4. Labour Relations

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4.1. Introductory Remarks*

To better understand the diverse forms of labour relations worldwide, in 2007 the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam set up the Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations. The first phase of this project (2007–2012) involved data mining.¹ A large group of international scholars met during workshops, worked together online, and developed a large number of datasets containing data on the occurrence of all types of labour relations in all parts of the world during five cross sections in time: 1500, 1650, 1800, 1900 (and, for Africa, 1950 too), and 2000, thereby also developing a new taxonomy of labour relations based on a shared set of definitions.² The second phase of the project sets out in search of explanations for shifts in labour relations as well as for the possible patterns observed therein. We look for causes and consequences of shifts in labour relations by looking in depth at possible explanatory factors, such as the role of the state; demography and family patterns; the role of economic institutions; and mechanisms that determine shifts in and out of self-employment.³

Efforts to classify work according to the different human relations involved are not new. The oldest are the distinctions between man and woman, master and servant, and between slave owner and slave. Alongside these distinctions came the no-

* Part of this article is based on the working paper by Karin Hofmeester, Jan Lucassen, Leo Lucassen, Rombert Stapel, and Richard Zijdeman, “The Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations, 1500–2000: Background, Set-Up, Taxonomy, and Applications” (October 2015), available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10622/4OGRAD>.

1 For the data and their accompanying methodological papers, see <https://datasets.socialhistory.org/dataverse/labourrelations>.

2 This project has been made possible by generous grants from the Gerda Henkel Stiftung in Düsseldorf as well as from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and the International Research Centre “Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History” at Humboldt University in Berlin (re: work). Further, separate grants were made available for conferences held by a number of subgroups, for example in Portugal, Turkey, and India. For more information on the project and its participants, see <https://collab.iisg.nl/web/labourrelations>.

3 These factors are explored in a series of dedicated workshops. Papers from the first workshop, on the role of the state, have been published in Karin Hofmeester, Gijs Kessler, and Christine Moll-Murata (eds), “Conquerors, Employers, and Arbiters: States and Shifts in Labour Relations, 1500–2000” Special Issue of *International Review of Social History*, 61:S24 (2016). A number of papers from the workshop on demography and family patterns have been published as a special section of *The History of the Family*, 22:1 (2017). Papers presented at the workshop on economic institutions will be published in Karin Hofmeester and Pim de Zwart (eds), *Colonialism, Institutional Change and Shifts in Global Labour Relations* (forthcoming).

tion of “class society” developed by various nineteenth-century thinkers, of whom Karl Marx is the most well known, and those inspired by him. Central to this line of thinking is the rise of the proletariat, i.e. wage-dependent workers. The German scholar Werner Sombart (1863–1941) was perhaps the first to attempt to apply this concept to the entire occupational population of a country (in this case the German Empire in 1905).⁴ Sociologists and historians subsequently tried to apply these categories to the entire population of Europe (except Russia) for the past five centuries.⁵ Ethnographers, geographers, and archaeologists (some of whom referred to Karl Marx) compared labour relations in market economies in the West and those in the rest of the world, sometimes (as Karl Polanyi and anthropologists inspired by him tended to do) stressing especially the differences.⁶ Finally, irrespective of time and place, historical and contemporary occupational census takers, sociologists, and historians have increasingly struggled with definitions of work, influenced in part by the emerging feminist movement, which stressed the importance of the often unobserved work of women and children.

One of the most comprehensive definitions of work has been provided by the sociologists Charles and Chris Tilly:

Work includes any human effort adding use value to goods and services. [...] Prior to the twentieth century, a vast majority of the world’s workers performed the bulk of their work in other settings than salaried jobs as we know them today. Even today, over the world as a whole, most work takes place outside of regular jobs. Only a prejudice bred by Western capitalism and its industrial labor markets fixes on strenuous effort expended for money payment outside the home as “real work”, relegating other efforts to amusement, crime, and mere housekeeping.⁷

All these lines of thinking have inspired the members of the Collaboratory to develop a new encompassing classification of labour relations, one necessary for long-term global comparisons, using the following definition: labour relations define for or with whom one works and under what rules. These rules (implicit or explicit, written or unwritten) determine the type of work, type and amount of remuneration, working hours, degrees of physical and psychological strain, as well as the degree of freedom and autonomy associated with the work. The Collaboratory’s classification of labour relations claims a much wider validity than traditional occupational censuses do, because it is intended to cover the whole world, from 1500 and in principle also for earlier periods. At the same time, it pays tribute to a long historical pedigree of ideas,

⁴ Werner Sombart, *Das Proletariat. Bilder und Studien* (Frankfurt am Main, 1906).

⁵ Charles Tilly, “Demographic Origins of the European Proletariat”, in: David Levine (ed.), *Proletarianization and Family History* (Orlando [etc.], 1984), pp. 1–85.

⁶ Jan Lucassen, “Outlines of a History of Labour”, IISH Research Paper 51 (2013), available at <http://socialhistory.org/en/publications/outlines-history-labour> (commenting upon Weber, Polanyi, Chayanov, and others).

⁷ Charles Tilly and Chris Tilly, *Work under Capitalism* (Boulder, CO, 1998), p. 22.

and it intends to offer an analytical instrument for comparing labour relations globally. The following steps were taken to arrive at this taxonomy of labour relations.

Taxonomy of labour relations, units of analysis: individual, household(s), polity, and market

People usually do not work alone. Seldom do they work only for themselves. In the first place, most *individuals* work the larger part of their lives for a *family*, defined as a group of kin or a *household*, who pool their income and mostly live and eat together. The activities of all members can thus be assumed to constitute a collective.⁸ They coordinate their activities, so we can speak of a collective strategy, also called “household living strategy”.⁹ This consists of the mutual division of tasks according to skills, gender, age, and marriage strategy. Taking the *individual* as a nucleus, we distinguish the *household* as the first goal of production. Sometimes groups of individuals or households share tasks, in which case we speak of *communities*. When communities share a form of government whose leadership has the power or mandate to establish and maintain rules pertaining to labour, we speak of a *polity*. When we call the *household* (or several, united in a community) the first goal, the *polity* logically forms the second, and the *market* the third. This brings us to the following taxonomy:

⁸ For the seasonality, see the “work cycle” in Jan Lucassen, *Migrant Labour in Europe, 1600–1900: The Drift to the North Sea* (London, 1987).

⁹ Also known as “coping strategies”. See Theo Engelen, “Labour Strategies of Families: A Critical Assessment of an Appealing Concept”, *International Review of Social History*, 47, 3 (2002), pp. 453–464; and J. Kok (ed.), *Rebellious Families: Household Strategies and Collective Action in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York and Oxford, 2002).

Taxonomy of Labour Relations

In order to classify the total population (“Starting point”, column 1) according to this taxonomy, we applied the following logic. We stress that this taxonomy should primarily be considered a tool to characterize individuals (whose labour relations are listed in column 4). The scheme should therefore be read from right to left and enables us to shed some light on the character of that society within a given place and period.

First, the taxonomy distinguishes between those who are able to work and those unable to work (the category non-working in our taxonomy). This has at least two advantages: it forces one to be aware of what work is; and it covers the entire population, thus explicitly also taking working women and children into account. As a consequence, in the day-to-day practice of historical research it compels scholars to test the demographic logic of their results, as all categories together should equal the total population. In addition, it provides a basic critique of a large number of historical occupational censuses, which systematically under-register female work and work in the household in general.

Next, in column 2, it distinguishes between the three types of exchange in organizing the exchange of goods and services. These types of exchange are linked with the three levels of analysis listed in column 3, which reflect the target of production: the household and/or community, the polity, or the market. The principles on which this exchange takes place are *reciprocity* (work done for other members of the same household or a group of households that form a community), *tribute giving* (work based on obligations vis-à-vis the polity), and market exchange in which labour is

“*commodified*” (i.e. where the worker sells their capacity to work – or, in the case of unfree labour, the owner sells the worker itself).

For the past five hundred years, in most parts of the world reciprocal labour outside the household has no longer been the sole category. This is true even if we concede that “self-sufficiency”, which occurs in labour relations 4a and 4b of our taxonomy, can include small-scale market transactions that aim at sustaining households rather than at accumulating capital by way of profiting from exchange value.¹⁰

All other, more subtle, distinctions fall within these four main categories (non-working, reciprocal labour, tributary labour, and commodified labour). They are based on various considerations, including the character of the entities that organize labour (households, communities, polities, or markets), the degree of freedom, and methods of remuneration. These subcategories are explained in detail in the appendix to this chapter. The Collaboratory fully recognizes that individuals might experience different labour relations at the same time. In those cases (serfs who are permitted to perform wage labour part of the year), the researcher may attribute a primary labour relation to the main activity (as defined by hours spent) and a second or even a third to the subsidiary activity. Even more importantly, research so far has shown that shifts in labour relations mostly take the form of shifts in such combinations, especially in the short run.

Shifts in labour relations

By using the taxonomy, shifts in labour relations can be signalled and followed over time and place. The preliminary outcomes of this project suggest that in the long run, the share of the population engaged in commodified labour increased at the expense of reciprocal labour and tributary labour. Commodified labour started earlier than expected (in 1500 some ten per cent of the world population we have data for had commodified labour relations as their primary labour relation), but at the same time reciprocal labour lasted longer than previously assumed (in 2000 ten per cent of the total world population still had reciprocal labour relations as their primary labour relation; this can largely be explained by the fact that we consider working for the household as reciprocal labour).¹¹

10 Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World. Essays Toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden and Boston, 2008), pp. 315–316, referring to G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defence* (Oxford, 1978). See also Akira Hayami, Osamu Saitô, and Ronald P. Toby (eds), *The Economic History of Japan 1600–1990, Vol. 1: Emergence of Economic Society in Japan 1600–1859* (Oxford, 2004), who argue in a similar sense for a broader concept of “self-sufficiency” that allows for market production as long as accumulation is not the basic goal of such transactions.

11 For an overview of countries and cross sections included in the Collaboratory, as well as data on which part of the world population is covered, percentages of labour relations per country, continent and the world as a whole per cross section, and for a visualization of all data as hierarchical tree-map

The biggest shift from reciprocal to commodified labour seems to have taken place between 1800 and 1900, especially in Europe and Asia, going hand in hand with an increase in the size of the non-working population. The South American countries included in the Collaboratory dataset show a more or less stable percentage of people in reciprocal and commodified labour relations in 1800 and 1900, though of course the nature of commodified labour changed from slavery to various less unfree forms of commodified labour. In the various sub-Saharan African countries we studied, reciprocal labour prevailed both in 1800 and in 1900, though it decreased from some seventy-five per cent to fifty per cent in favour of commodified labour, which seemed to have shifted from slavery to other forms of less unfree commodified labour relations, including self-employment.

Another important finding is that, from early on, many individuals and households pooled various types of labour relations – combining commodified labour with reciprocal labour, for example, as was the case with Spanish farmers in 1800, who combined self-employment with reciprocal labour.¹² Russia is a very special case in this respect. Here, in 1800, farmers combined both tributary labour (as serfs) with reciprocal labour relations, as they worked their own land and were part-time wage workers.¹³ In the Deccan in India, self-employment in farming and manufacturing was often combined with work for the community, a combination that seemed to remain stable even between 1900 and 2000.¹⁴

Often, shifts in labour relations manifest themselves as shifts in combinations of labour relations. In Spain, in 1900, farmers still combined two types of work, though now both were commodified: they worked as self-employed farmers on their own plot of land and as wage earners on other people's land.¹⁵ Shifts within the larger category of commodified labour from 1800 to 1900 could, and often did, manifest themselves as shifts in combinations of labour relations. Within the combination of self-employment and wage work, the ratio shifted from more self-employment

graphs, see <https://socialhistory.org/en/projects/labourrelations/treemap>. For a preliminary overview of some of these data, see also Karin Hofmeester, "Self-employment as Category in the Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations, 1500–2000", Paper prepared for the workshop "Self-Employment in Historical Perspective", 15–16 December 2016, IISH, Amsterdam. Unless stated otherwise, data mentioned in this article can be found in dataverse as mentioned in reference 1 and via the above mentioned link.

12 José-Miguel Lana-Berasain, "Labour Relations in Spain, 1800, 1900 and 2001: A Methodological Approach", p. 13 and dataset. See for the dataset and the methodological paper, *idem*, "Spain 1800,1900,2000 [Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations 1500–2000 Dataset]", <http://hdl.handle.net/10622/CH6ZP5>, IISH Dataverse, V1.

13 Gijs Kessler, "Wage Labor and the Household Economy: A Russian Perspective, 1600–2000", in: Marcel van der Linden and Leo Lucassen (eds), *Working on Labor. Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 353–369, at 362–363.

14 Jan Lucassen and Rombert Stapel, "Shifts in Labour Relations in India 1800–2000", Paper for the Early Modern Panel, X. International Conference on Labour History, The Association of Indian Labour Historians, VV. Giri National Labour Institute, Noida, India, 22–24 March 2014, pp. 32–35.

15 Lana-Berasain, "Labour Relations in Spain".

to more wage work. Between 1900 and 1950 wage labour seems to have grown considerably worldwide, especially in sub-Saharan countries, where colonial economic activities stimulated wage labour (not always free wage labour) at the cost of self-employment. By 2000 this trend had been reversed, certainly in sub-Saharan African countries but, so it seems, also in Asian and European countries.

Though these results are still very sketchy and partial, they do give some indication of the potential of the Collaboratory's approach for studying the various forms of labour relations worldwide.

Appendix: Definitions of Labour Relations

Non-working:

As a starting point for each geographical unit and cross section, we take the entire population and subsequently determine what part is not, as a rule, working, and, consequently, what part is working (these "calculations" will often be based on estimates rather than precise data). The non-working population is divided into the following three categories:

1. *Cannot work or cannot be expected to work*: those who cannot work, because they are too young (≤ 6 years), too old (≥ 75 years),¹⁶ disabled, or are studying.
2. *Affluent*: those who are so prosperous that they do not need to work for a living (rentiers, etc.), and consequently actually do not work. This also goes for their spouses if all their productive and reproductive tasks are taken over by servants, nannies, etc. There are, of course, affluent people, owners of big companies, who are wealthy enough to stop working but nevertheless choose to continue to work. If they are employers, these people should be assigned to labour relation 13 instead of 2.
3. *Unemployed*: although unemployment is very much a nineteenth- and, especially, twentieth-century concept, we do distinguish between those in employment and those wanting to work but who cannot find employment.

Working:

Reciprocal labour:

Persons who provide labour for other members of the same household and/or community are subsumed within the category **Reciprocal labour**.

¹⁶ These minimum and maximum ages are very much culturally determined. The age brackets chosen will always be indicated in the database and explained in the methodological paper.

Within the household:

4a. *Leading household producers*: heads of self-sufficient households (these include family-based and non-kin-based forms). Self-subsistence can include small market transactions, but only if most (at least eighty per cent) of total household income is earned through self-subsistence labour. Heads of households have labour relation 4a.

4b. *Household kin producers*: subordinate kin, including spouses (men and women) and children of the above heads of households, who are mainly self-subsistent and who contribute to the maintenance of the household by performing productive work for that household.

5. *Household kin non-producers*: subordinate kin, including spouses (men and women) and children of heads of households, who can support the household (under either reciprocal or commodified labour relations). These spouse and kin dependants are free from productive work, but they contribute to the maintenance of the household by performing reproductive work for the household, i.e. especially child rearing, cooking, cleaning, and other household chores. In all other cases spouses and kin producers in the categories named have income-generating activities essential for the survival of the household, i.e. labour relations 12a, 12b, 13, 14, or 18, and will have one of these labour relations themselves.

6. *Reciprocal household servants and slaves*: subordinate non-kin (men, women, and children) contributing to the maintenance of self-sufficient households. This category does not include household servants who earn a salary and are free to leave their employer of their own volition (i.e. labour relation 14), but it does include servants in autarchic households, monasteries, and palaces. They may work under all shades of conditions, from enforcement (including pawnship) to a desire to receive patronage. These conditions may change from one generation to another.¹⁷

Within the community:

7. *Community-based redistributive labourers*: persons who perform tasks for the local community in exchange for communally provided remuneration in kind, such as food, accommodation, and services, or a plot of land and seed to grow food on their own. Examples of this type of labour include working under the Indian *jajmani* system, hunting and defence by Taiwanese aborigines, or communal work among nomadic and sedentary tribes in the Middle East and Africa. In the case of the *jajma-*

¹⁷ First-generation slaves might be commodified, whereas their children might no longer be considered slaves and might be working for the household on conditions that were more free, as was the case with children of slave women and free Ashanti men. See Gareth Austin, *Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807–1956* (Rochester, NY, 2005), pp. 106–134, 174–180, 481–490, 498–500.

ni workers in South Asia, hereditary structures form the basis of the engagement, while in parts of Africa or Taiwan the criteria for fulfilling community-based labour are gender and age (in Taiwan, for example, males between six and forty).

Tributary labour:

Persons who are obliged to work for the polity (often the state, though it could also be a feudal or religious authority). Their labour is not commodified but belongs to the polity. Those workers are included in the category **Tributary labour**.

8. *Obligatory labourers*: those who have to work for the polity, and are remunerated mainly in kind. This category includes those subject to civil obligations (corvée labourers, conscripted soldiers and sailors), and work as punishment, i.e. convicts. Yet the obligatory work can also be an entitlement that enjoys middle or high social standing, such as the European or Indian nobility, the samurai in Japan, or banner people in Qing China.

9. *Indentured tributary labourers*: those contracted to work as unfree labourers for the polity for a specific period of time to pay off a debt or fine to that same polity.

10. *Tributary serfs*: those working for the polity because they are bound to its soil and bound to provide specified tasks for a specified maximum number of days, for example state serfs in Russia.

11. *Tributary slaves*: those who are owned by and work for the polity indefinitely (deprived of the right to leave, to refuse to work, or to receive compensation for their labour). One example is forced labourers in concentration camps.

Commodified labour:

Work done on the basis of market exchange in which labour is “commodified”, i.e. where the worker or the products of his work are sold. The category **Commodified labour** is subdivided into those working for the market and those working for public institutions *that may nevertheless produce for the market* (though not for the gain of private individuals).

For the market, private employment:

12a. *Self-employed leading producers*: those who produce goods or services for the market (for example, peasants, craftsmen, petty traders, transporters, as well as those in a profession) with fewer than three employees, possibly in cooperation with

12b. *Self-employed kin producers*: household members including spouses and children who work together with self-employed leading producers who produce for

the market. All members of a family working under a putting-out system should be counted as self-employed producers.¹⁸

13. *Employers*: those who produce goods or services for market institutions by employing more than three labourers. The number after the dot is an attribute that says something about the freedom or unfreedom of the employees.

13.1 Employers who employ free wage earners.

13.2 Employers who employ indentured labourers.

13.3 Employers who employ serfs.

13.4 Employers who employ slaves.

14. *Market wage earners*: wage earners (including the temporarily unemployed) who produce commodities or services for the market in exchange mainly for monetary remuneration. A subdivision is made by type of remuneration.

14.1 Sharecropping wage earners: remuneration is a fixed share of total output.

14.2 Piece-rate wage earners: remuneration at piece rates.

14.3 Time-rate wage earners: remuneration at time rates.

14.4 Cooperative subcontracting workers at piece rates.

15. *Indentured labourers for the market*: those contracted to work as unfree labourers for an employer for a specific period of time to pay off a private debt. They include indentured European labourers in the Caribbean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and indentured Indian, Chinese, and Japanese workers after the abolition of slavery.

16. *Serfs working for the market*: those bound to the soil and bound to provide specified tasks for a specified maximum number of days for private landowners, for example serfs working on the estates of the nobility.

17. *Slaves who produce for the market*: those owned by their employers (masters). They are deprived of the right to leave, to refuse to work, or to receive compensation for their labour. Here we do not distinguish between the different ways individuals may become enslaved (sale, pawning, etc.). We do, however, differentiate between:

17.1 Slaves working directly for their proprietor, for example productive work by plantation slaves, and domestic slavery in households producing for the market.

17.2 Slaves for hire, for example for agricultural or domestic labour (as a rule they may keep a small part of their earnings, while the largest part goes to the owner).

For non-market institutions:

18. *Wage earners employed by non-market institutions* (that may or may not produce for the market), such as the state, state-owned companies, the Church, or production

¹⁸ As long as they are ≥ 6 and ≤ 75 (or other age indications for too young or too old to work as documented for the cross section that is specifically analysed).

cooperatives, who produce or render services for a free or a regulated market. A subdivision is made by type of remuneration:

18.1 Sharecropping wage earners: remuneration is a fixed share of total output.

18.2 Piece-rate wage earners: remuneration at piece rates.

18.3 Time-rate wage earners: remuneration at time rates.