatial turn”, has been presented in its arguably more complete way by the radical geographer Doreen Massey.<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> 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 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.

<sup>22</sup> 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.

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.<sup>23</sup> 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 that the national framework is denied the exclusive status it held in traditional historiography.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup> 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

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

<sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> 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.*

Francesca Trivellato has named “global history on a small scale”<sup>26</sup>, 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 relations and connections that are co-extensive with the historical phenomenon at stake and with the author’s perspective.

Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk 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”.<sup>27</sup> 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”.<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> 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.*

<sup>28</sup> 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.

Other authors point to different kinds of connections, i.e. those produced by groups and individuals as they moved across the globe. Their perspectives resonate with key arguments put forward by scholars of Global migration history, cross-cultural studies, and transnational and trans-local exchanges.<sup>29</sup> 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 the

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<sup>29</sup> 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.

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”.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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”.<sup>32</sup> In the special issue, Henrique Espada Lima provides a micro-historical perspective on slavery in Brazil, 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

<sup>30</sup> 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).

<sup>31</sup> 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 (Gribaudi) and that “the micro generates the macro” (Rosental).

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

mid-nineteenth century southern Brazil, also resonates with those strands of the literature that have sought to follow “the individuals’ own connections”.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup>

On a different scale, other essays point to the significance of “spatial divisions of labour” *within* the national/imperial level.<sup>35</sup> 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 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.

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<sup>33</sup> 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.

<sup>34</sup> 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.

<sup>35</sup> 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.

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.<sup>36</sup>

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.<sup>37</sup> 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”.<sup>38</sup> Three recent path-breaking volumes, and the publications linked to the platform *Topography of Entanglement. Mapping Medieval Networks* based at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, have convincingly put forward similar arguments, although they have not specifically addressed labour.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> 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](http://www.iisg.nl/research/gmhp.php); [www2.lse.ac.uk/economicHistory/Research/GEHN/Home.aspx](http://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.

<sup>37</sup> See: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/ghcc/> and [http://global.history.ox.ac.uk/?page\\_id=663](http://global.history.ox.ac.uk/?page_id=663)

<sup>38</sup> GERRITSEN. “Scales of a Local”. *op.cit.* p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> 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.



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.<sup>40</sup> 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 argued for the existence of an “integrated labour market” in the early Roman empire.<sup>41</sup> 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 insights<sup>42</sup>, 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*

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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.

<sup>40</sup> 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.

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

<sup>42</sup> [http://www.rsrc.ugent.be/work\\_labor\\_professions](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.

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.<sup>43</sup> This imposes a non-Eurocentric perspective and, in turn, forces scholars of the post-1500 period to question their Eurocentric prejudicial assumptions on “modernity”.

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.<sup>44</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries, by focusing on the rise in human capital through education and training, in the context of a “guildless” society.

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<sup>43</sup> 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://vkc.library.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.

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

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.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> Participants in the 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.<sup>47</sup> 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

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<sup>45</sup> 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).

<sup>46</sup> 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 ULMSCHNEIDER, K., PESTELL, T. eds., *Markets in Early Medieval Europe: Trading and Productive Sites, 650-850*. 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

<sup>47</sup>[http://www.hist.uzh.ch/fachbereiche/mittelalter/oberassistenten/schiel/activities/Slavery\\_Conference2012.html](http://www.hist.uzh.ch/fachbereiche/mittelalter/oberassistenten/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.

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 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

IISH<sup>48</sup>, they seek to integrate it in the broader frame of free and unfree labour relations, while pointing to the specific process of definition of 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.<sup>49</sup> Following the example of Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly's studies,<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> 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].

<sup>49</sup> 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.

<sup>50</sup> 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.

<sup>51</sup> 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.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> 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’”.<sup>54</sup>

This special issue mirrors this feature of *Global labour history*.<sup>55</sup> Virtually all the articles underline the role of workers’ agency and, whilst revealing the

<sup>52</sup> 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.

<sup>53</sup> 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.

<sup>54</sup> VAN DER LINDEN, M. *Het Naderende*. op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>55</sup> 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.

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.





