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Why all the fuss about Global Labour History?¹

The New Obscurity

In my opinion it's a shame that there is so much work in the world. One of the saddest things is that the only thing that a man can do for eight hours a day, day after day, is work. You can't eat eight hours a day nor drink for eight hours a day nor make love for eight hours – all you can do for eight hours is work.²

This insight by literary Nobel Prize winner William Faulkner refers to the central role of work in human existence. Only very few terms summarize such manifold and at the same time such fundamental issues as the concept linked with the word 'work'. What is widely understood by this term today is still very much determined by the conditions that industrial development and the labour movement imprinted on modern societies. Work is regarded as one of the key issues in the political discourse of most industrialized countries. It is sometimes even suggested that once this problem has been solved, all other problems will be solved much more easily. Success and failure, both personal and professional, are closely linked to the concept of work. Work defines status. The supposed unambiguity of the term easily leads us to ignore the fact that 'work' covers an enormous range of activities and concepts which are linked with very different horizons of experience in time and space.³ Often, debates in industrialized countries continue to use one very limited concept of work, namely, gainful employment, which is more or less clearly separated from the domestic sphere – although this distinction no longer corresponds to the experiences of many people.

Work has been repeatedly subjected to fundamental change, and its form has often differed considerably depending on the region in which it has been under-

¹ Some sections of this introduction draw from Andreas Eckert/Marcel van der Linden, *New Perspectives on Workers and the History of Work: Global Labour History*, in: Sven Beckert/Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Global History Globally*, London (forthcoming). I would like to thank Mahua Sarkar and Marcel van der Linden for comments and suggestions.

² Quoted in Gerd Spittler, *Anthropologie der Arbeit Ein ethnographischer Vergleich*, Wiesbaden 2016, 85.

³ See Jörn Leonhard/Willibald Steinmetz (eds.), *Semantiken von Arbeit: Diachrone und vergleichende Perspektiven*, Cologne 2016.

taken. After a long period of ‘baisse’ and a number of academic obituaries, there is a recurrent interest in themes related to work. The constantly growing number of conferences and research projects in this area is telling of this trend in the humanities and social sciences. In this context, reference has been frequently made to on-going debates on social change, including change that could be summarized under headings such as ‘financial crisis and global capitalism’, ‘labour and generational conflict’, ‘the rise of precarious and informal work’, and ‘transformations of the working world’ through new technologies. Both in scholarly and political debates, ‘informal labour’, in particular, is very much *en vogue*.⁴ Although some Africanists insist that “African economies are the most informalized in the world”, non-waged economic activities, unregulated by law and unprotected by social regulations or services, have become increasingly visible in many parts of the world, including the North Atlantic region.⁵ ‘Precarity’ has also become a fashionable new concept in labour studies.⁶ It seems to imply that whereas in the past, capital was striving to systematically extract surplus value from a large and growing workforce that at the same time had to be tamed, today more and more workers seem to have become unnecessary. However, some scholars have drawn attention to the fact that precarity does not represent a particular phase of capitalism but that it is an inherent characteristic of capitalist labour.⁷

The discovery of the ‘informal’ and ‘precarity’ went in pair with the observation that full-time wage labour with relatively good social benefits over the course of an entire career was not a global norm, but rather the exception in many parts of the world, the contingent product of a particular conjuncture in 20th century world history.⁸ This, in turn, led to the insight that the male proletariat does not

⁴ As James Ferguson in *Give a Man a Fish. Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution*, Durham/NC 2015, 93 aptly observes, a critical literature seems to agree on the inadequacy of the term ‘informal’ but has failed to produce alternative terminology. For a useful review of the literature see Kate Meagher, *Identity Economics. Social Networks and the Informal Economy in Nigeria*, Oxford 2010, 11-26. For critical reflection of the concept, see Jan Breman, A Bogus Concept?, in: *New Left Review* 84 (2013), 130–138.

⁵ Kate Meagher, The Scramble for Africans: Demography, Globalization and Africa’s Informal Labor Markets, in: *Journal of Development Studies* 52 (2016), 483–497, here: 485. For a powerful argument about the global importance of informal labour relations see Jan Breman/Marcel van der Linden, Informalizing the economy: the return of the social question at a global level, in: *Development and Change* 45, 5 (2014), 920–940.

⁶ A widely discussed intervention is Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, London 2011.

⁷ Marcel van der Linden, San Precario: A New Inspiration for Labor Historians, in: *Labor* 11 (2014), 9–21.

⁸ See Ruth Pearson, Re-Assessing Paid Work and Women’s Empowerment: Lessons from the Global Economy, in: Andrea Cornwall et al. (eds.), *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions*,

represent the quintessential worker but is rather one among a number of categories of workers whose histories are connected.⁹ Analysing work ‘beyond wage labour’ became increasingly important as it allowed for marginalized groups and their activities to form part of labour history – e.g. ‘guestwork’, housework, care work, children’s work, sex work, surrogacy, prison and convict labour, but also non-manual work by employees and civil servants or the work of the police and soldiers.¹⁰ This extension is regarded as crucial in better capturing processes of accumulation and the production of inequality through work. On the other hand, warnings have been articulated against the tendency to dilute the concept of work (“everything is work”) and to ‘depoliticize’ it; that is, to ignore or to play

Contestations and Challenges, London 1987, 201–213; Alejandro Portes/Saskia Sassen-Kooh, Making it Underground. Comparative Material on the Informal Sector in Western Market Economies, in: *American Journal of Sociology* 93,1 (1987), 30–61.

9 This is one of the major points made by Marcel van der Linden in *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labor History*, Leiden 2008.

10 On guestworkers see: Stephen Castles, Guestworkers in Europe: A Resurrection, in: *International Migration Review* 40,4 (2006), 741–766; Cindy Hahamovitch, Creating Perfect Immigrants: Guestworkers of the World in Historical Perspective, in: *Labor History* 44,1 (2003), 69–94 (on labour migration see also below); On care work now: Erdmute Alber/Heike Drotbohm (eds.), *Anthropological Perspectives on Care. Work, Kinship, and the Life Course*, London 2015; Dirk Hoerder et al. (eds.), *Towards a Global History of Domestic and Caregiving Workers*, Leiden 2015. For the highly controversial theme of children’s work and the ideologically charged issue of child labour, see (mostly from an anthropological perspective) Gerd Spittler/Michael Bourdillon (eds.), *African Children at Work. Working and Learning in Growing Up for Life*, Münster 2012. On sex work: Christine B. N. Chin, *Cosmopolitan Sex Workers in a Global City*, New York 2013; Lin L. Lim (ed.), *The Sex Sector. The Economic and Social Basis of Prostitution in Southeast Asia*, Geneva 1998; On surrogacy: Amrita Pande, *Transnational Commercial Surrogacy in India*, New York 2014; Mahua Sarkar, When Maternity is Paid Work. Commercial Gestational Surrogacy as a New Transnational Industry, in: Eileen Boris et al. (eds.), *Women’s ILO: Transnational Networks, Working Conditions, and Gender Equality*, London (in press). On prison/convict labour: Christian de Vito/Alex Lichtenstein, Writing a Global History of Convict Labour, in: *International Review of Social History* 58,2 (2013), 285–325 (reprinted in this volume); Robert P. Weiss, “Repatriating” Low-Wage Work: The Political Economy of Prison Labor Reprivatization in the Post-Industrial United States”, in: *Criminology* 39,2 (2001), 253–292; Anand A. Young, Indian Convict Workers in Southeast Asia in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries, in: *Journal of World History* 14,2 (2003), 179–208; Florence Bernault (ed.), *A History of Prison and Confinement in Africa*, Portsmouth 2003. On military labour see Erik Zürcher (ed.), *Fighting for a Living. A Comparative History of Military Labour 1500–2000*, Amsterdam 2013. For an influential article on this topic see Alf Lüdtke, Soldiering and Working: Almost the Same? Reviewing Practices in Industry and the Military in Twentieth-Century Contexts, in: Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Work in a Modern Society. The German Historical Experience in Comparative Perspective*, New York 2010, 109–130 (reprinted in this reader); for an example from a colonial context see: Michelle Moyd, Making the Household, Making the State; Colonial Military Communities and Labor in German East Africa, in: *International Journal of Labor and Working-Class History* 80,1 (2011), 53–76.

down aspects such as violence, suppression, exploitation and political struggles about work.¹¹

Be this as it may, the new interest in the theme of ‘work and non-work’ is highly political. Not only are definitions of what constitutes work and what is excluded from it of central importance; so are the practices and policies surrounding them. Just take the example of the *Code du Travail* in colonial French West Africa from 1952: it was the result of intense debates between French officials and African trade unions and accompanied by numerous strikes. The code placed the kind of tasks that women most often did outside the law’s conception of work. The fact that women were crucial to the commerce of West African cities or that they performed a great variety of income-generating activities did not enter into the discussion of any aspect of the law.¹² What is legitimate work and what is illegal has long been a matter of state policy. The line of demarcation between labour and crime has always been fuzzy, and it has shifted and adjusted according to the needs of state and market regulatory regimes. In the same manner, the demarcation of work and leisure, so starkly contrasted in the modern period, is becoming blurred as new forms of work acquire shades of leisure while leisure itself has been industrialized.¹³ The other great division linked to this topic is that between paid and unpaid work, the work outside as opposed to inside households or between men’s work and women’s work. A number of studies suggest that the home and the domestic sphere have always been hothouses where the regimes of discipline and the deployment of labour have evolved. These divisions are being invented, abolished and resurrected regularly, but the question remains to what extent these are rather recent or long-standing phenomena.¹⁴ At the same time, work and non-work are increasingly understood as having culturally specific meanings. In essence, the on-going debates about notions of work triggered a substantial revision and re-evaluation of this concept. There is the danger of

11 See Ravi Ahuja, Preface, in: Idem (ed.), *Working Lives & Worker Militancy. The Politics of Labour in Colonial India*, New Delhi 2013. Also: Laurent Bazin, Le travail: un phénomène politique complexe et ses mutations conjoncturelles, in: *Politique Africaine* 133 (2014), 7–23.

12 Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society. The Labour Question in French and British Africa*, Cambridge 1996, 277–321.

13 Leisure is already a long-standing topic in historiography, especially in British history. See e.g. Peter Borsay, *A History of Leisure. The British Experience since 1500*, Basingstoke 2006. For the African context: Phyllis M. Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville*, Cambridge 1995.

14 There is a huge literature on this topic, ranging from Meg Luxton, *More than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women’s Work in the Home*, Toronto 1987, and Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic*, Oxford 1994, to Karen Tranberg Hansen, *Distant Companions. Servants and Employers in Zambia, 1900–1985*, Ithaca/London 1989.

watering down the concept, but by and large these debates have opened new, exciting (and often explicitly political) perspectives since the often-declared ‘end of labour history’.

Thus while labour history and the history of work as a field of research are currently thriving, it has also become a very diverse field, covering a wide array of themes and approaches from ethnographic studies of the shop-floor to transnational strike movements. According to Jürgen Kocka, “it is not yet clear what the leading questions and viewpoints structuring the history of work as a general field of research might be”;¹⁵ and in a recent review article, Kim Christian Priemel made the shrewd observation that “the state of the art suggests [...] that labour history as a field of research might thrive even without labour history as a discipline.”¹⁶ Another important aspect currently discussed is related to questions of scale: One of the virtues of labour history in recent decades has been its micro-historical focus on workers and work in relation to the range of social processes in a particular milieu – race, gender and ethnicity, for instance. If we increasingly look beyond both locality and region toward wider spatial relationships, what do we learn besides the insight that we are confronted with fuzzy categories and fuzzy constellations? Labour historians face the difficulty of focusing on the necessarily specific historical trajectories in certain localities in Europa or Asia or Africa and across specific patterns of regional migration, without losing sight of the wider context. A growing number of labour historians attempt to write a history of labour and work infused with both specificity and comparison, which sees shared entanglements as bi- or multi-directional rather than unidirectional, and that does not impose a model from one period, nation, or region onto another. These efforts have been subsumed under the rubric of Global Labour History. The following pages present some of the contours of this field but without claiming to be comprehensive. Some important aspects are ignored, for instance, transformations in the historiography of labour movements and workers’ resistance.¹⁷ Moreover, the time frame of this essay is more or less restricted to the last 200 years and does not pay tribute to the numerous efforts aimed at systematically developing a long-term perspective of Global Labour History that includes the Early Modern period.

¹⁵ Jürgen Kocka, Work as a Problem in European History, in: Idem (ed.), *Work*, 1–15, here:1.

¹⁶ Kim Christian Priemel, Heaps of Work. The ways of labour history, in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 23 January 2014 <http://www.hsozkult.de/literaturereview/id/forschungsberichte-1223> (5 May 2016). See also, Lex Heerma van Voss, Whither Labour History? Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives, in: *International Review of Social History* 58, 1 (2013), 97–106.

¹⁷ See the influential study by Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labor. Workers’ Movements and Globalization since 1870*, Cambridge 2003.

The Emergence of a Global Perspective

Global labour history has become one of the main approaches representing new directions in the field of labour history.¹⁸ Although rather peripheral in most relevant texts that provide introductions or overviews, it is also an important part of the fast-growing branch of ‘Global history’. According to Sebastian Conrad, the core concerns of this field are “with mobility and exchange, with processes that transcend borders and boundaries. It takes the interconnected world as its point of departure, and the circulation and exchange of things, people, ideas, and institutions are among its key subjects. A preliminary and rather broad definition of global history might describe it as a form of historical analysis in which phenomena, events, and processes are placed in global contexts.”¹⁹ A meteoric rise of Global History has been noted for the Americas, Europe, and Asia, but not for Africa.²⁰ Although some protagonists of Global History tend to act like missionaries, most representatives of this field would agree that it is not the only acceptable approach but one perspective among others. Moreover, it is common sense that any claims by global historians of radical newness would be misleading. In numerous fields – the history of imperialism and colonialism, migration history, and environmental history among them – historians have long since begun crossing boundaries and challenging the prevailing compartmentalization of the world.²¹

18 The key text is still Van der Linden, *Workers of the World*. He also produced numerous essays to map the field, most notably: The Promise and Challenges of Global Labor History, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 82 (2012), 57–76 (reprinted in this reader). For another effort in mapping see: Andreas Eckert, What is Global Labour History Good For?, in: Kocka, *Work*, 169–181. More recently: Leo Lucassen, Working Together: New Directions in Global Labour History, in: *Journal of Global History* 11,1 (2016), 66–87. Indian historians gathered under the umbrella of the Association on Indian Labour Historians have been particularly active contributors to the framing of the field. See Marcel van der Linden/Prabhu P. Mohapatra (eds.), *Labour Matters. Towards Global Histories*, New Delhi 2009; Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Towards a New History of Work*, New Delhi 2014. For other efforts see Rana Behal et al. (eds.), *Rethinking Work. Global Historical and Sociological Perspectives*, New Delhi 2011; Babacar Fall et al. (eds.), *Travail et culture dans un monde globalisé. De l’Afrique à l’Amérique latine*, Paris 2015.

19 Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* Princeton 2016, 5.

20 Dominic Sachsenmeier, *Global Perspectives on Global History. Theories and Approaches in a Connected World*, New York 2011. Global History has become the subject of many introductory texts and collective volumes. See, among many, James Belich et al. (eds.), *The Prospect of Global History*, Oxford 2016; Maxine Berg (ed.), *Writing the History of the Global: Challenges for the Twenty-First Century*, Oxford 2013; Sebastian Conrad et al. (eds.), *Globalgeschichte. Theorien, Ansätze, Methoden*, Frankfurt/M. 2007.

21 Conrad, *Global History*, 37.

This also applies to Global Labour History.²² As far as its methodological status is concerned, it is more of an ‘area of interest’ than a theory or school to which everyone must subscribe. 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.”²³ One of its main concerns so far has been to integrate more systematically the ‘global south’ into labour historiography, both at the intellectual and institutional level. The International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam was crucial to the development of the field. Since the institution was founded in 1935, it has been one of the most important research and documentation centres for the history of the labour movement and other social movements. In the late 1990s, under the leadership of Jan Lucassen and Marcel van der Linden, the IISH established itself as a worldwide operating platform for Global Labour History. In what almost amounts to a manifesto, Lucassen and van der Linden stressed the importance of “study[ing] the global development of labour throughout history without implicitly using (a particular interpretation of part of) European history as a model.”²⁴ With almost military precision, the IISH’s members and associates started a large research initiative which involved numerous conferences and projects in order to explore the empirical and methodological dimensions of this new field.²⁵ The IISH also supported initiatives and activities in a number of non-European countries to address and discuss Global Labour History and has contributed to the development of a global network of scholars and institutions interested in this field of historical study.²⁶

22 The prehistory of Global Labor History is presented in detail by Marcel van der Linden, *Labour History Beyond Borders*, in: Joan Allen et al. (eds.), *Histories of Labour. National and International Perspectives*, Pontypool 2010, 353–383.

23 Christian G. De Vito, *New Perspectives on Global Labour History*. Introduction, in: *Workers of the World* 1,3 (2013), 7–31, here: 12.

24 Marcel van der Linden/Jan Lucassen, *Prolegomena for a Global Labour History*, Amsterdam 1999, 7.

25 Some of the projects are listed on www.iisg.nl. See also De Vito, *New perspectives*. The first undertakings were mainly conceived in a comparative perspective, involving case studies on numerous non-European countries and increasingly attempting to explain similarities, differences and entanglements. See e.g. Sam Davies et al. (eds.), *Dock Workers 1790–1970. International explorations in Comparative Labour History*, 2 vols, Aldershot 2000. For a first attempt to present the state of the art in the field on the basis of both regionally and thematically focused articles see Jan Lucassen (ed.), *Global Labour History. A State of the Art*, Berne 2006. See also this article below.

26 See the list in Van der Linden, *Promise*, 59f.; idem, *Speaking Globally*, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 75 (2009), 184–188.

These more recent efforts, however, should not lead us to ignore the fact that, for instance, Latin American historians, like their colleagues in North America and Europe, have been studying the particularities of labour in their regions for decades.²⁷ African and Indian historians began more recently, but with a focus either on an area or on specific types of labour, for example, plantation labour.²⁸ For a long time European and Western labour historians tended to ‘universalize’ their views based on often rather specific examples. They ignored, for instance, Caribbean specialists for whom the relationship of plantation labour and global capitalism has been central since the work of C.L.R. James and Eric Williams in the 1930s and 1940s.²⁹ Perspectives in the context of (post-)colonialism have been central in many attempts to globalize historical studies.³⁰ This appears to be true as well with regard to labour history. In this field, the mutual relationship between social change with the colonizing countries and the colonized territories continues to be of interest. The crucial question that remains open is how colonization shapes labour history. One important reference here is the slave plantation as a formative experience in developing large-scale, closely supervised enterprises.³¹ How did this experience shape ideas, organization and labour practices in the world? Another is the point Karl Marx made: the availability of land and the possibility of migration are obstacles to original accumulation. Why did this problem remain even after relatively long-term and intense colonization efforts? In fact, there is some reason to argue that Marx’s concept of “original accumulation” might gain new importance in the African context, given for example the rush for land in Africa and the political and economic conflicts this entails.³²

27 See James P. Brennan, Latin American Labor History, in: José C. Moya (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Latin American History*, Oxford 2011, 342–366.

28 Rana Behal, *One Hundred Years of Servitude: Political Economy of Tea Plantations in Colonial Assam*, New Delhi 2014; Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar*, London 1987. Much of the literature on plantation labour in Africa has been produced by North American scholars. See e.g. Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters. Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Colonial Kenya, 1890–1925*, New Haven 1980.

29 Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, Chapel Hill 1944; C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins. Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, New York 1938.

30 Conrad, *Global History*, 53–57.

31 Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power. The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, Harmondsworth 1985.

32 Catherine Boone, *Property and Political Order. Land Rights and the Structure of Conflict in Africa*, New York 2014.

Themes, Concepts, Approaches

Global Labour History emphasizes interaction and entanglements between different world regions while taking for granted that the growing circulation of goods, people and ideas not only produced common ground, but disassociations and differences, the search for particularities and the hypostatization of dichotomous structures. The encounters between Europe and the non-European world between the fifteenth and mid-twentieth centuries had been largely within the context of overseas colonialism, and hence, largely hierarchical and repressive.³³ The transfer of work patterns (including juridical concepts, concepts of labour, work ethics, training and discipline) from the West to the colonies was thus not innocent of the highly uneven power relations that marked colonial domination. What did these complex entanglements look like? Even before the subcontinent came under direct colonial rule by the British in the late eighteenth century, the Dutch East India Company was already transferring enslaved labour from parts of India to the colonies further east.³⁴ During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries both the trading and the agrarian sectors commercialized further and labour relations were at least partly based on contracts.³⁵ Indeed, as Ravi Ahuja has argued, there was no need to import European terms in order to express the phenomenon of wage labour. In the Tamil language a wage labourer was (and is) called a 'Kuliyal' or 'Kuli'. Indian workers were also conscious about the difference between free and unfree labour: a Kuli was regarded as nobody's servant. On the other hand, this term had a negative connotation and was linked to subordination and lower caste background. During the nineteenth century, the British used 'Kuli' to denominate an 'unfree' labourer and from this colonial context the term entered European languages, but not as a synonym for wage labourer, but as a symbol for the unlimited subordination of the labour force.³⁶

33 Stuart Hall, *The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power*, in: idem et al. (eds.), *Modernity. An Introduction to Modern Societies*, Oxford 1996, 184–228; Robert Miles, *Racism*, London 2003.

34 Marcus Vink, "The World's Oldest Trade": Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century, in: *Journal of World History* 14,2 (2003), 131–177.

35 See David Washbrook, *Progress and Problems. South Asian Economic and Social History, c.1720-1860*, in: *Modern Asian Studies* 22,1 (1998), 57–96, here: 72; Ravi Ahuja, *Geschichte der Arbeit jenseits des kulturalistischen Paradigmas. Vier Anregungen aus der Südasiensforschung*, in Jürgen Kocka/Claus Offe (eds.), *Geschichte und Zukunft der Arbeit*, Frankfurt/Main 2000, 121–134, here: 124. For a case study see Ravi Ahuja, *Die Erzeugung kolonialer Staatlichkeit und das Problem der Arbeit. Eine Studie zur Sozialgeschichte der Stadt Madras und ihres Hinterlandes zwischen 1750 und 1800*, Stuttgart 1999; idem, *Labor Relations in an Early Colonial Context: Madras, 1750–1800*, in: *Modern Asian Studies* 32,4 (2002), 793–826.

36 Ahuja, *Geschichte der Arbeit*, 125. Sucheng Chan echoes this shift in meaning when she notes that whereas in Asian languages – including in Chinese where *ku li* stands for bitter labour – the

Another interesting aspect of entanglement, although still not systematically researched, is the way in which the practice of colonial labour regulations in the British Empire affected the situation in the metropole. Master and servant acts, the cornerstone of English employment law for more than four hundred years, gave largely unsupervised, inferior magistrates wide discretion over employment relations, including the power to whip, fine and imprison men, women and children for breach of private contracts with their employers. The English model was adopted, modified and reinvented in more than a thousand colonial statutes and ordinances regulating the recruitment, retention, and discipline of workers in shops, mines, and factories, on farms, in forests, on plantations and at sea.³⁷ The claim that the British colonies were used as laboratories of institutional reforms still needs further evaluation. It is evident, however, that the ‘globalization’ of English employment law did not lead to the levelling of difference. The most repressive and inegalitarian elements of this law and related legal practices survived much longer in the colonies than in England and were even developed further and tightened. The system of indentured labour is a case in point: Indenture (an apprentice contract or contract of employment) stands for a specifically colonial legal form which was not restricted to South Asia. For the period of the contract (which the worker could not terminate), the plantation owner had nearly unlimited rights of disposal over ‘his’ workers. This practice beyond ‘free wage labour’, which goes back to the North American colonies in the sixteenth century, was justified with the cynical argument that indenture was ‘a school for Indian workers’ to teach them how to conclude and to keep to a contract.³⁸

The indentured labour system was one aspect of the long and complex history of (labour) migration, which is itself a well-established theme in historiography that received new impulses from the emergence of global perspectives.³⁹ During

word “signifies the nature of the work that a person does”, in North America, where the term was introduced by the British, *kuli* or *coolie* “references the innate attributes of a person occupying the negative pole of the binary ‘free’ versus ‘unfree’ labor.” See Sucheng Chan, *Asian American Economic and Labor History*, in: David K. Yoo/Eiichiro Azuma (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Asian American History*, Oxford 2016, 299–330, here: 302.

37 Douglas Hay / Paul Cravan (eds.), *Masters, Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1582–1955*, Chapel Hill and London 2004.

38 See Ravi Ahuja, *Arbeit und Kolonialherrschaft im neuzeitlichen Südasien. Eine Einführung*, in: Dietmar Rothermund/Karin Preisendanz (eds.), *Südasien in der Neuzeit*, Vienna 2003, 199–211, here: 200; Ranajit Das Gupta, *Labor and Working Class in Eastern India. Studies in Colonial History*, Calcutta 1994; Marina Carter, *Voices from Indenture. Experiences of Indian Migrants in the British Empire*, London/New York 1996.

39 Jan Lucassen/Leo Lucassen (eds.), *Globalizing Migration History. The Eurasian Experience (16th–21st Centuries)*, Leiden 2014; Jan Lucassen et al. (eds.), *Migration History in World History. Multidisciplinary Approaches*, Leiden 2010.

the Early Modern period, the links between Europe and the rest of the world in terms of work and labour were already apparent in the context of slavery and the slave trade.⁴⁰ For example, labour has always played a central role in the long history of relations between Europe and Africa. The creation of a world economy by European capitalists and the reordering of economic relations in nearly every part of the world was followed by a huge need for human labour, which could only be satisfied by various forms of force and coercion.⁴¹ The slave trade completely transformed labour regimes in most parts of the 'New World', but also in Africa, where in many regions slaves not only became a crucial commodity, but also the main resource for labour.⁴² The mobility of large numbers of people, most of them unskilled workers, therefore, was one of the defining characteristics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between 1840 and the 1930s, more than 150 million people left their countries of origin, in many cases to settle elsewhere permanently. While earlier research mainly focused on the 60 million Europeans who had left their homes in order to begin a new life in the 'New World', recent studies refer to the crucial importance of the large flows of people from India and Southern China to areas in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, as well as to large transborder migrations in Northeast Asia. They also refer to the paradox that these global movements were accompanied by the erection of global walls.⁴³ One central focus of Global Labour History has been the group of seamen who travelled between different continents, and represented mobility and connection.⁴⁴

It became apparent that 'freedom' and 'free labour' stand as central concepts through which the world of labour has been thought about and interpreted, at

40 See David Eltis (ed.), *Coerced and Free Migrations. Global Perspectives*, Stanford 2002.

41 See, among many others, Paul E. Lovejoy / Nicolas Rogers (eds.), *Unfree Labor in the Development of the Atlantic World*, London 1994.

42 Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery. A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2nd ed., Cambridge 2000.

43 See especially the highly influential work of Adam McKeown, *Melancholy Order. Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders*, New York 2008; idem., *Global Migration, 1846–1940*, in: *Journal of World History* 15,3 (2004), 155–190. Also: Wang Gungwu (ed.), *Global History and Migrations*, Boulder 1997. For an analysis of current South-South labour migration that addresses the unfree/free divide and other themes central to Global Labour History see Mahua Sarkar, *Producing Precariousness: the Un-Freedom of Bangladeshi Transnational Circular Migrants as an Instituted Process*, in: *European Journal for Sociology* (forthcoming).

44 See Leon Fink, *Sweatshops at Sea. Merchant Seamen in the World's First Globalized Industry, from 1812 to the Present*, Chapel Hill/NC 2011; Gopalan Balanchandran, *Globalizing Labour? Indian Seafarers and World Shipping, c.1870–1945*, Delhi/Oxford 2012. For a broader perspective see Roland Wenzlhuemer, *The Ship, the Media, and the World: Conceptualizing Connections in Global History*, in: *Journal of Global History* 11,2 (2016), 163–186.

least for the last two centuries. Considering relations and labour policies in the world of work, the binomial ‘free’ and ‘un-free’ is of particular importance, especially given the centrality of the ideology of ‘free labour’ from the nineteenth century on, in slave, post-emancipation and colonial contexts. Indeed, the idea of modern ‘freedom’ helped to shape contemporary political language and provided a set of standards through which the social experience could be read. First, it created a master narrative that constructed the history of Western societies as a progressive path towards ‘freedom’ and ‘emancipation’, and embedded in particular forms of social relations, institutions and values. Second, it set this narrative as the model towards which institutions and values developing in different cultural and social contexts should progress and against which they therefore ought to be evaluated.⁴⁵

Recent global historical research, often building on area-based studies, has drawn out numerous hybrid constellations, for example, when slaves were ordered by their owners to leave the mansion or the plantation and work for wages, but bring back part of their earnings.⁴⁶ Other combinations of slave and wage labour or serfdom and capitalism (such as in Russia around 1900) would seem to relativize Karl Marx’s and other classical writers’ theses of the outstanding importance of contractually free wage labour as a defining element of capitalism.⁴⁷ Comparing Russia and England between 1780 and 1850, Alessandro Stanziani highlights: “Servants, wage earners, the poor, criminals, slaves, and serfs all had to respond to common general principles of utility and efficiency.”⁴⁸ In societies where slavery was crucial – as in parts of the Americas, Africa and elsewhere – the distinction between ‘free’ and ‘unfree’ became essential, especially

⁴⁵ See Robert J. Steinfield, *The Invention of Free Labour: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350–1870*, Chapel Hill/NC 1991; idem, *Coercion, Contract and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge 2001; Tom Brass/Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues*, Bern 1997. See also the articles of the thematic issue “Shifting Boundaries between Free and Unfree Labor” of the *International Journal of Labor and Working-Class History* 78,1 (2010), ed. by Carolyn Brown/Marcel van der Linden. The following paragraph owes a lot to discussions with Henrique Espada Lima and Sidney Chaloub.

⁴⁶ João José Reis, The Revolution of the Ganhadores: Urban Labor, Ethnicity and the African Strike of 1857 in Bahia, Brazil, in: *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 29 (1997), 355–393.

⁴⁷ Alessandro Stanziani, The Legal Statuts of Labour from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century. Russia in a Comparative European Perspective, in: *International Review of Social History* 54 (2009), 359–389 (reprinted in this volume); idem, *Bondage. Labor and Rights in Eurasia from the Sixteenth to the Early Twentieth Century*, New York/Oxford 2014; idem (ed.), *Le Travail Contraint en Europe et en Asie, XVI–XXe siècles*, Paris 2010.

⁴⁸ Alessandro Stanziani, The travelling panopticon: labor institutions and labor practices in Russia and Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 51,4 (2009), 715–741, here: 732.

once slavery as an ‘institution’ became a public abomination, at least from the late eighteenth century on. In these contexts the clear divide between ‘slavery’ and ‘freedom’ turned into the source of all kinds of social and political anxieties and fostered various logics of continuity and discontinuity. On this topic, Brazilian historians have particularly stressed that during the nineteenth century no distinct division existed between slaves and ‘freed’ workers with regard to the utilization of extra-economic coercion. On the other hand, as their work shows, the ambivalence of the concept of ‘freedom’ indicated sharp social conflict on the ground, which was related to specific work arrangements. Among former slaves, ‘freedom’ was usually experienced as precarious, limited, even spurious, but it nevertheless constituted a relevant category and a crucial aspiration.⁴⁹

One insight from this research is that even if there seems to be a long-term trend towards ‘free wage labour’, so-called free labour “cannot be seen as the only form of exploitation suitable for modern capitalism, but rather as one alternative among several”.⁵⁰ Marcel van der Linden further suggests that rethinking the fuzzy boundaries between wage labour, self-employment and slavery helps to rethink the concept of the working class, itself a specific historical artefact that originated in nineteenth-century Europe. He refers to the observation that most workers not only belonged to households that combined several modes of labour, but that they could combine different modes of labour, both synchronically and diachronically. Thus, van der Linden argues, there has always been a large class of people within capitalism whose labour power was commodified in various ways. Its members are enormously varied: they include chattel slaves, sharecroppers, small artisans and wage earners.⁵¹ Such an interpretation involves a substantial re-interpretation of the role of ‘free wage labour’ within capitalism and

49 See Henrique Espada Lima, Freedom, Precariousness, and the Law: Freed Persons contracting out their Labor in Nineteenth-Century Brazil, in: *International Review of Social History* 54,3 (2009), 391–416; Marcelo Badaró Mattos, Experiences in Common: Slavery and “Freedom” in the Process of Rio de Janeiro’s Working Class Formation (1850-1910), in: *International Review of Social History*, 55,2 (2010), 193–213; Sidney Chaloub, The Precariousness of Freedom in a Slave Society (Brazil in the Nineteenth Century), in: *International Review of Social History*, 56,3 (2011), 405–439; idem, The Politics of Ambiguity. Conditional Manumission, Labor Contracts and Slave Emancipation in Brazil (1850s to 1888), in: *International Review of Social History*, 60,2 (2015), 161–191 (reprinted in this volume). These contributions also represent a new dialogue between historians of slavery and labour historians. For a thoughtful reflection on the unfree-free divide referring to the crucial contribution of Brazilian historians see Ravi Ahuja, A Freedom Still Enmeshed in Servitude. The Unruly ‘Lascers’ of the SS *City of Manila* or, a Micro-History of the ‘Free Labour’ Problem, in: idem, *Working Lives*, 97–133, esp. 97f.

50 Van der Linden, *Labour History Beyond Borders*, 368.

51 Ibid, 367. Also Van der Linden, *Workers of the World*, 32f.

makes a case for the fact that the relationship of capitalism and labour is neither homogenizing nor linear.⁵²

Finally, (racist) ideologies, stereotypes and claims of superiority shaped the history of work and have been taken up by historians in order to develop global perspectives on this aspect. In the colonial world in general, ‘work’ was assigned the task of overcoming the supposed ‘backwardness’ of the colonized people. ‘Work’ promised to open access to ‘civilization’, while colonial ideology claimed that it would take a long time to distil a sufficient amount of capitalist work ethics into Asians and especially Africans. The ‘lazy native’ soon became a classic stereotype of colonial literature.⁵³ This very persistent stereotype also demonstrates that European rule in the colonies was far from omnipotent. For instance, the characterization of African workers as ‘lazy’ implied that in the end colonizers had to accept the limits of colonial rule, that Africans were partially successful in their struggles over work – even under the harsh system of South African gold mining. Notwithstanding the severity of this context, Africans shaped the limits of their own exploitation, notably in generating pressure for systems of day labour or workers’ guilds in cities or various forms of labour tenancy on farms, all of which allowed them to allocate family labour and shape work rhythms to a significant extent.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the way work was supposedly performed in Africa and other non-European regions was contrasted with the ‘high quality’ and ‘standard’ of ‘national types of work’.⁵⁵

Nevertheless ‘education for work’ was a crucial element of colonial policies. Sebastian Conrad has argued that efforts to discipline the homeless in Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shaped the parallel project of ‘civilizing’ the Africans in the German colonies.⁵⁶ Moreover he claims that the ‘colonial mission’ had effects on debates and practices back in Germany. In the

⁵² The comeback of capitalism as a tool for historical analysis is demonstrated in Jürgen Kocka/ Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *Capitalism. The Reemergence of a Historical Concept*, London 2016.

⁵³ Syed H. Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, London 1977. For a case study see Alamin Mazrui/ Lupenga Mphande, Time and Labor in Colonial Africa: The Case of Kenya and Malawi, in: Joseph K. Adjaye (ed.), *Time in the Black Experience*, Westport/Conn. 1994, 97–119.

⁵⁴ Frederick Cooper, Africa in a Capitalist World, in: Darlene Clark Hine/Jacqueline McLeod (eds.), *Crossing Boundaries. Comparative History of Black People in the Diaspora*, Bloomington 1999, 391–418, here: 401.

⁵⁵ Sebastian Conrad, Circulation, “National Work” and Identity Debates About the Mobility of Work in Germany and Japan, 1890–1914, in: Wolf Lepenies (ed.), *Entangled Histories and Negotiated Universals. Centers and Peripheries in a Changing World*, Frankfurt 2003, 260–280.

⁵⁶ Sebastian Conrad, “Eingeborenepolitik” in Kolonie und Metropole. “Erziehung zur Arbeit” in Ostafrika und Ostwestfalen, in: idem/Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.), *Das Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt 1871–1914*, Göttingen 2004, 107–128; idem, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany*, Cambridge 2010, Ch. 2.

end, however, there are very few clues that could justify the idea that there was a mutual linking-up of experiences, discourses and practices in ‘East Africa and East Westphalia’. Without doubt, the parallel structure of educational projects in Germany and East Africa seems to fit like a glove. And the effects of the practices in the Reich upon practices in the East African colony are quite evident. However, it is far from clear whether the radicalization of the labour discourse in Germany has anything to do with colonial experiences and practices.

Challenges⁵⁷

Conrad’s attempts to link ‘education for work’ in the metropole and colony represent a major challenge to Global Labour History: While it is easy to show how labour regimes and working practices in the Americas, Africa and Asia have been shaped by North Atlantic influences, it is usually far more difficult to demonstrate how the realm of work in Europe has been influenced by its colonial experiences and practices. However, a number of studies now offer remarkable insights into the interconnections between different parts of the world, and look at people and at institutions, ideas and objects.⁵⁸ The search for entanglements entails risks though, for instance the tendency to assume an ever-increasing connection and compression of labour regimes and practices and thus reproducing the teleological perspective of the concept of globalization.⁵⁹ Along these lines, Franco Barchiesi casts doubt on the perception of ‘the global’ manifesting itself in Africa in the form of connections, but rather sees disconnection, segmentation and seg-

⁵⁷ A most interesting set of challenges and critical questions to Global Labour History is articulated in the feedback to van der Linden, Promise, published in: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 82 (2012). See, Franco Barchiesi, How Far from Africa’s Shore? A Response to Marcel van der Linden’s Map for Global Labor History, 77-84; Peter Winn, Global Labor History: The Future of the Field?, 85-91; Jürgen Kocka, Revising Labor History on a Global Scale: Some Comments to Marcel van der Linden, 92-98; Dorothy Sue Cobble, The Promise and Peril of the New Global Labor History, 99-107; Prasannan Parthasarathi, Global Labor History: A Dialogue with Marcel van der Linden, 108-113; and Marcel van der Linden’s response: Global Labor History: Promising Challenges, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 84 (2013), 218–225. Some of the points made in these comments will be taken up in the following section.

⁵⁸ A crucial institution in this context is the International Labour Organization (ILO). See Jasmien Van Daele et al. (eds.), *ILO Histories: Essays on the International Labour Organization and Its Impact on the World During the Twentieth Century*, Berne 2011; Sandrine Kott/Joëlle Droux (eds.), *Globalizing Social Rights: The ILO and Beyond*, London 2012.

⁵⁹ For a powerful critique see Frederick Cooper, What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African historian’s perspective, in: *African Affairs* 100, 399 (2001), 189–213.

regation. He specifically criticizes the idea of workers' 'teleconnections' in global commodity chains put forward by van der Linden. He argues instead, that "colonial and postcolonial Africa shows indeed that the globalization of capital did not only provide a minority of unionized workers with new opportunities to converse with the global working class. It has also, and more importantly, excluded and marginalized multitudes of producers, households, and communities."⁶⁰ Moreover, there is a certain general tendency within global history of 'doing history backwards' and to limit research to identifying the flows and nodal points of globalization.⁶¹ In labour history, this trend finds its expression in the focus on seamen and other mobile sectors of the African and Asian labour force, which contributed to the emergence of global commodity and labour markets. While there is nothing wrong with this, it is crucial not to overlook other parts of the workforce – non-plantation rural labour, for instance – as the globalization of labour not only meant unbounded mobility, but spatial immobility as well, and we need to see the contradictions and unevenness of global processes of incorporation.

Marcel van der Linden has directed our attention to a central methodological problem of Global Labour History:⁶² All core concepts of 'traditional' labour history are primarily based on experiences made in the North Atlantic region and are thus in need of critical reconsideration. The concept of 'labour' itself provides a good example of this problem. Several Western languages make a distinction between 'labour' and 'work'. In these cases, following Hannah Arendt, 'labour' often refers to toil and effort or to market-related activities, while 'work' refers to more creative processes. This binary meaning, however, does not exist in many other languages. In some languages there is no single word for abstractions like 'labour' and 'work', on the other hand we find changing meanings for local words such as the Swahili term *kazi* in Belgian Congo, which initially referred to slave and forced labour but transformed its meaning and designated wage labour.⁶³ To which extent are the concepts of 'labour' and 'work' trans-culturally usable? While it does not seem feasible for a useful historiographical dialogue to simply use local terms as we find them, the content of 'labour' and 'work' should be defined and contextualized much more precisely than is usually done. Where does 'labour' begin and 'work' end? Is it possible to draw a precise boundary between 'labour' and 'work', or is the boundary less obvious than is often assumed?

⁶⁰ Barchiesi, *How Far From Africa's Shore*, 77.

⁶¹ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History*, Berkeley 2005, Ch.4.

⁶² Van der Linden, *Labour History Beyond Borders*, 365.

⁶³ Julia Seibert, *Kazi. Konzepte, Praktiken und Semantiken von Lohnarbeit im kolonialen Kongo*, in: Leonhard/Steinmetz, *Semantiken*, 209–223.

The highly uneven existence of source material and availability of data for writing histories of labour around the world presents another challenge. A large IISH project entitled “Global Collaborative on the History of Labour Relations” shows both the possibilities and limits of large-scale data-based global labour history enterprises. The core of this project is a universal taxonomy of labour relations that aims to map different kinds of labour relations in various world regions between 1500 and 2000.⁶⁴ The taxonomy basically distinguishes between four types of labour: non-work, reciprocal labour, tributary labour, and commodified labour, either connected with the household, the community or the market. These types are further elaborated in nineteen different labour relations at the individual level, for instance, in the category of household: leading producers, kin producers, kin non-producers, servants and redistributive labourers. The project chose five-cross sections in time: 1500, 1650, 1800, 1900, and 2000, as well as 1950 for Africa. On the basis of the data collected by the participating specialists on specific regions and cross-sections, the ‘collaboratory’ attempted to analyse major shifts in labour relations by asking, for instance, when a specific type of labour relation gave way to another or how these transitions could be explained and connected in a global context. Without any doubt, this project offers a solid base from which to analyse shifts in labour relations over time within societies and allows for interregional and worldwide comparisons. One drawback seems to be the strong role of demographical data as a starting point for examining each geographical unit and cross-section, given the fact that for a continent like Africa, this data is very sketchy and unreliable until right into the twentieth century. Moreover, the taxonomy does not really allow for capturing overlaps and ‘grey zones’ in individual labour relations. The Africa-related publications that have emerged from this project so far provide interesting new insights but also refer to the limits of the database-driven approach to the history of African labour and its global connections, especially for the periods before 1900.⁶⁵

The project set an example for collaboration between scholars from many parts of the world, including historians from what is now called the ‘Global South’. Despite various and successful efforts, however, one cannot ignore the many ways in which structural inequalities shape the field of Global Labour History: For scholars in Asia or Africa, access to sources and literature is limited, funding for research and conferences rarely available. The important thing for the practice of Global Labour History is, according to Van der Linden, “to follow the

⁶⁴ My presentation of the project follows Lucassen, *New Directions*, 68-70. For detailed information, see <https://collab.iisg.nl/labourrelations>.

⁶⁵ See Karen Hofmeester et al., No Global Labor History without Africa: Reciprocal Comparison and Beyond, in: *History in Africa* 41 (2014), 249–276.

traces of interest to us wherever they may lead: across political and geographical frontiers, time frames, territories and disciplinary boundaries.”⁶⁶ This journey presents a considerable demand not only to the intellectual and linguistic skills of the researcher, but also in terms of financing. Nevertheless, the scepticism about global history approaches is not only due to frustrations about the lack of resources. In many parts of the ‘Global South’, the persistent preoccupation with national history also represents an obstacle to global perspectives.⁶⁷ In essence, given the long history of Eurocentric knowledge production and academic hierarchies, there is a widespread sense of Global (Labour) History as just another hegemonic Western project.

The Chapters of the Volume

The articles reprinted in this reader have been published over the last decade or so and represent a selection from a very broad and lively field of historical research. This collection is meant to provide both an introduction and some insights into themes, debates and the methods of Global Labour History as they have been developed over the last few years. It is intended to be of use to students and scholars interested in familiarizing themselves with a burgeoning field of high academic *and* political relevance. This book has been divided into four sections, each comprising three articles. Section 1, “The Globalization of Labour History”, is devoted to efforts to map the field and to discuss major historiographical developments. Marcel van der Linden’s “The Promise and Challenges of Global Labour History” is a key text in this respect, and it succinctly describes the rise of Global Labour History, its major concerns as he sees them, its innovative aspects, and research topics to be pursued. Christian G. De Vito and Alex Lichtenstein’s “Writing a Global Labour History of Convict Labour” contributes to the understanding of a specific theme within labour history – convict labour, from a global and long-term perspective – and takes up one of the central issues of Global Labour History, the unfree/free-divide. Phil Bonner, Jonathan Hyslop and Lucien van der Walt (“Rethinking Worlds of Labour. Southern African Labour History in International Context”) discuss comparisons and the connection between the history of labour in South Africa and in other parts of the world. Using the example of what is arguably the most important labour historiography south of the Sahara, and which was long shaped by a rather parochial view of

⁶⁶ Van der Linden, Promise, 62.

⁶⁷ For Latin America, see Winn, Global Labour History.

the country's past, the authors sketch the possible benefits of 'globalizing' the perspectives on labour without losing sight of local developments.

Section II, "Varieties of Work", presents studies on different professions that have gained new attention in the context of an emerging Global Labour History, but also addresses the question of what is work and how to define it. Gopalan Balanchandran in his "Workers in the World: Indian Seafarers, c.1870s-1940s" offers a concise portrait of Indian seamen in the steamship era between the late nineteenth century and World War II and draws a picture of considerable mobility. Despite being relatively small in number, they appear to have travelled nearly everywhere in the world and could be labelled "India's earliest global workers". Alf Lüdtke's article "Soldiering and Working: Almost the Same? Reviewing Practices in Industry and the Military in Twentieth-Century Contexts" broadens dominant concepts of work. The author explores analogies and similarities between practices and experiences of work in modern industrial settings and practices and experiences in military organizations and modern wars. He also draws our attention to the frequently overlooked destructive implications of work. At the centre of Gerd Spittler's "Work – Transformation of Objects or Interaction between Subjects" are hunters and gatherers, herders and peasants, but also capitalist industrial work. He argues against a definition of work as purely instrumental and shows that the idea that animals, plants and even things possess their own sense of self-will (*Eigensinn*) is widespread in non-industrial, non-capitalist societies.

Section III, "Dynamics of Labour Relations", critically engages the boundaries of 'free' labour and the ambiguities contained in this concept but also addresses state interventions in labour regulations and historicizes informality. Sidney Chalhoub ("The Politics of Ambiguity. Conditional Manumission, Labour Contracts, and Slave Emancipation in Brazil") focuses on controversies regarding conditional manumission to explore the legal and social ambiguities between slavery and freedom that prevailed in nineteenth-century Brazilian society. "Regulated Informality. Legal Constructions of Labour Relations in Colonial India 1814-1926" by Prabhu Mohapatra investigates the genealogy of contemporary informal labour relations in India well into the nineteenth-century colonial period and traces the processes by which labour relations were constructed by colonial state action, especially through legislative intervention. The author argues that in the process of such construction, labour relations were deeply impressed by pervasive informality, and this shaped subsequent developments in the decades after independence. In his "The Legal Status of Labour from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century. Russia in a Comparative European Perspective", Alessandro Stanziani emphasizes that until the end of the nineteenth century, the barrier between freedom and bondage was movable and negotiable. In most "Western" countries, he argues, labour was similar to service and wage conditions resem-

bled those of domestic servants, with numerous constraints imposed on worker mobility. Thus the material and living conditions of 'free' workers and servants were not necessarily better than those of 'serfs'.

Section IV, "The End of Wage Labour?", takes up and critically engages a debate that emerged in the 1980s in many Western industrial countries about "the end of work society", the menacing disappearance of wage labour and the rise of informal labour not only in the 'Global South', but in Western countries as well. Michael Denning ("Wageless Life") provocatively reminds us that under capitalism, "the only thing worse than being exploited is not being exploited" and insists that 'proletarian' is not a synonym for 'wage labourer', but for dispossession, expropriation and radical dependence on the market. In her "The Problem with Work", Kathie Weeks focuses on the United States to discuss what she perceives as the widespread willingness to live for work and asks why work seems to be valued more than other pastimes and practices. She wonders about the lack of attention paid to the lived experiences and political textures of work within political theory, given the fact that work is crucial not only to those whose lives are centred around it, but also, in a society that expects people to work for wages, to those who are expelled or excluded from work and marginalized in relation to it. And finally, Rina Agarwala ("Reshaping the social contract. Emerging relations between the state and informal labour in India") takes up some of the arguments developed by Mohapatra in the previous section. She investigates the strategies of Indian informal workers to improve their livelihoods and relates them to the new forms of institutionalism that have developed in the current system of reduced state regulation of capital and blurred employer-employee relations. Argawala argues that experiences of informal workers in India suggest the continuing power of both states and workers in shaping the current phase of economic and political transition and thus challenges widespread views about the diminishing role of the state. This volume offers a comprehensive introduction to the new book series "Work in Global and Historical Perspective". Its articles map out the state-of-the-art of current research, and explore the latest debates in the scholarly landscape of labour history.