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The art of link-making in global labour history: subaltern, feminist and Eastern European contributions

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ABSTRACT

Benefiting from the 'global' and 'trans-national' turns in the larger historiography, labour historians in the past two decades have greatly expanded their geographical scope, developed new methodologies, refashioned categories of analysis and largely abandoned teleological assumptions. In this context, the history of labour in Eastern Europe still constitutes one of the least-globalized research topics in the field, even though the region attracted an array of excellent labour historians both before and after the collapse of state socialism in 1989/91. This introduction to the Dossier on labour history and Eastern Europe reflects on the reasons for the apparent mismatch between Eastern European labour history and the new global labour history. It does so by situating this large question within a discussion of some more or less successful examples of how scholarship on a particular theme in labour history has contributed or attempted to contribute to the conceptual and empirical enlargement of labour history in the past few decades. Focusing on particular aspects of the debates on class analysis, the peasant question, the history of gender, and the history of labour under state socialism, the authors address key questions in the international development of the history of labour. These questions, the authors argue, are at the core of the contributions on Eastern Europe assembled in the Dossier. Situating the four historiographical studies contained in the Dossier in this larger context, the introduction discusses the varied reception of scholarship on aspects of the history of labour emerging in and from different contexts and asks how this scholarship has contributed or might contribute to the development of a more inclusive global labour history.

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Over the past two decades, global labour history has established itself as one of the leading research paradigms in the field of social history. Benefiting from the 'global' and 'trans-national' turns in the larger historiography, labour historians have greatly expanded their geographical scope, developed new methodologies, refashioned categories of analysis and largely abandoned teleological assumptions grounded in the experience of the core countries of the industrialized

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West. The aim of this scholarship has been to open new avenues for empirical research and to question the received stock of master concepts that organized the production of historiographical knowledge in labour history. In this context, the history of labour in Eastern Europe still constitutes one of the least-globalized research topics in the field, in the double sense that this historiography has often been self-referential and that labour historians invested in promoting global perspectives have barely engaged with this scholarship. The sidestepping of Eastern Europe – the region constituted by the former (state-) socialist countries – in the new global labour history¹ is even more curious, given that the region attracted an array of excellent labour historians both before and after the collapse of state socialism in 1989/1991. In addition, research on Eastern European labour history can – compared to some other regions – benefit from both the availability of an abundance of mostly well-kept and readily available sources and a prolific tradition of older historiographies on labour movements and the working classes. What are the reasons for the apparent mismatch between Eastern European labour history and the new global labour history, and how can the impasse be overcome? In addressing these questions, this introduction proceeds in three steps. In the first and second sections, we discuss a few examples of how scholarship on a particular theme in labour history has contributed or attempted to contribute to the making of the new global labour history, with particular emphasis on the ways in which this scholarship has challenged the use of key concepts and proposed new interpretations of trans-regional relevance. In the third section, we discuss recent developments in the historiography of labour in Eastern Europe and present a reading of the contributions to this dossier which situates these four historiographical studies in the context of global labour history. We ask why and how scholarship on aspects of the history of labour in Eastern Europe might contribute to the development of a more inclusive global labour history. Finally, we argue for the need to critically re-evaluate the ascription of trans-national value to and epistemic translation of regionally based historiographies of labour. We hope that in this way the dossier can help to enrich the debate on what constitutes global labour history and bring to the fore the trans-regional relevance of the historiography of labour in Eastern Europe.

Making labour history more inclusive: a selective history of suggestions

Labour historians have travelled various roads in their aspiration to make labour history more inclusive and to globalize their research themes. Some have critically interrogated the focus on free wage labour when studying the history of capitalism in order to show how a plethora of other types of work were essential for the emergence and development of modern economies. Others have questioned the epistemic value of the received conceptual canon of the discipline by asking whether and to what extent notions of class formation, proletarianization, commodification or labour control make sense outside the specific histories for which they were initially formulated. For both approaches, the category ‘global’ indicates not merely an extension of the geographical scope of labour history, but also an implicit and sometimes explicit critique of the conceptual language and explanatory models which were historically embedded in the experience of the industrializing and industrialized West, yet for a long time were conceived of as universally applicable models. By expanding the notion of labour under capitalism, labour historians have built up taxonomies of work that might more adequately account for the advent of capitalism across colonial empires in Latin America, Asia or the African continent.² Similarly, by testing the relevance of such master concepts as proletarianization, scholars have begun to rethink processes of class formation beyond property and location, the rural/urban divide and the factory shop floor.

Both feminist labour history and studies in the history of coerced labour are exemplary of the first approach. Regarding coerced labour,³ for instance, historians of Atlantic slavery have forcefully argued for the centrality of slave labour in the development of early capitalism, notably for its role in underpinning the production of global commodities such as cotton or sugar.⁴ For this literature, far from being an anomaly to be wiped away by the spread of free trade and wage labour, slavery is placed at the heart of the emerging economic system of the modern world. Moreover, studies of debt peonage, serfdom, indentured and bonded labour have challenged teleological narratives that identified the global expansion of capitalism with the multiplication of wage labour and have questioned the very meaning of 'free' and 'unfree' labour.⁵ The various forms of 'unfree' labour were not merely contemporaneous but also closely intertwined with the development of free wage labour in the metropolises, posing as the colonial counterpart of the 'Satanic Mills' of nineteenth-century Western Europe.⁶

Feminist labour historians similarly have insisted that forms of labour other than free wage labour have formed an indispensable component of labour in modern economies. Rather than changing and enlarging the vision of labour history and capitalism via geographical expansion, early feminist labour history in the West insisted that an adequate picture of labour within Europe during the period of the industrial revolution would only emerge if the enquiry were grounded in more inclusive perspectives. The seminal *Women, Work and the Family* by Louise A. Tilly and Joan Scott, first published in 1978, shows how women's work took many forms and was ever present before and during industrialization. For women, proletarianization happened both inside and outside of the home, and this double process had 'important ramifications for women's family activities' too.⁷ In a more radical take, some women's and gender historians have redefined family activities as work that formed an indispensable component of labour, and was systematically exploited, under capitalism, and enabled capitalist accumulation. Gisela Bock and Barbara Duden in their often-quoted 1977 study describe the institutionalization and generalization of dependent unpaid housework after the early phase of capital accumulation as the 'subsumption of housework under capital':

[The] subordination of women and the institutionalization of the family as the organizational form of unpaid housework in the working class allowed for the payment of lower wages to the workers ... The entrepreneur or, respectively, the state, for one wage obtains two workers, the wage relation hides the unpaid work of the woman ... Women are not only the 'heart of the family', but the heart of capital.⁸

Through these and other interventions, feminist labour history has not only suggested that labour history must embrace a much larger scope of labour relations when studying modern economies, and systematically consider gender as an important category when exploring the history of labour. It has also questioned the epistemic value of the received conceptual canon of the discipline, the second route towards globalizing labour history indicated earlier. Both the question of unpaid labour for 'social reproduction' and the insistence on gender as a category relevant for all of the history of labour have constituted such challenges to the field.

As to the category of gender, bringing gendered perspectives into the history of labour initially caused a number of difficult and even troubled debates on the relationship between the categories of class and gender, or the priority of one over the other. From the 1990s, however, historians of women and gender began to engage productively with the challenge of 'intersectional' approaches. The concept of intersectionality has signalled a paradigmatic

shift by way of which the categories of class, gender and race – to name but three of the key categories involved – have come to be considered as constantly (re-)constructed and negotiated as well as mutually constitutive of each other. For the field of labour history, this implied that the primacy of class analysis was to be abandoned and that it was unpredictable, for example, how in a given historical moment and context ‘perceptions of racial and ethnic difference alongside gender helped to create new categories of workers and further divisions of labor.’⁹

Discussing the labour of social reproduction, feminist labour history has, among other things, questioned some of the received wisdom about the ‘commodification’ of labour engrained in the conceptual tool-kit of global labour history. Labour historians have long employed the notion of commodification to analyse the various social processes through which labour-power became a commodity to be measured, priced and finally sold to employers. These processes took place within many different contexts, ranging from agrarian transformations such as enclosures and land grabbing to the mechanization of agriculture and the ‘Green Revolution’. Mainstream labour history has tended to assume that the commodification of labour has been at the core of the history of labour in modern economies and has therefore conceptually privileged wage labour over all other forms of labour.¹⁰ Feminist labour history has fundamentally challenged this assumption. Simply put, it has asked why labour history should ‘not study all working people whether or not they are “commodified”’.¹¹ It has also suggested a conceptual re-thinking of ‘commodification’. In this view, in modern economies, a large portion of the unpaid labour of social reproduction, as it has re/reproduced the labour-power which will do commodified work in the service of profit, generates additional value, which as an ‘invisible’ subsidy is attached to the commodified labour-power so re/produced, and appropriated by the buyer of this labour-power. Unpaid labour thus has been invisibly commodified.¹² This also explains why and how, in the history of labour, the labour of social reproduction has constituted a site of constant struggle which has co-shaped the struggles of and over-commodified labour. Last but not least, modern economies have been expansive not only in terms of commodifying ever more labour, but also in terms of colonizing and indirectly exploiting ever more labour of social reproduction and subsistence labour. If, for no other reason, it is because of this tendency that the study of the history of labour needs to be attentive to all forms of unpaid labour.

A parallel example of a specific body of scholarship which has re-situated and reconstructed the master concept of commodification, thereby enlarging the scope of global labour history and opening new research avenues, is the work of anthropologist Martha Lampland. Her intervention puts at centre stage the history of Eastern European state socialism by way of revising the master narrative of commodification which was long predicated on the assumption that the commodification of labour was produced through severing individuals from the means of subsistence and subjecting them to the compulsion to sell their labour-power in the context of emerging or expanding capitalism. In this sense, the notion of commodification was seen as both a precondition for and a by-product of labour markets.¹³ Lampland’s work turns this set of arguments around by arguing that, historically, processes of commodification also took place in the absence of capitalist labour markets. Proposing an anthropology of the state, expertise, managerial practices and the so-called ‘science of work’ Lampland argues that the state-socialist regimes and planned economies of post-war Eastern Europe also produced commodified labour, both in the countryside with respect to agrarian labour and in the factories.¹⁴

The historiography produced around the 'subaltern studies' project constitutes another large body of scholarship that has demonstrated how traditional concepts in labour history can be radically re-thought in light of empirical material collected in peripheral or, seemingly, atypical historical settings. The history of peasant labour has been one key theme in this context. According to Dipesh Chakrabarty, the theoretical underpinnings of Ranajit Guha's work on peasant insurgencies in colonial India might be understood as a critique of 'historicism', namely of the assumption that historical development follows a stagist, universalist logic as capitalism comes to encompass various regions of the globe. Guha identifies one version of 'historicism' informing Eric Hobsbawm's treatment of peasant struggles in Southern Europe and Latin America, which the British historian acknowledged as driven by economic forces yet classified as backward-looking and 'prepolitical'. As Chakrabarty puts it, Guha 'insisted that instead of being an anachronism in a modernizing colonial world, the peasant was a real contemporary of colonialism, a fundamental part of the modernity that colonial rule brought to in India'.¹⁵ This assumption led Guha and his colleagues to conceive of texts left behind by the ruling classes as artefacts in which the 'social power relationships were encoded'. Consequently, in de-coding these texts, historians could write 'the history, histories of ... groups and people who didn't leave behind documents'.¹⁶ Two overlapping conclusions have been derived from these observations and approaches.

The first came as a methodological injunction. In the first issue of *Subaltern Studies*, published in 1982, Guha urged fellow historians to analyse the struggles of workers, peasants and the poor as an autonomous domain, a form of political expression that could not be hegemonized by the ruling Indian bourgeoisie.¹⁷ If during riots, strikes and other collective acts of protest, these historical actors mobilized a repertoire of contention that drew on ethnic markers, religious practices and communal customs, this was to be grasped as a logic of power of its own, sharing public spaces with the legal and secular mechanisms of consent and coercion employed by the state. The second conclusion carried implications for conceptualizing capitalism in South Asia. For if the struggles of the subaltern classes could be conceived of as autonomous, it followed that the development of capitalism outside the Western core countries did not *by necessity* bring 'bourgeois relations of power to a position of hegemony'.¹⁸ How, then, could the insights articulated by the subaltern studies historians in regard to explaining modern Indian history challenge the ways in which we think about global labour history?

Dipesh Chakrabarty provided the beginning of an answer in his comments on a collective volume exploring the labour history of Middle Eastern countries published in 1994. His observations concern the contributors' use of the notion of class formation which failed to take into consideration two aspects Chakrabarty deemed critical. Firstly, in writing about workers' struggles, labour historians should acknowledge that class formation goes hand in hand with state formation. For example, irrespective of their declared goals, trade-union struggles are always predicated on and part of the state's own logic of power to the extent that they test or enforce civil rights, such as the right to association. In this view, writing working-class histories is a way of sketching the 'biography of the state'.¹⁹ Secondly, Chakrabarty objected to the argument that one can distinguish neatly between protests informed by ethnicity, religion or custom and protests fuelled by 'class consciousness'. Such an argument rests on denying the autonomy of specific forms of workers' solidarity that do not easily fit trade-union politics, state categories of legibility or the historian's own progressive agenda.

Globalizing labour history: the fortune of selected challenges from the West and from the Global South

Using the examples discussed so far, in this section we reflect on some of the factors that have propelled or impeded creative and innovative link-making in global labour history. We consider the role of the given global conjunctures and unequal development as generating or foreclosing potential openings in the canon, as well as certain particularities of the given intervention itself.

Arguably, three factors have been of particular relevance in facilitating the relative success of the contribution of subaltern studies to the evolving field of global labour history. Firstly, subaltern studies proposed a re-thinking of the history of labour which, while originally referring to the history of labour in colonial and post-colonial India, was framed in such a way that it directly spoke to the findings or puzzles with which labour historians in other world regions were concerned. In addition, as we have seen above, subaltern studies engaged directly in globalizing the debate about the history of labour. Some of the main arguments advanced by Ranajit Guha and Dipesh Chakrabarty today indeed inform global debates about the nature of 'modernity' and the trajectory of capitalism and class formation. Chakrabarty's call to integrate workers' struggle into larger stories of citizenship in order to write 'biographies of the state' visibly reverberates in studies of Latin American workers. Disagreements over Guha's 'autonomous domain' of popular protest resonated in the production of histories of the 'mutually intelligible' dynamics between workers and colonial elites in post-war Africa.²⁰

Secondly, the emergence of subaltern studies in the 1980s was, or appeared to be, especially compatible with the rising tide of cultural studies. Within the tradition of working-class history, subaltern studies helped to displace the central role assigned to political and craft organizations in organizing popular protest movements. Consequently, studies of workers' and peasants' collective action – food riots, revolts, wildcat strikes and so on – could be analysed as varying expressions of popular culture rather than as 'backward' forms of protest undertaken in the absence of 'class consciousness'. For instance, Chakrabarty argues that the hierarchical culture in which the jute workers of Bengal were embedded in the first half of the twentieth century hindered a full proletarianization of the workforce. Turning proletarianization into a condition of permanence constantly reinforced under colonial capitalism in India, Chakrabarty points out how the unfolding of capitalism in colonial settings did not and could not bring about the type of workers inhabiting the core of European industrialization.²¹ These arguments, again, closely mirror debates in African labour history about the permanent or transitory nature of proletarianization processes.²² More recently, Vivek Chibber's critique of the subaltern studies' historiography re-opened the debate around the category of 'abstract labour' and, implicitly, about the universalizing social consequences of capitalist development in specific locations.²³ Finally, these debates coincided with global change that affected the prospects of convergent economic development across various regions of the world, at times overruling the modicum of progress made during the post-war period. Since the 1980s, the related phenomena of the decomposition of the working class as traditionally conceived of by many labour historians also became visible in the Global North. It was in this context that arguments questioning the universalizing tendencies of capitalism and underlining its compatibility with culturally

articulated forms of oppression or resistance, as well as arguments against the inevitability of workers' developing 'class consciousness' gained traction.

Feminist labour history with a focus on the Western world arguably has been less successful than subaltern studies at visibly impacting the global circuits of knowledge in the field of labour history. This is striking given the fact that it emerged as a conceptually challenging field of research in its own right, partaking in the post-structuralist or post-modernist turn in the discipline of history,²⁴ in visible parallel with subaltern studies. To be sure, in terms of the more factual dimensions of engendering the study of labour feminist labour history has made substantial inroads. Working women and the 'atypical' labour relations in which many of them have been involved are now part of the canon, and the critique of the marginalization of women and women's work in the present and past politics of the labour movement and the historiography of labour has been well taken. The picture is more blurred when it comes to evaluating the fate of the conceptual contributions discussed above. Neither the feminist critique of the conceptualization of commodification and its central role in the theoretical underpinnings of much labour history, nor the displacement of class as the master category of labour history as exemplified by the intersectional approach, have gained much traction in the new global labour history. Significantly, studies aiming to rethink gendered labour history from a more global perspective have been published in publications focusing on gender history rather than labour history,²⁵ and have rarely been taken up or discussed in any substance in the new global labour history. Simultaneously, in our – admittedly limited – screening of the most recent publications at the heart of the new global labour history, we have not come across monographs that would put intersectionality, or the conceptual 'equal treatment' and intersection between gender, class, and race, at centre stage. The same is true for the study of the gendered divisions and hierarchies between paid work on the one hand and the labour of social reproduction and subsistence labour on the other,²⁶ even though this theme has recently gained new currency in disciplines other than history.

We believe that one reason which can explain why the more far-reaching feminist challenges have not been fully met lies in the conceptual incompatibility of the relevant argument and thinking with most varieties of class analysis, which continue to lie at the heart of many contributions to global labour history. Marxian or post-Marxian thinking in particular has remained strongly rooted in class analysis, with a focus on commodified labour and technological progress. While the feminist propositions initially contributed to destabilizing class analysis and problematizing the labour theory of value, Marxian and left-wing labour history has found it difficult to come up with materialist alternatives.²⁷ Feminist historians today still, or again, seem to be knocking at the doors, just as they did 30 years ago. In a recent debate on the new global labour history, Dorothy Sue Cobble critically interrogated why global labour history should continue to 'privilege "commodification" as the most important form of exploitation?'²⁸ Silvia Federici has pinpointed one historical juncture that can help to explain some of left-wing labour historians' unease with non-commodified labour. The approaches foregrounding commodification directly build on Marx' oeuvre. His disregard for the relevance of women's unpaid labour for capitalist accumulation was co-produced by the particular historical circumstances of his time, namely the extreme squeeze on social reproduction in the period of the industrial revolution,²⁹ and, one might add, the stunning drive towards the commodification of labour in the hubs of the industrial revolution – rather than the overall position of commodified labour – during his lifetime. Even as leading voices now make sure to include the study of unpaid labour in the framings

of global labour history,³⁰ the issue of how to conceptually integrate the labour of social reproduction into the field remains a challenge.

Similarly, (explicitly or implicitly) class-based analyses of the history of labour have not taken up the challenge of intersectional analysis. While it was easy to dismiss some of the early feminist labour history for privileging the category of gender over the category of class, the concept of intersectional analysis offers a much more open-ended alternative to traditional class analysis. However, even though it involves a re-thinking of the role of, for instance, ethnicity in labour struggles which is parallel to but also different from subaltern studies' propositions, it has not been taken up by labour historians beyond feminist circles.

A number of factors related to the global constellation of our days may also help to explain the limited degree of attention to, and conceptual integration of, the large theme of the unpaid labour of social reproduction into global labour history. The processes by which particular types of knowledge are taken up or 'relatively disregarded' in an emerging field such as global labour history, continue to be driven, among other things, by inequalities in the global circuits of knowledge. The Western world, or the Global North, in recent decades has seen a large wave of the accelerated commodification of formerly unpaid household labour. Millions of often precariously employed immigrant women have come to these countries to do this work. If we speculate that the experience of the privileged world regions is of particular influence on the development of the new global labour history, it can be argued that this process, while contributing to the rise of the interest in precarious and migratory labour, has also served to foreclose a change of attitude with regard to unpaid household labour, which has remained largely invisible in global labour history. Last but not least, gender historians in the West have themselves been less keen to promote overarching conceptual debate on the role of unpaid work for social reproduction for the study of labour in historical and global development, in particular as compared to researchers discussing the global or more universal framings of women's and gender studies. Feminist development studies and feminist political economists seem to be more interested in developing overarching conceptual framings which fully integrate the labour of social reproduction into the study of labour.³¹ Early programmatic texts by feminist historians such as 'Arbeit aus Liebe – Liebe als Arbeit' quoted above, while irreversibly changing the coordinates of the field, have not been followed up in the longer run by overarching conceptual debate within feminist labour history. The reluctance of many feminist labour historians to push for such debate arguably might have contributed to keeping the challenge of fully integrating the labour of social reproduction and subsistence labour into the overarching paradigms in global labour history low-key.

Contributions from Eastern Europe

In this section, we focus on contributions and potential contributions from Eastern Europe to global labour history, including the scholarship discussed in the four studies assembled in this Dossier. We discuss some of the reasons why, despite so many potential connections, it has been rather difficult to link the older as well as the more recent scholarship on the history of labour and the labour movements in Eastern Europe to the new global labour history.

Eastern European, and in particular East-Central and South-Eastern European labour history, experienced a period of marked decline between the late 1980s and the early 2000s. More recently, however, the history of labour, working-class politics and political parties as

well as of processes of industrialization and urbanization under state socialism has developed into a lively and conceptually elaborate research field in Eastern Europe.³² By contrast, until very recently little new research has addressed the history of labour before the advent of state socialism. This has begun to change now. The four contributions to this Dossier revisit the scholarship on this large theme written before 1989, interrogating national traditions of labour historiography produced between 1947 and 1989 in Romania, Poland and East Germany in comparison to West Germany and Hungary. They highlight elements of the scholarship on the history of labour in Eastern Europe in the pre-socialist period which only became part of global circuits of knowledge to a limited degree, and have largely fallen into oblivion since. This Eastern European scholarship was not only contemporaneous with the Western feminist historians' and subaltern studies' contributions to labour history introduced above. The authors of this Dossier also demonstrate that the themes addressed and concepts discussed by the Eastern European scholarship were, or could have been, in close dialogue with these other contributions to global labour history.

In the first contribution, Alexandra Ghit re-reads state-socialist Romanian historiography. Her study points to the connection between the politics of asserting female communist historians' presence in the profession and the attention given to questions of women and labour, including social reproduction, in the early period, and changes in later decades. In the second contribution, Natalia Jarska ferrets out several key debates in Polish Communist historiography around the notion of class and its uses. In his article, Thomas Lindenberger describes GDR labour history as being overall uninventive, despite strong competition between East and West German scholarship, and explains why the study of labour under state socialism was more vibrant in re-unified Germany from the 1990s than in other formerly socialist countries and why it remained so in unified Germany, in marked contrast to the fate of the discipline across Eastern Europe after 1989. Finally, Susan Zimmermann zooms in on the scholarship written in state-socialist Hungary on the history of peasant workers and agrarian radicalism.

There are several reasons why the post-1989 history of labour under state socialism has developed somewhat in isolation from trans-regional and global debates on the history of labour. Firstly, this literature has so far not been strongly involved in the recent trend, visible internationally and within Eastern Europe, of studying state-socialist Eastern Europe from a trans-national or global perspective. Secondly, it might be argued that the fact that some of the new scholarship on labour under state socialism has combined an interest in the history of labour with the exploration of particular events in the political history of Eastern Europe has hampered rather than furthered dialogue with the new global labour history. We can briefly mention here two excellent contributions that have defined the field in terms of research strategies and conceptualization. Pádraic Kenney's study of post-war Polish workers in Wrocław and Łódź,³³ covering the first five years after the end of the Second World War makes use of a number of key concepts in labour history. Kenney shows how the communist authorities managed to gain workers' support in Wrocław, a former German city quickly filled with Polish rural migrants in search of work, and encountered stiff opposition among textile workers in Łódź, one of Poland's traditional industrial enclaves. Similarly, in his social history of post-war Hungarian workers, Mark Pittaway chose to explore how 'the regime established legitimacy, haltingly; how it maintained it tentatively; and how it lost it entirely in 1956, before compromising with a rather different kind of legitimacy'.³⁴ In the introduction to a special issue devoted to workers in post-war

Eastern Europe, Pittaway urges labour historians not only to take communism seriously as a 'social experience' but also to explore carefully working-class cultures and the way in which workers' durable dispositions shaped the emergence of state socialism after 1945.³⁵ Pittaway, too, mobilized core notions of labour history such as labour control to examine questions of consent, conflict and accommodation in Hungarian factories during the first two decades of state socialism. This literature has significantly enriched our knowledge of state socialism, its exploration of the history of industrial workers, shopfloor politics and everyday struggles. At the same time, however, rather than gearing these histories towards conceptual debate on the global history of labour,³⁶ it has aimed to shed new light on events and processes circumscribed by the historical experience of state-socialist regimes such as the October Revolution in Hungary or the distant origins of Solidarność in Poland.³⁷ By contrast, Martha Lampland's contribution introduced above to re-thinking the concept of commodification from state-socialist Eastern Europe certainly belongs in a group of studies which could be read more easily as an Eastern European contribution to such global debates. By disentangling the notion of commodification from market institutions and practices, Lampland opened up new perspectives which could be picked up by global labour historians in at least two complementary ways. On the one hand, studies of managerial practices might find in labour commodification a common vantage point from which to assess the global circulation and hybridization of such practices between different, allegedly opposing, political and economic systems. On the other hand, Lampland's work makes it possible to map out comparatively the types of work that were excluded from commodification under market and state-dominated historical formations. Amongst the contributors to this Dossier, Thomas Lindenberger, in discussing the history of labour in the GDR as a history of aborted Fordism, similarly offers a direct venue for thinking labour under state socialism into global labour history.

Thirdly, the inward-looking tendency of some of the scholarship on the history of labour under state socialism has combined with a narrow definition of the temporal scope of this body of scholarship, which has resulted in a tendency to conceive of labour under state socialism as a separate and isolated history. Efforts to frame the study of labour under state socialism in a *longue durée* perspective are few and far between.³⁸ However, studying labour under state socialism in the *longue durée* entails a unique opportunity to connect, through a focus on the historical transformation of labour in Eastern Europe and on continuity and change, the history of labour under state socialism to the history of labour in market societies across the world.

Since the fall of state socialism, the history of labour in Eastern Europe before the advent of state socialism has attracted few historians. By contrast, as demonstrated by the contributions assembled in this Dossier, historians publishing during the state-socialist period have produced a large body of research on this theme. This Dossier proposes ways in which the historiography of labour in Eastern Europe might be revisited in terms of its relevance for global labour history. The contributions tease out topics of research and objects of investigation which have or have not been addressed earlier, as well as conceptual contributions, which might speak to global labour history. They also discuss how the politics of history have influenced the fortune and fate of writing labour history in Eastern Europe, and in the other part of Germany, supplying food for thought and some pieces of the jigsaw for global labour historians who are contemplating the history of the making of their field.

Taken together, the contributions aim to assess how historians writing under self-proclaimed socialist regimes undertook to construe objects of research in labour history, explored questions of capitalist development, debated issues of methodology and thought about wage labour and the labour movement in their own respective countries and in Eastern Europe more generally. The contribution on Germany puts these developments into a long-term and comparative perspective.

Under the state-socialist regimes of Eastern Europe, the history of labour occupied a central position. In the eyes of the ruling authorities, the entire discipline was a 'science of the court' (*Hofwissenschaft*) entrusted with the mission to build up teleological historical narratives in service of the regime, glorifying a past of struggle and hardship that necessarily ended up with the victory of the Communist Party.³⁹ Relegated to the newly founded Institutes of Marxism-Leninism, this historiography was heavily financed, a fact which allowed labour historians to make use of and partake in a genuine archival revolution. Documents pertaining to the history of labour struggle and the labour movement, of factories and aristocratic manors – some of them dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – or trade unions were carefully collected and catalogued.⁴⁰ Archivists and historians pursued large-scale oral-history projects as well as biographical life-writing in their effort to assemble ego-documents from former participants in key historical events such as the 1907 peasant *jacquerie* in Romania, the great strikes of the interwar epoch and wartime resistance. Labour leaders and rank-and-file activists alike were interviewed or asked to write down their memoirs.⁴¹ This massive database supported the publication of factory monographs, studies of working-class formation and biographies of the militants of the labour movement.

The pressures of ideological conformism among labour historians under state socialism did not result in an absence of debates over questions of historical method, the use of concepts and the scholarly relevance of empirical findings. The authors of this Dossier are far from in agreement when it comes to judging the potential scholarly relevance for present-day global labour history of the elements of the historiography of labour which they discuss in their respective contributions, and they present different lines of argument when reflecting on how present-day global history might critically engage with these traditions.

If the genre of labour history as it is broadly conceived was pivotal for the state-socialist regimes of post-war Eastern Europe, the history of women workers and women activists was all but marginal. As Alexandra Ghit argues, the overall marginality of the history of women in state-socialist Romania was the outcome of a series of contingent yet gendered struggles within the historical profession, carefully differentiating between different periods. Although during the early 1950s the Communist Party promoted women historians and largely encouraged research focused on the role of women in the interwar labour movement, these pursuits were often framed as 'amateurish' in relation to allegedly more professionalized brigades of male historians and their research interests. Still, the period of 'high Stalinism' proved conducive in terms of the inclusion of women historians and women's history. By exploring the activities of the Institute for Party History under the leadership of Clara Cușnir-Mihailovici, Ghit shows how the initial historiographical production of the Institute examined the role of women within the labour movement, collecting testimonies and building up biographies of 'veteran' female activists. This approach to the interwar past, however, was soon marginalized through discourses emphasizing the professionalization of historical writing and the rehabilitation of the Romanian nation as the main object of

historiographical attention. Nevertheless, labour and women's history made a comeback during the 1970s, much of it still relying, as Ghit argues, on input from and the expertise of so-called 'amateur' women historians. In Ghit's reading, publications on female labour movement activists had an explicit recuperative stake, ferreting out a plethora of primary sources in order to shed light on processes of proletarianization, class formation and everyday struggle during the interwar period. Characteristically, these studies carefully documented working conditions, the plight of women workers in factories and the countryside as well as the challenges of political mobilization and participation in the labour movement. It is in the depiction of this last aspect that Ghit locates the contemporary relevance of this historiography for global labour history. The prose used to narrate women's involvement in the labour movement of interwar Romania suggests a possible revisiting as 'affective work' the wide range of activities women engaged in to support (and make possible) political action. According to Ghit, gendered labour struggle in interwar Europe and around the globe, including the ways in which women's social and political activism structured the emergence of proletarian public spheres, deserves closer attention.

Natalia Jarska explores how after 1956 such debates unfolded in Polish historiography around the category of the 'working class'. After destalinization, Polish historians started to question the usefulness of a binary concept of class that neatly distinguished between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and identified most other lower social groups as 'pre-capitalist plebeians' lacking 'class consciousness'. This rigid framework, associated with Orthodox Marxism, gave way to more subtle understandings of class that took into account the 'underdeveloped' nature of capitalism in the Polish Kingdom and expanded the notion to include rural and other types of workers as well.

According to Jarska, the abandonment of Orthodox Marxism in the late 1950s had a clear impact on subsequent historiography of labour in Poland. Equally importantly, Polish historians could freely draw on indigenous social theory that sociologists and social thinkers had developed in the interwar period in order to refine their categories of analysis. Studies of working-class formation organized around notions of proletarianization, urban lifestyle and wage dependence were soon supplemented by social histories of proto-industrialization, peasant mobility and the reproduction of craft traditions. The general context in which these processes took place was not one that pitted the bourgeoisie against an emergent labour movement, but rather one in which the working class struggled against feudal social relations and a culture of hierarchy in the countryside and the cities alike. And although structural accounts of class formation rotted in wage statistics and price fluctuations remained dominant in Polish historiography throughout the state-socialist period, Jarska shows how the emphasis on 'underdevelopment', late feudalism and 'backwardness' opened a window for investigations of workers' culture during the 1980s, including questions of patriarchal authority and ethnicity.

Thomas Lindenberger discusses the interconnected historiographies of labour produced in the GDR and the FRG before 1989, and invites a more global reading of the history of labour in the GDR during the same period. Lindenberger, in contrast to the findings of Susan Zimmermann with regard to one 'special' element of Hungarian labour historiography, describes the large body of scholarship on the history of labour written in the GDR as – overall – conceptually narrow and dated even whilst including a number of different genres and undergoing change over the decades. The rigidity of the conceptual framings of this scholarship did not, however, hinder East German historians from engaging in cross-border

exchanges with their West German peers, notably beginning in the late 1970s. It is unclear to which extent this history of interaction later contributed to the remarkable fact that labour history formed an important, constitutive element of the new historiography called upon to investigate the second German dictatorship which began to mushroom immediately after the fall of the GDR. Lindenberger argues that both German re-unification and the character of GDR society were crucial in generating this development. In this reading, the veritable boom in 'DDR-Geschichte' which followed unification included a strong labour history dimension because work had been central to the social, economic and cultural history of the GDR, reaching deep into the everyday of ordinary people. Using this fundamental insight into the history of labour in the GDR as a springboard, Lindenberger proposes the notion of 'Fordism' as an analytical category that might bring the experience of daily life and labour in state-socialist East Germany (and state socialism more generally) into the purview of global labour historians. According to Lindenberger, some of this new literature on the history of workers in the GDR points towards the possibility of conceptualizing state socialism as a variant of 'Fordism', a theoretical operation which would potentially align Eastern Europe after the Second World War with global patterns. The concept of Fordism might indeed help to account historically for the dynamic growth of the immediate post-war years, the crisis of the 1970s and the subsequent inability of state socialism to make the transition to more flexible production and consumption modes during the 1980s. Fordism might also provide an overarching framework for interpreting the life trajectories, leisure activities and work rhythms experienced by blue- and white-collar workers. In our reading, the multi-faceted tradition of research on labour, industry and the economy produced both before 1989 and after in the two Germanies could potentially prove useful in grounding empirically such an approach. The once thriving genre of the 'factory monograph' (*Betriebsgeschichte*) discussed in Lindenberger's contribution, for instance, might be taken as a cultural artefact of the GDR's own variety of Fordism, serving historians as a body of source material for interrogating the cultural representation of East Germany as a 'company-centred society'.

The material presented in the contributions invites reflection on various layers of the politics of both the Western and non-Marxian preponderance in international scholarship and the Cold War as well as its ongoing legacy and sometimes painful aftermath impacting on the relationship between Eastern Europe and the rest of the world. According to Susan Zimmermann, Hungarian historiography under state socialism was home to a rich variety of empirically grounded research on the history of agrarian labour as it was broadly conceived in the pre-1945 period. This evolving tradition sprang from a variety of different sources and at times starkly divergent interests and thus did not constitute a unified or integrated research arena. Only some of this literature was translated into languages other than Hungarian. However, this fact in and of itself does not explain the apparent isolation, when observed from an international angle, of this research tradition, or the fact that it has fallen into oblivion since. A fuller picture emerges when a number of additional contexts are taken into consideration. First, the Hungarian research on the agrarian working classes fully partook – and, in hindsight, this of course constitutes one of its limitations – in the conceptual framing of labour history *en vogue* at the time internationally and in Eastern Europe, which aimed to show how the working class, narrowly defined as constituted of free proletarian wage workers, came into being. However, at the same time this research focused on a group of workers who for many decades constituted the large core of the working class in agro-industrial Hungary, and whose history of protracted 'in-betweenness',

unfreedom, and so on, did not fit into the paradigm of the industrial working class as the core of the working class. However, this scholarship, while insisting on the long-term historical relevance of this large sector of work and its non-conformity with the dominant paradigm of the history of the working class, did not urge fundamental conceptual revision. Second, in the global perspective during the 1960s and 1970s this research remained marginal because it looked at a non-core world region, while research focusing on the West dominated the international scholarly landscape. In addition, this literature was associated with the state-socialist world and, thus, within the Cold War constellation, with aspiring but secondary power and its classical Marxism. For these reasons, it was subjected to Western-driven politics of containment. Third, when by the 1980s, internationally, Marxian and post-Marxian revisionism, including subaltern studies of the history of labour, were beginning to make their impact, this research tradition, while losing momentum under the changing conditions within Hungary, clung to its universalist and classical social-history framings. Fourth, after 1989, when labour history internationally gradually transformed into what today has become discernible as global labour history, in Hungary labour history was abandoned altogether and completely devalued as belonging to the state-socialist past.

In hindsight, then, it might be argued that the critical awareness of this Eastern European research tradition has fallen victim to a multiply disadvantageous conjuncture. In the 1960s and 1970s, international labour historiography was not prepared to take up the challenge of integrating the historiography of a neglected group of workers in a 'backward' agrarian country, which only half-heartedly aimed to broaden inherited narrow Marxist notions of class formation so as to fit agrarian workers in. From the 1980s, subaltern peasant studies 'overwrote' this Eastern European intervention as they took part in a much more radical questioning of such notions and the evolving globalization of historical research. In this context, some non-Western regional traditions of unconventional thinking and writing came to be discussed as contributions to a critical re-thinking of the global in history.⁴² By contrast, it might be argued, the research tradition reviewed by Susan Zimmermann, and also some of the scholarship discussed in the other contributions to this Dossier, was too 'Marxist' and 'too close' to qualify for such immediate recycling.

Concluding remarks

In his overview of East European historiography produced under state socialism, Maciej Górny notes that what allowed for dialogue between Western historians and their Eastern counterparts during the middle decades of the last century was not so much thematic issues as methodological approaches:

Contrary to many popular post-1989 opinions, it was Marxist methodology in general, and the new perspectives of social and economic research in particular, that enabled many of them to communicate with *Annales* scholars, as well as to absorb such recent Western developments as modernization theory into their work. It was also non-schematic Marxism that made Polish, Hungarian, and Czechoslovak historians intellectually interesting partners for the Western scholars. Understood as a useful tool, and not as an ideological burden, it helped historians escape the primordial national narrative as codified in the native nationalisms and then petrified by the official interpretation of history in the 1950s.⁴³

Górny, in other words, claims that historiography written in state-socialist Eastern Europe made a strong if partly hidden or unacknowledged contribution to the larger development

of historiography in the period. In this Introduction, we have taken a step forward by arguing, in dialogue with the authors of the four ensuing contributions, that current agendas in global labour history might be enlarged and de-provincialized by paying attention to and re-thinking the empirical findings and conceptual debates that have defined the historiography on labour in Eastern Europe during and after state socialism. In order to substantiate this point, we have assumed that historical knowledge is cumulative and that the expansion of research agendas in particular fields of enquiry such as global labour history proceeds by what we called 'link-making'. We have shown why and how some of the empirical findings and theoretical considerations on the history of labour developed in subaltern studies, feminist scholarship, the new history of labour under state socialism, and the scholarship on labour written under state socialism, as discussed in the contributions to the Dossier have challenged some of the core assumptions and master concepts of labour history. We have also considered whether, how and to what degree each of these bodies of scholarship has in fact been, or could be, read as a contribution to global labour history, pointing to some of the factors conducive to or hampering trans-regional link-making. The scholarship discussed in the Introduction and the contributions to the Dossier have involved new thinking and new findings related to the history of popular protest, the spread of capitalism, household work, the role of different types of wage labour in the development of modern economies, agrarian radicalism, peripheral capitalism, comparative Fordism and affective work. The discussion of each of these themes in the Introduction and the four ensuing contributions points to the complexity of link-making. Important factors conducive to or hampering successful link-making include the conceptual framings of the given research, the relevant larger historical context against which any given – potential – contribution to global labour history in a given historical period is situated, and a number of case-specific factors influencing the patterns of reception and interaction.

We conceive of this Dossier as an invitation to labour historians around the world to creatively engage, as exemplified by the contributions to the Dossier, with regional traditions of the historiography of labour and regional histories of labour from a global perspective. Conversely, it can also be read as an invitation addressed to historians of labour in Eastern Europe to open up their research topics to methodologies, problematics and interpretative schemes pioneered by global labour history – while insisting on the relevance of the regional experience and the research traditions building on it. The merits of this operation might reside in a broadening of scope and an emancipation from parochial narratives that carry little explanatory value outside the field of Eastern European history. Some of the new historiography of labour under state socialism lends itself to such more globally inspired re-thinking of the history of labour in Eastern Europe. The wealth of archival evidence on labour before the advent of state socialism amassed before 1989 provides an ideal context in which to pursue questions articulated with the global labour history agenda. The contributions assembled here point out that such engagement could critically put to use the historiography of labour produced under state socialism both for its empirical richness and for its ambition to tackle large-scale processes and epochal transformations.

Notes

1. There is somewhat less sidestepping of the history of labour in Russia and the Soviet Union, which internationally is dominated by Anglo-Saxon and other English language scholarship.

2. See the argument in Bergquist, "Labour History and Its Challenges," 757–64. Bergquist urges his fellow labour historians of Latin America to question the applicability of categories of analysis developed to account for the unfolding of labour struggles in Western Europe to their own case studies.
3. Behal, *One Hundred Years of Servitude*. Behal links the emergence of indentured labour on the 'capitalist plantations' of colonial India to the growing importance of tea as a global commodity.
4. Beckert and Rockman, *Slavery's Capitalism*.
5. For a sample of this literature, see Campbell and Stanziani, *Debt and Slavery in the Mediterranean and Atlantic Worlds*; De Vito and Lichtenstein, *Global Convict Labor*; van der Linden and Rodríguez, *On Coerced Labor*.
6. For a recent restatement of free wage labour as a systemic feature of capitalism, see Welskopp, "Kapitalismus und Konzepte von Arbeit," 197–216. After reviewing Marx and Weber on the relationship between free wage labour and capitalism, Welskopp concludes that forms of unfree labour (both historical and contemporary) are compatible with but by no means constitutive of capitalism.
7. Tilly and Scott, *Women, Work and the Family*.
8. Here and in the following all translations into English are by the authors. Bock and Duden, "Arbeit aus Liebe – Liebe als Arbeit," esp. 152, 175, 177f. For an overview of relevant research with regard to North America, see Boris and Herbert Lewis, "Caregiving and Wage-Earning," 73–97.
9. Frader, *Breadwinners and Citizens*, 104, 110–13. For conceptual considerations, see Boris and Janssens, "Complicating Categories," 1–13.
10. For the privileged relationship between free wage labour and capitalism in classical European social theory, see Offe, "Work: The Key Sociological Category?," in *Disorganized Capitalism*, 129–50. Debate on the relationship between free wage labour and capitalism continues to be a lively arena of conceptual encounter amongst those labour historians who have widened the scope of the study of labour under capitalism.
11. Cobble, "The Promise and Peril of the New Global Labor History," 103.
12. Bennholdt-Thomsen, "Subsistenzproduktion und erweiterte Reproduktion," 30–51.
13. See also the discussion in Biernacki, "Labor as an Imagined Commodity," 173–206.
14. Lampland, *The Object of Labor*; and, more recently, Lampland, *The Value of Labor*.
15. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 13.
16. Schäbler, "Interview with Dipesh Chakrabarty by Birgit Schäbler," esp. 257.
17. Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," 1–9. For Guha's creative appropriation of the Gramscian concept of hegemony, see Anderson, *The H-Word*.
18. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 14. In his earlier work on jute mill workers in Bengal, Chakrabarty asked how a 'prebourgeois culture' defined by hierarchy could challenge Marxian 'historicist' assumptions about the universality of capitalism; see Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History*.
19. Chakrabarty, "Labor History and the Politics of Theory," 321–34.
20. Casey, "Heterogeneity, Work, and Mobilisation," 169–85. By contrast, Frederick Cooper has underscored the importance of 'universalistic' languages and regimes of labour in decolonizing Africa. Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*.
21. Chatterjee, "Subaltern Studies and Capital," 69–75.
22. Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*, 38–81.
23. Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*.
24. Rose, *What Is Gender History*, 102–5.
25. Important examples include Frader, "Gender and Labor in World History," 26–50, and Smith, "Gender and Work," 145–94.
26. Marcel van der Linden has made a case conceptually for including subsistence labour in the global history of labour, referring to the 1970s debate on the political economy of domestic labour, and regretting the 'relative disregard' in global labour history for some of the key

- contributions to the study of subsistence labour. Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World*, chap. 14, esp. 320, 322f.
27. A useful discussion can be found in Savage, "Class and Labour History," 55–72. The return of emphatically materialist approaches to labour history might bring productive turns, though. For instance, an introduction to a cluster of articles on 'Work across Africa' published in 2017 aims to combine the current 'revival of the Marxian view of a world in which different class interests played out in opposition to each other' with an enlarged vision of commodification, allowing for the systematic inclusion of gendered household labour. Belluci and Freund, "Introduction," 27–35.
 28. Cobble, "The Promise and Peril of the New Global Labor History," 104.
 29. The chapter quoted here was originally published in 2009. Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 92ff.
 30. Hofmeester and van der Linden, "Introduction,"
 31. Important contributions to this scholarship have been assembled in Beneria and Bisnath, *Gender and Development*. For the more recent literature and debate, see Peterson, "International Feminist Journal of Politics," 5–35.
 32. Excellent yet surely non-exhaustive reviews of this literature are contained in Peter Heumos, "Workers under Communist Rule," 83–115, and Archer and Music, "Approaching the Socialist Factory and Its Workforce," 44–66.
 33. Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*.
 34. Pittaway, *The Worker's State*. The quote comes from Nigel Swain's introduction to the volume.
 35. Pittaway, "Workers and Socialist States in Postwar Central and Eastern Europe," 1–8. In the same vein, see Grama, "Labouring Along."
 36. However, the work of Mark Pittaway in the years before his untimely death can be read as a contribution to such debate; see the conceptual reflection by Swain, "Epilogue." The same is true of some of the earlier scholarship on labour under state socialism; see for example Burawoy and Lukacs, *The Radiant Past*.
 37. Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*.
 38. One notable exception is Pobłocki, "The Cunning of Class."
 39. Tych, "Die Geschichtsschreibung der Arbeiterbewegung 30 Jahre nach Gründung der ITH aus der Sicht osteuropäischer Länder. Einige Anmerkungen."
 40. Popescu-Puțuri, *Documente privind începuturile mișcării muncitorești socialiste din România*. No fewer than seven volumes were published covering the period between 1821 and 1924.
 41. In Hungary, the Politikátörténeti Intézet (Institute of Political History) keeps several hundred autobiographical writings, which its predecessor, the Párttörténeti Intézet (Institute of Party History) solicited and collected. The catalogue of these writings is not publicly accessible so as to protect the protagonists and their descendants.
 42. One influential contribution on Latin America has been Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 2000).
 43. Górný, "Historical Writing in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary," 258.

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