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Labour relations worldwide: the taxonomy of the Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations [1]

Content

1. Labour Relations: a short historiographical overview of classifications

Efforts to make classifications of types of work go back in Europe to Classical Antiquity[2], and a similar conclusion may apply to other parts of the world– although sources, and even more academic research, is much more rare in these cases.[3] These classifications concentrated on values attached to different types of work: intellectual and manual, agricultural, industrial and commercial, work in the household and in public and the like.

Most systematic were the attempts of the authors of the French *Encyclopédie*, first published 1751-1772, from which follow all classifications in occupational censuses made in North Atlantic countries and their colonies as well as the International Standard Classification of Occupations (*ISCO*)[4]. The latter was developed from the 1950s onwards by the International Labour Office (ILO), allowing

[1] Version November 2013, authored by Karin Hofmeester and Jan Lucassen, based on input of all participants, in particular Christine Moll-Murata and Marcel van der Linden.

[2] Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Worthy Efforts: Attitudes to Work and Workers in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012); see also the discussion about this book, which is forthcoming in *The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 11 (2014).

[3] Karin Hofmeester and Christine Moll-Murata Eds.), *The Joy and Pain of Work: Global Attitudes and Valuations, 1500-1650* (Special Issue 19, *International Review of Social History* 56, 2011).

[4] ILO. *International Standard Classifcation of Occupations: Revisited Edition 1968*. Geneva: International Labour Office, 1969.

classification of occupational activities worldwide. Basing themselves on *ISCO '68* historians have developed a historical international classification of occupations (HISCO) combined with information on their tasks and duties in historical settings as well as images on the history of work.[5]

Whereas these classifications of types of work are based on the relation between workers and nature or natural environment, others tried to systematize work according to different human relations involved. The oldest are the distinctions between master and servant and between slave owner and slave. Next to these legal distinctions came the notion of social stratification as well as that of 'class society' by Karl Marx and those inspired by him. Central to this line of thinking is the rise of the proletarians, i.e. the wage-dependent workers. The German scholar Werner Sombart (1863-1941) was the first as far as we know who attempted to apply this concept to the entire occupational population of a country (in this case the German Empire in 1905).[6] Besides, sociologists and historians tried to apply these categories to the entire population of Europe (except Russia) for the last five centuries.[7]

Ethnographers, geographers and archeologists (some referring to Karl Marx) pointed to the differences between labour relations in market economies in the West and those in other parts of the world, sometimes especially stressing the differences.[8] Finally, irrespective of time and place, occupational census takers, sociologists, and historians have increasingly struggled with the definitions of work, thereby being influenced by the emerging feminist movements who stressed the importance of the often unnoticed work of women and children. A most encompassing definition has been provided by the sociologists Tilly and Tilly: "Work includes any human effort adding use value to goods and services. […] Only a prejudice bred by Western capitalism and its industrial labor markets fixes on strenuous effort expended for money payment outside the home as 'real work', relegating other efforts to amusement, crime, and mere housekeeping".[9]

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[5] http://socialhistory.org/en/projects/hisco-history-work.

[6] Werner Sombart, *Das Proletariat. Bilder und Studien* (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening, 1906).

[7] Charles Tilly, "Demographic Origins if the European Proletariat", in: David Levine (Ed.), *Proletarianization and Family History* (Orlando [etc.]: Academic Press 1984), pp. 1-85.

[8] Jan Lucassen, *Outlines of a History of Labour* (*IISH Research Papers* 51, 2013),also available at http://socialhistory.org/en/publications/outlines-history-labour (commenting upon Weber, Polany, Chayanov and others).

[9] Charles Tilly and Chris Tilly, *Work under Capitalism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press,1998), p. 22.

2. The logic of the taxonomy

All these lines of thinking have inspired the members of the Collaboratory to develop a new encompassing classification of labour relations[10], non-existing before but necessary for long-term global comparisons. This classification of labour relations claims a much wider validity than the traditional occupational censuses do as it should cover the whole world from 1500 and in principle also for earlier periods. At the same time it pays tribute to a long historical pedigree of ideas, and it pretends to offer an analytical instrument for comparing labour relations globally.

The logic of the classification may be summarised as follows:

1. First, it distinguishes between those who are able or unable to work. This has at least two advantages: it forces the researcher to be aware of what work is[11]; and, the supplementary advantage of taking the entire population, explicitly also the working women and children into account, in the day-to-day practice of historical research compels the scholar to test the demographic logic of his results as all categories together should equal the total population.
2. Next, it distinguishes between the three different principles in which societies may organize the exchange of goods and services, including work (often but not necessarily coinciding with different types of societies, largely dominated by one of them[12]). These principles are reciprocity (work done for the other members of the same house or community), tribute giving (work based on obligations vis-à-vis the polity, which owns labour) and market exchange in which labour is "commodified" (i.e. where the worker, his/her means of production or the products of his/her work are sold).

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[10] Historically and linguistically the distinction between work and labour (like between oeuvre and travail, Werk and Arbeit etc.) refers to the distinction between creative activities versus strenuous activities. In the practice of labour history however, the distinction is different: labour is less general than work as the term refers to a specific type of work, mostly reserved for market economies, where it may be free labour or forced labour. Strictly speaking, we therefore should speak of work relations, but this terminology is rather uncommon, whereas labour relations is most common in the field of historical studies on work and labour.

[11] See Tilly and Tilly, *Work under Capitalism*, Ch. 2.

[12] We stress "dominate" because any society since the introduction of agriculture combines two or more of these main organizational principles. Think of reciprocal labour inside household, performed by housewives (labrel 5.2) inside a society, dominated by commodified labour.

3. For the period from 1500 till now, in various parts of the world reciprocal labour no longer was the most important category. For South Asia for example, it has been remarked that "self-sufficiency" can no longer have been complete. Basic foodstuffs, such as salt, and materials for tools and weapons, such as iron, were acquired through barter or monetary transactions even in tribal societies that were, by 1500, only marginally exposed to market production.[13] This is true even if we concede that "self-sufficiency" in our sense, which occurs in labour relations 4, 5.1, and 6, can include small-scale market transactions that aim at sustaining households rather than accumulating capital by way of profiting from exchange value.[14]
4. All other distinctions fall within these four main categories (labrel 1-3 for non-working, labrel 4-6 for reciprocal, labrel 7-11 for tributary and labrel 12-18 for commodified labour). They are based on various considerations, e.g. the entities which organise labour (households, communities or polities), the levels of free- and unfreedom, methods of remuneration, etc. These sub-categories will be explained in detail below.
5. The Collaboratory fully recognises the fact that persons at the same time may experience different labour relations. In those cases (e.g. serfs who part of the year are allowed to do wage labour) the researcher may attribute a first labour relation to the main activity (as defined by hours spent) and a second or even a third to the subsidiary activity. Research so far has shown that shifts in labour relations mostly take the form of shifts in such combinations, especially in the short run.

In order to enhance meaningful comparisons through time and space the Collaboratory for the time being concentrates on a limited number of cross sections (around 1500, 1650, 1800, 1900, (for Africa also 1950) and 2000) and strives at comparisons between similar geographical units between different cross sections.

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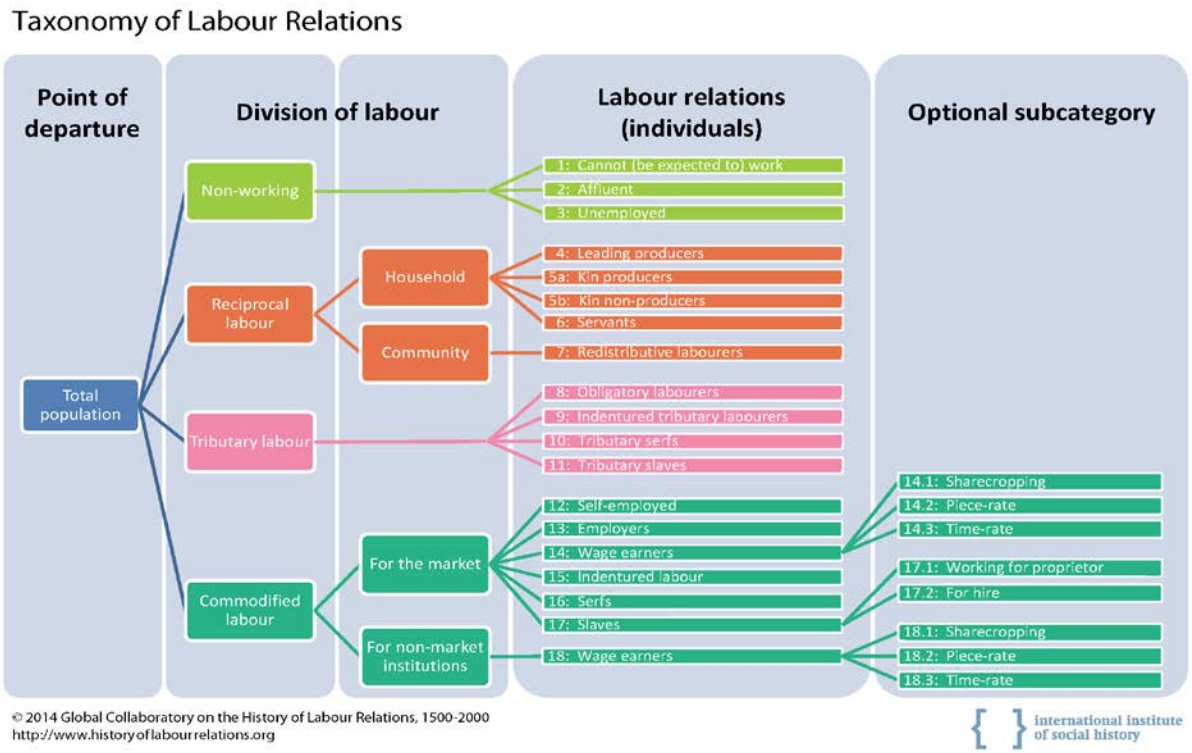
[13] According to Amalendu Guha, "The Medieval Economy of Assam", in Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds), *The Cambridge Economic History of India* (Cambridge, 1982), vol. 1, p. 487, "village self-sufficiency in a total sense was a myth", even for the relatively remote sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Assam.

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

3. The taxonomy



4. Definitions of Labour Relations

Non-working:

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

1. *Cannot work or cannot be expected to work:* those who cannot work, because they are too young (≤6 years), too old (≥75 years),[15] disabled, or are studying.

[15] These minimum and maximum ages are very much culturally determined. If these ages differ for the respective regions and cross sections it will be indicated in the database and motivated in the methodological paper.

2. *Affluent*: those who are so prosperous that they do not need to work for a living (rentiers, pensioners, etc.), and consequently actually do not work. This also goes for their spouses if all their productive and reproductive tasks are taken over by servants, nannies etc. There are of course affluent people, owners of big companies, who are affluent enough to stop working, however they chose to continue to work. These people should e.g. have labour relation 13 if they are employers instead of 2.

3. *Unemployed*: although unemployment is very much a nineteenth- and, especially, twentieth-century concept, we do distinguish between those in employment and those wishing to work but who cannot find employment.

Working:

Reciprocal labour:

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

Within the household:

4. *Leading household producers*: heads of self-sufficient households (these include family-based and non-kin-based forms, such as monasteries and palaces). Self-subsistence can include small market transactions, only if the biggest part of the income is earned by self-subsistence labour, heads of households have labour relation 4.

5a. *Household kin producers:* subordinate kin a.o. spouses (men and women) and children of the above mentioned heads of households that live mainly from self-subsistence, who contribute to the maintenance of the household by performing productive work for the household.

5b. *Household kin non-producers:* subordinate kin a.o. spouses (men and women) and children of heads of households who can support the household (under either reciprocal or commodified labour relations) , so the spouse and kin dependants are free from productive work but they contribute to the maintenance of household by performing reproductive work for the household, i.e. especially child rearing, cooking, cleaning and other household chores.

In all other cases spouses and kin producers of the named categories have income generating activities essential for the survival of the household, i.e. labrel 12,13 or 14 or 18 and will have either one of these labour relations themselves.

6. *Reciprocal household servants and slaves*: subordinate non-kin (men, women, and children) contributing to the maintenance of self-sufficient households. This category does not refer to household servants who earn a salary and are free to leave their employer of their own volition (i.e.

labrel 14), but rather to servants in autarchic households, monasteries and palaces. They may work under all shades of conditions from enforcement (including pawnship) to a desire to receive patronage. These conditions may change between generations.[16]

Within the community:

7. *Community-based redistributive workers*: persons who perform tasks for the local community in exchange for communally provided remuneration in kind, such as food, accommodation, and services, or a plot of land and seed to grow food on their own. Examples of this type of labour include working under the Indian *jajmani* system, hunting and defence by Taiwanese aborigines, or communal work in nomadic and sedentary tribes in the Middle East and Africa. In the case of the *jajmani* workers in South Asia, hereditary structures form the basis of the engagement, while in parts of Africa or atTaiwan the criteria for fulfilling community-based labour are gender nd age (in Taiwan for example males between six and forty).

Tributary labour:

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

8. *Obligatory labourers*: those who have to work for the polity, and are remunerated mainly in kind. They include corvée labourers, conscripted soldiers and sailors, and convicts. Yet the obligatory work can also be an entitlement that enjoys middle or high social standing, such as the European or Indian nobility, Samurai in Japan, or banner people in Qing China.

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

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

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

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[16] First generation slaves may be commodified, whereas their children may no longer be considered to be slaves and may be working for the household on more free conditions as was the case with children of slave women and free Assanti men, see Gareth Austin, *Labour, Land and Capital: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807-1956* (Rochester NY, 2005), 106-34, 174-80, 481-90, 498-500

Commodified labour:

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

For the market, private employment:

12. *Self-employed*: those who produce goods or services for market institutions, possibly in cooperation with other household members or no more than three wage labourers, apprentices, serfs, or slaves (for example, peasants, craftsmen, petty traders, transporters, as well as those in a profession). NB: All members of a family working under a putting-out system should be counted as self-employed producers.[17]

13. *Employers*: those who produce goods or services for market institutions by employing more than three wage labourers, indentured labourers, serfs, or slaves.

14. *Market wage earners*: wage earners who produce commodities or services for the market in exchange mainly for monetary remuneration (including to the temporarily unemployed).

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

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

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

15. *Indentured labourers for the market*: those contracted to work as unfree labourers for an employer for a specific period of time to pay off a private debt. They include indentured European labourers in the Caribbean in the 17th and 18th centuries, and after the abolition of slavery.

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

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

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

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

17.2 Slaves for hire, for example for agricultural or domestic labour in eighteenth-century Virginia.

For non-market institutions

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

18.1 Sharecropping wage earners: remuneration is a fixed share of total output (including the temporarily unemployed).

18.2 Piece-rate wage earners: remuneration at piece rates (including the temporarily unemployed), e.g. hired artisans in Chinese imperial silk weaveries during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

18.3 Time-rate wage earners: remuneration at time rates (including the temporarily unemployed), e.g. hired artisans on Chinese imperial construction projects during the Ming and Qing dynasties, but also workers and employees in twentieth-century state enterprises, including army and navy.