

Global Labour Relations and Persistent Social Inequalities: A Research Agenda

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¹ This text is based on discussions with senior researchers at the IISH, initially held between a core group consisting of Pepijn Brandon, Ulbe Bosma, Bas van Leeuwen, Matthias van Rossum, and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, and later encompassing the entire senior and research staff. Parts of this article are based on a concept position paper written by Pepijn Brandon, Marcel van der Linden, Leo Lucassen, and myself for the November 2019 workshop “Social Inequality: What Has Work Got To Do With It?”.

Introduction: Why labour relations and social inequality?

The IISH Global Labour History approach, first formulated in 1999 by Jan Lucassen and Marcel van der Linden, shifted the focus of our research agenda and that of many other labour historians.¹ We changed our perspective from a predominantly national approach towards labour history to a transnational and transcontinental comparison. We no longer focused on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century history of white, male factory workers but began to examine all forms of work and all types of workers, globally and over the last five hundred years. In this approach, work could range from unpaid household work and wage labour to slave labour and could be performed under different types of labour relations. This broad view of work, working conditions, and labour relations also led to a wider understanding of labour protest: this could be a strike but also a mutiny on a slave ship. The outcome of this transition to a global labour history is global comparative studies on work, workers and labour relations in several economic sectors, in sections of commodity chains, on so-called free and unfree labour, and a global taxonomy of labour relations as well as datasets on labour relations and labour conflicts, currently available online in Open Access.

The publications of the IISH Global Labour History programme also made evident that social inequality was an important theme, though often solely in an implicit way. In 2014, Leo Lucassen proposed a more explicit link between labour and social inequality by combining the labour relations typology and datasets with other data, as a means to analyse changes in the social position of workers and to integrate labour relations in the debate on social inequality.² Over the past decade, the academic and public debate on growing social and economic inequality has only increased. Increasing awareness about the consequences of capitalism – highly unequal globally – on people and planet contributed to this. At the same time, awareness grew, not least through the actions of new social movements, about the long legacy of slavery and colonialism. Consequently, the persistence of inequality based on the existential categorization of people became an key aspect of the social inequality debate. All this prompted us to feed this debate from the perspective of work and labour relations. The work carried out to date provides a solid base for this and there is clearly an academic and societal need for it.

It is now widely accepted notion that work, working conditions, and labour relations are crucial to our understanding of social inequality. According to Thomas Piketty's latest study: "it is impossible to understand the structure of inequality today without taking into account the heavy legacy of slavery and colonialism".³ In his book, he also refers to serfdom, bondage, and other forms of unfree labour and their impact. But the systematic link between labour relations and social inequality is not discussed. Our research agenda is developed to do just that: to understand the links between labour relations and persistent social inequality.

In the following paragraphs, we offer an overview of the various forms of social inequality addressed by the IISH research agenda and indicate how labour relations can explain the mechanisms behind the dynamics of social inequality. This is followed by a bird's-eye view of the main research clusters and their current and future projects and plans. But first, we start by taking stock of the IISH Global Labour History research programme over the past decade, to see where we stand today.

The IISH Global Labour History research programme: the last decade

For more than a decade, the IISH has been studying all forms of work and labour relations at macro, meso, and micro levels. The programme was initiated with the aim of classifying labour relations

globally and tracing the main changes and continuities over time and space. To this end, the IISH adopted broad definitions of labour relations and of work. Instead of the classical definition of labour relations as industrial relations, the Institute's new definition encompassed all those that worked, for whom they worked, why they worked, and under which rules. These rules could be implicit or explicit, written or unwritten. Together, they determined the type of work, kind and amount of remuneration, the number of working hours, the degrees of physical and psychological strain, as well as the degree of freedom and autonomy associated with the work.⁴ We borrowed a very broad definition from Charles and Chris Tilly: "Work [on the other hand,] includes any human effort adding use value to goods and services".⁵ Together with a large group of scholars from around the globe – united through a [Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations](#) – the IISH developed a [Taxonomy](#) of all types of labour relations, varying from self-subsistence labour within the household to wage labour, and from slave labour to self-employment. The members of the Global Collaboratory have also collected data on the development of labour relations and analysed factors that may explain changes over time and space, such as state actions, colonialism, and institutional change, as well as transformations in demography and family patterns.⁶

Alongside this macro approach to the study of work and labour relations, the IISH has also developed a number of projects focusing on the mechanisms behind the workings of unfree labour regimes and their consequences. Recent projects have paid special attention to slavery and the slave trade in various parts of the world, including Asia.⁷ Precarious work as well as the development of self-employment and wage labour have also been research subjects.⁸ Various colleagues study labour relations as part of entangled histories (of empires), showing how wage labour in one part of the world could move to other parts of the world, and how integration into the global market led (colonial) producers to adapt local labour relations.⁹ Others look at labour relations as part of industrial development, commodity production, commodity chains, and, most recently, in connection with commodity frontiers as part of transformations in capitalism.¹⁰

Many of these studies, though exploring global developments, focus on specific regions or the meso level of workplaces, such as plantations, mines, ships, and shipyards, looking at the labour relations mechanisms established by powerful actors, such as the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Others look at the individual and collective strategies of workers, finding "micro" sources that allow us to analyse and understand workers' behaviour, interactions, and strategies, for example in terms of intercultural and interracial interactions, mutinies and uprisings, or desertion.¹¹ On a truly micro, and also more local, level the Historical Sample of the Netherlands offers a representative sample of about 85,500 people born in the Netherlands during the period 1812–1922, mapping their individual life courses and offering a unique insight into individuals' behaviour and strategies to improve their social position, in the same way as our studies and datasets on migration provide insights into strategies at a more macro level.¹²

These studies of work and labour relations from different angles and perspectives focus on workers' behaviour towards labour relations and labour regimes, including allocation and coordination mechanisms of work, as well as on workers' responses and agency. Insights from these studies combined with our datasets on labour relations (collaboratory datasets as well as various datasets on slavery), indicators of social inequality (Clio-Infra), life courses (HSN), migration and strikes,¹³ as well as the rich IISH collections on collective actions and social movements, enable us to study the question of social inequality from a work and labour relations perspective.¹⁴ Let us discuss, then: what is the IISH approach to the study of social inequality and labour?

Social Inequality: Multi-dimensional and multi-causal

Social inequality manifests at different levels and can be measured and studied with the help of different indicators. Economists and economic historians prefer to focus on the dimension of income and wealth.¹⁵ Both Piketty, in his *Capital in the Twenty First Century*, and Branco Milanović, in his *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization*, study long-term developments in social inequality based on impressive empirical research and large datasets, including household surveys that look at the position of individuals within countries, while mixing them with developments in inequality between countries globally. Although these two scholars look at the political consequences of social inequality, their analysis of social inequality is focused specifically on income and wealth indicators.¹⁶

However, there are more dimensions to social inequality, as shown in *How Was Life? Global Well-Being since 1820*, edited by Jan Luiten van Zanden. In this volume, GDP per capita data is presented at a macro level alongside – and in correlation with – data on education, life expectancy, human heights, and real wages.¹⁷ In the follow-up to this OECD report, two further indicators of social and economic inequality are taken into account: gender and the development of biodiversity.¹⁸

In their ground-breaking work on the development of India, Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen provide an excellent case study of this multiple dimension approach. They showed that, in 2011, India's six per cent economic growth led to a GDP per capita that put the country at number one, i.e. the "richest" in a world ranking of the sixteen poorest countries outside sub-Saharan Africa. However, if you take life expectancy at birth and infant mortality into account, the country drops to ninth and tenth place, respectively.¹⁹ This is an indicator of what sociologist Göran Therborn calls *vital inequality* in his typology of social inequalities.²⁰ Drèze and Sen also refer to the unequal access to education, paid jobs, safe drinking water, and technology. In brief, this unequal access to social and material resources is what Therborn calls *resource inequality*, which could also be termed *societal inequality*. A third type of social inequality is what Therborn defined as *existential*. This is a form of inequality that discriminates and restricts a person's freedom based on individual or group categories, such as gender, race, ethnicity, caste, and class. Charles Tilly described and analysed the mechanisms (discussed below) behind this form of social inequality, more aptly called *durable inequality* as it tends to be reproduced from one social interaction to the next, over whole careers, lifetimes, and organisational histories.²¹ The focus of our research is the effect of labour relations on societal and durable inequality.

Social inequality is also a multi-causal phenomenon. The number of factors that have been explored as co-determining inequality is enormous. They include, among many others, economic growth,²² changes in family structures,²³ exchange rate fluctuations,²⁴ foreign direct investment,²⁵ parliamentary democracy,²⁶ and agricultural density.²⁷ Attempts at synthesis have thus far remained rudimentary and a large number of theories exist.²⁸ One problem is that the term is analytically all-encompassing and can only be meaningfully studied when it is unpacked, which we will try to do below. Another major impediment is, of course, that every single variable should always be considered in conjunction with a least some of the other variables. As causal factors, the integration of labour-related aspects, from both a national and a global perspective, may ultimately help us to arrive at a multi-causal understanding of social inequalities.

Work, labour relations, social inequality, and agency

It is not possible to capture a multi-causal and multi-dimensional societal phenomenon in a single diagram. Nevertheless, taking into account that we look at work, labour relations, and the agency of workers as *some* of the many causes of social inequality – and conscious that this variable is

interdependent with many other variables left out of this scheme (such as political and economic regimes including capitalism, ideologies, colonialism, wars, family patterns and demography) – we can use a diagram, or rather diagrams, as a tool to explain our approach. What we want to show is **how work and labour relations can have an impact on unequal access to resources and opportunities, and thus on societal inequality; how individual and collective action may have an impact on labour conditions, labour relations, and social inequality; and how durable inequality may reinforce and reproduce societal inequality.** Inequality of outcome, i.e. the level of income, wealth, educational attainments, etc., are used to detect social inequality and are not analysed per se. Finally, the outcomes of social inequality linked to work and labour relations can have multiple consequences, which we may also want to study.

The diagrams are useful in two ways: they help us to understand the various static links between labour relations and inequality, but they also help us to discover and understand the dynamics: how *changes* in labour relations can lead to *changes* in social inequality.

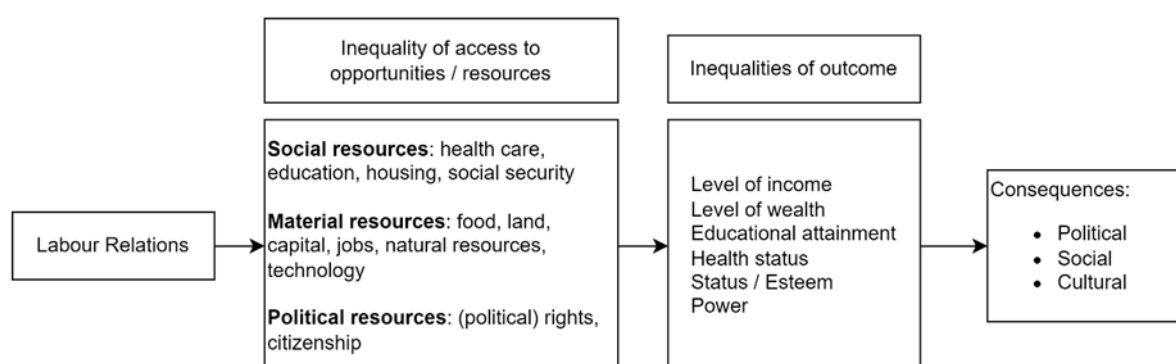


Figure 1 Labour relations and social inequality of access and outcome

Labour relations

Labour relations are characterized by various forms of relational inequality. Firstly, many labour relations have an in-built structural inequality. Labour relations in which one side consists of an actor who orders work to be done and the other side comprises people who must perform the work are fundamentally asymmetrical. Taking some of the labour relations from our Taxonomy as an example, we can think of conscripted soldiers who must perform a tributary duty to a political authority, or a serf who is obliged to work for a landowner, a slave who must work for her owner, but also a wage worker who has to work for a corporation or multinational. Usually, the actor who is in command of the work process has more power than the person who performs the work; consequently, they appropriate a larger share of the output or the revenues. Asymmetric labour relations can lead to various forms of societal inequality, among others unequal access to material resources, as listed above, but also unequal access to rights: from slaves who lack the right of self-determination over their own bodies to wage workers who earn too little to be eligible to vote, or migrant workers who are deprived of citizenship and thus of social security and healthcare. These types of societal inequalities are often reinforced by durable, categorical inequality.

A *change in labour relations*, be it on an individual, micro, or a more macro level, can either reduce or increase access to opportunities and resources, and thus increase or decrease social inequality. Several publications resulting from our Collaboratory project show the connection between (colonial) state-imposed changes in labour relations that led to greater inequality between different groups of workers.²⁹ Asymmetrical power relations can also exist within households and

determine the division of labour and labour relations within this unit. Gender roles and gender norms often determine who can do which type of work. A change in (the importance) of these roles and norms can lead to diminished female labour force participation. Gender norms can be a barrier to women entering commodified labour in the first place and colonial states may impose very different gender norms in the colony to those in the metropolis, with all the consequences for labour relations and inequality that this entails.³⁰ One result of lowering female labour force participation is women's unequal access to various social, material, and political resources, such as education.

Relational social inequality can also exist within one region between workers with different types of labour relations. Labour regimes can develop in such a way that within a certain area some of the workers are enslaved while others are free wage-earners. Again, this is an example of changes in labour relations that lead to growing inequality. On the other hand, the existence of an enslaved group in an area may result in a downward trend in the remuneration of the wage earners.³¹ Naturally, it is also possible for inequalities to develop between groups of workers with similar labour relations. Frequently, we observe inequalities between better-paid and less well-paid groups of wage earners that are consolidate along ethnic, racial, or gender lines.³² Often, the mutual reinforcement of categorical inequality and the unequal access to opportunities and resources develop into patterns that persist over time.

Finally, relational social inequality can also occur when labour relations in one part of the world influence labour relations in another part of the world. Think of the above-mentioned entangled histories, where (forced) changes in labour relations in colonial societies had an indirect impact on those in the metropole. Another obvious case, roughly a century later, is the movement, from the 1960s, of textile and shipbuilding industries from the North Atlantic region to newly industrializing countries, caused by global wage differentials. These types of relational social inequalities are often part and parcel of global commodity chains and can typically be found in commodity frontiers.

Of course, the causal relations between increasing or decreasing social inequality and changing labour relations also work the other way round: people who have or acquire extensive access to material resources (land, capital, etc.) can make other people work for them and thus determine their labour relations.



Figure 2 Labour relations, durable inequality, and social inequality

Durable inequality and the valuation of work

Within a given social division of labour different specializations are almost always valued and rewarded differently, no matter what part of the world or which period we study.³³ For instance, Jean Barbot writes of the Senegalese around 1700: “they occupy themselves either in tilling the fields or sowing them, because this occupation is the most honoured after that of soldiering. Those who

make fishing-nets, and the potters, the fishermen, the weavers and the weapon-makers, are considered mere mechanics".³⁴ While, today, wage labour is preferred by many to other available forms of work, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England it was regarded as very lowly, because it was associated with a precarious existence and entailed no rights.³⁵ The status of the work itself depends on a great many factors.³⁶ Labour supply and demand may play a role in the valuation of occupations. Scarcity of a certain specialization, leading to skill premiums,³⁷ may lead to a higher status. Occupations performed mainly by women, for example, are more likely to be labelled as unskilled and to carry less prestige than occupations performed mainly by men. The opposite is also true: when men dominate an occupation, its prestige rises, and the skill level is upgraded.³⁸ Similarly, work performed mainly by people of colour is often viewed as less prestigious than work performed by whites.

The above-mentioned social inequalities related to labour relations and the valuation of work are often reinforced and reproduced via the mechanism behind durable inequality, as analysed by Charles Tilly. First, people try to appropriate certain resources through exploitation or opportunity-hoarding. If they succeed, the resulting societal inequality needs to be consolidated; this requires distinguishing insiders from outsiders, monopolizing knowledge and power, and ensuring loyalty and succession. All this may be achieved by establishing categorical boundaries.³⁹ In addition, inequality may be promoted by what Gunnar Myrdal has called circular cumulative causation: positive and negative feedback mechanisms consolidate and strengthen separate social groups' differential access to resources.⁴⁰

When we link this to the labour relations typology, it is clear that certain (coerced) labour relations, especially slavery and caste-determined occupations, often create long-term intergenerational durable inequalities that continue long after the original labour relation has disappeared, with the position of African Americans in the United States and the Dalit in India as extreme examples.⁴¹ Finally, underlining the importance of an intersectional approach, within these groups, women often experience the greatest disadvantage.⁴²



Figure 3: Labour relations, individual and collective action, and social inequality

Individual and Collective Action

The IISH research also takes into account how changes in labour relations affected the daily lives of workers, how they perceived inequality and precarity, and how individual and collective actions could improve labour conditions and reduce social inequalities. "Micro" sources, as mentioned earlier, are needed to find out what strategies workers developed to improve their situation. These strategies can help us understand how people perceived their work, inequality, and precarity. For a more systematic analysis, we can analyse people's behaviour by studying their life courses, as is done by researchers using HSN data or comparative data on other parts of the world.⁴³ Life course data

can inform us which factors hindered or pushed people to attain better jobs, and if and how people gained access to societal resources such as education and healthcare. In addition to social mobility strategies, these data can also be used to analyse migration strategies.⁴⁴ Not only the strategies, but also their outcomes can give us insight into the success or failure of individual or household attempts to improve their position and – via individual or collective action – reduce social inequality for themselves or society as a whole. At the same time, the data collected on gender and religion may also provide evidence that can be used to study the effects of durable inequality.

Studying patterns of social protests can inform us about the perception of work, labour relations, and social inequality. Moreover, it may answer vital questions such as: how do groups of people, organized or in informal gatherings, try to improve their situation and change their unequal access to resources? Though we have excellent overviews of strikes worldwide, and locally in the Netherlands,⁴⁵ much work is still to be done since there are various other ways of organizing change and measuring the impact of agency.

Finally, to link up to the consequences of social inequality, more particularly the political consequences: both Piketty and Milanović have examined the rise of populism and nativism or the tendency to protect the interests of “native-born” or established inhabitants over those of immigrants. These considerations form part of a new book project by Leo Lucassen, which analyses the relationship between various forms of labour relations and xenophobia at a global scale in the last millennium. This will also address how perceived social inequality leads to xenophobia, exclusion, and (political) actions against people in the same or lower social position as the protesters.⁴⁶

Research clusters

To optimally develop our research perspectives, we created four thematic research clusters that group our present and future research projects. These clusters were developed partly for practical, pragmatic reasons and partly for strongly substantive reasons. The division into clusters helps us to organize our projects and promote interrelatedness within and between clusters. Together, these clusters form the building blocks of our Global Labour History programme, and they help us to answer the questions formulated on page 4: How can work and labour relations influence unequal access to resources and opportunities, and thus social inequality? How can individual and collective action influence working conditions, labour relations, and social inequality? How can durable inequality reinforce and reproduce social inequality? Given that, inherently, labour relations can be highly unequal, the first cluster of projects is centred around **Global Labour Relations**. Labour relations can also have an impact on and be determined by unequal access to resources, therefore our second cluster is dedicated to **Commodities, Environment, and Labour**; both clusters are, of course, closely related to the history of capitalism, colonialism, and its legacy. The latter aspect partially links this cluster to the next cluster. Inequality linked to work and labour relations can be reinforced by *existential or durable inequality*, based on characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, and caste. This type of social inequality, together with individual, household, regional, economic, and demographic inequalities are part of the **Social and Economic Inequality** cluster. Much of the knowledge and methods developed in the projects in this cluster are used to inform the projects of other clusters. Finally, people may individually or collectively seek to improve their position and reduce social inequality for themselves or a larger group. Our fourth cluster is therefore dedicated to **Individual and Collective Action**. Projects in this cluster intersect with all other projects: individual actions are influenced by and affect work and labour relations; collective actions arise in response to poor working conditions and unequal labour relations, but also to unequal access to resources.

Among the issues addressed by the projects in this cluster are: strikes by wage workers; slave revolts; protests against land expropriation; and the negative effects of climate change on production opportunities.

These clusters gather senior researchers (acting as project leaders and principal investigators), postdocs, PhD candidates, research assistants, and research fellows. They guarantee maximum synergy in research-, publication-, funding- and societal impact strategies, all of which are discussed during regular research project presentations for the staff of the research and publication departments. These impact strategies are also discussed during grant application procedures with colleagues of the KNAW's Humanities Cluster (HuC) Grant Team.

Since many projects fit into more than one cluster, and researchers figure in more than one cluster at the same time, synergy between clusters is guaranteed. This set up stimulates discussions about the theoretical principles of the various projects within a cluster and of the overall research programme. Of course, there are all kinds of interrelationships between the projects in the four clusters; after all, they are all part of the larger, overarching Global Labour History research programme.

Global Labour Relations

As mentioned above, labour relations can be inherently uneven. Because we study all forms of labour relations as part of larger labour regimes, this cluster is devoted to projects on diverse labour relations, ranging from twenty-first-century precarious labour to sixteenth-century slavery and other forms of coerced labour, and how they impact social inequality. In their latest works, both Jan Lucassen and Marcel van der Linden explicitly refer to labour relations and social inequality. Adhering to the major division of the IISH Taxonomy of Labour Relations, Jan Lucassen sketches the worldwide development of shifts in reciprocal, tributary-redistributive, and commodified labour in the period from 10,000 BCE onwards, signalling a growing division of labour and inherent inequalities. Meanwhile, Van der Linden shows how labour relations on the transcontinental labour markets of the past two centuries have become increasingly unequal.⁴⁷

Households are important units that produce goods and services, often both for themselves and for the market. An important aspect of our programme is the analysis of how goods and services are produced within households, and how the division of labour and labour relations are organized. A new book project developed with the Bonn Centre for Dependency and Slavery Studies looks at [households, including larger institutional households, as coercive labour regimes](#). The book focuses on the household as a unit of production, analysing the division of labour and the mechanisms of control within households.

Moving from the household to the shop floor, Rosa Kösters's PhD research "[Between solidarity and fragmentation](#)" studies the effects of the flexibilization of labour on the shop floor in various economic sectors. A central theme in her work is the various forms of workers' organization in response to this flexibilization. This PhD project is a follow-up to the pilot "Precaire Polder: Historische Verkenningen Vakbeweging".⁴⁸ The regulation of labour relations is researched in the project on the [Dutch Labour Authority](#) (Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie). On a more macro level, *The Social Question in the Twenty-First Century: A Global View*, edited by Jan Breman and others, takes a worldwide perspective on the social implications of globalization, and identifies the renewed and intensified Social Question as a labour issue.⁴⁹

One key concern within this cluster is the role of slavery and other forms of coercive labour relations, and their implications for social inequality.⁵⁰ There is a high societal relevance as well as an academic urgency to improve our understanding of the global history of slavery. Moving beyond

dominant models of “classic” and Atlantic histories of slavery, we question how different regimes functioned, how they were enforced and challenged, and how various regimes were connected and interacted.⁵¹ Here, too, a global but deeply empirical research agenda for the history of slavery is crucial in bridging historiographic gaps between the study of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and Southeast Asia, colonial and local contexts, formal and informal forms of slavery.⁵² Using court and other archival records to connect micro histories to the global history of labour, we can question and reconceptualize how slavery regimes worked in practice, how categorization (and racialization) developed, how enslavement impacted people’s lives, and how people responded and resisted.⁵³ In similar ways, these new research avenues are also relevant for other forms of labour coercion that were instrumental in the making of the modern world, such as widely employed systems of convict or *corvée* labour,⁵⁴ and for the interactions and interrelations between different regimes of labour coercion.⁵⁵

The global history of slavery and the slave trade and their implications for social inequality in different parts of the world are tackled by a cluster of research projects. Matthias van Rossum’s NWO Vidi research project “[Resisting Enslavement](#)” (2023–2028) as well as his ERC project “[Voices of Resistance](#)” (2024–2028) aim to reconceptualize the history of slavery based on colonial court records and comparable source material from the Dutch, French, and Iberian empires (both discussed in the description of the Individual and Collective Action Cluster). These projects build on the projects “[Resilient Diversity](#)” (NWO Vrije Competitie 2017–2022) and “[Between Local Debts and Global Markets](#)” (NWO Veni, 2016–2020). While “Between Local Debts” shifted the attention to slavery in Asia, by studying debt and market systems of slavery as interconnected systems of economic production, the “Resilient Diversity” project used digitized and indexed judicial VOC and Dutch West India Company (WIC) archives to analyse how Dutch colonial institutions governed diversity in North America, the Caribbean, Western Africa, and Asia. The institutions’ resilience and their lasting impact on modern systems of governance of diversity are also explained. Both projects have contributed to a shift in the perspective on the Dutch colonial empire and slavery, and have produced a wealth of new data – based on court records – for future research on the slave trade and other topics. The indexes of colonial courts across the Dutch empire not only laid the foundation for the aforementioned projects, but also for the development of several PhD dissertations. These include the “[Colonial Girl Power](#)” PhD project by Hanna te Velde (described under the Individual and Collective Action cluster) and Alexander Geelen’s PhD, which explores the impact and reach of the VOC and WIC in the eighteenth century in the Gold Coast (in present-day Ghana) and the Malabar Coast (present-day Kerala, India), and how this is visible through the regulation of and interference with local practices related to forced labour and bondage. For all projects, court records reveal the depth of the impact on the individual level, through the eyes of the local people most affected by it.

The study of labour relations, and especially that of slavery, is embedded in the study of the patterns, actors, and organization of the slave trade. Our expertise in the field led major Dutch Banks, such as ABN Amro, and insurance companies to approach the IISH to research their predecessors’ past involvement in slavery and the slave trade.⁵⁶ Eva Seuntjes’s PhD project “Slavery Insured” about the [Assurantie Compagnie 1771](#) is another example, as is our research on the history of slavery and the slave trade of the city of Amsterdam and the Dutch State.⁵⁷ Central questions in these projects are: who are the actors? Who profits and what do they gain? What are the consequences of the slave trade for the enslaved? The approach of these projects fits into our combination of micro histories of European commercial companies, firms, and polity actors and the consequences of their activities for the lives of the enslaved within the broader context of the development of capitalism and colonialism.

Moving beyond the Dutch colonial empire, the NWO project “[The Global Business of Slave Trade – Patterns, Actors and Gains in the Early Modern Dutch and Iberian Slave Trade in Asia](#)” (Open

Competition M 2023–2028), led by Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, focuses on Portuguese and Spanish slaving activities in South and East Africa, the South China Sea, and the Indonesian Archipelago, and explores the entanglements between European actors, local authorities, and local peoples. With new research methods developed by the “[GLOBALISE](#)” project, sources from Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, and local Asian archives are used to thoroughly revise the understanding of the dynamics and impact of the slave trade beyond the Atlantic world. In these and other future projects, the [Exploring Slave Trade in Asia](#) database, aimed at creating an Indian Ocean and Maritime Asia Slave Trade Database, will play an important role, just like the developing research infrastructure for the digital archive of the Dutch East India Company ([GLOBALISE](#)). We will continue our work on a new history of global slavery and other forms of coerced labour in 2024, with the addition of a newly endowed Chair on the global history of forced labour relations at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, held by Matthias van Rossum.

Commodities, Environment, and Labour

Projects in this cluster focus on the consequences of commodity extraction, production, exchange, and consumption for labour, land, and environment. Their main analytical lenses are those of commodity frontiers and commodity regimes. This perspective has rapidly gained currency since Jason W. Moore introduced the concept in 2000.⁵⁸ An agenda-setting article in the *Journal of Global History*, co-authored by Ulbe Bosma, defines commodity *frontiers* as processes and sites of the incorporation of resources into the expanding capitalist world economy.⁵⁹ This article also introduces commodity *regimes* as a device for periodization and a proposal for a comparative historical method that links broad political-economic change to local agency and contestation.

Projects in this cluster study the history of capitalism from the perspective of capitalism’s capacity to profoundly restructure the countryside and nature. They connect processes of extraction and exchange with degradation, adaptation, and resistance in rural peripheries. Projects apply transdisciplinary concepts such as commodification, extractivism, land grabbing, and environmental justice. The focus on the countryside allows these projects to highlight capitalism’s vulnerabilities, including ecological depletion and social resistance, which have led to fundamental crises culminating in rebellions and revolutions, such as the revolution in Saint Domingue in 1791 and massive strikes in plantation belts across the globe in the 1930s. The link with our projects in the Individual and Collective Action cluster is self-evident. The projects and their researchers are mostly participating in the international transdisciplinary Commodity Frontiers Initiative (<https://commodityfrontiers.com/>). This network publishes output in its own bi-annual journal and via other well-established media channels, such as the digital magazine *Aeon*.⁶⁰

Peyman Jafari’s Veni project researches “[Oil Frontiers in the British and Dutch Empires: Land, Labour and Environment in the Making of an Imperial Oil Regime, 1890–1940](#)”. The hypothesis tested in this project is that in order to overcome the obstacles and resistances that they faced, oil corporations introduced legal, managerial, and technological solutions that connected the oil-producing regions with the rest of the world. The problems of socio-ecological degradation and colonialism have become institutionalized through the unequal interaction between empires, oil corporations, and local communities involved in oil production.

On the other hand, Erik Odegard’s project “[Investing in Dutch Brazil: Credit, Debt and the Sugar-Cycle in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World](#)” is looking at the involvement of private entrepreneurs from the Dutch Republic in financing and running a WIC-maintained colony in

northeastern Brazil, the first Dutch Atlantic slave society and plantation colony. (NWO Veni project 2023–2026).

Ulbe Bosma recently published *The World of Sugar: How the Sweet Stuff Transformed our Politics, Health, and Environment over 2,000 Years*, the first global history on sugar, which extensively discusses how the cultivation of sugar was a key factor in shaping global capitalism and transformed land and labour, and was responsible for massive enslavement and coerced labour migrations.⁶¹ Karin Hofmeester works on “Luxury and Labour: A Global Trajectory of Diamond Consumption and Production, 16th–19th century”. The central question of this research project is how the globalization of the diamond trade and finishing industry – spurred by increasing consumer demand – has affected labour relations in this sector worldwide. The project looks at all segments of the production process “from the mine to the finger”.⁶²

Rossana Barragán (senior researcher until mid-2022, now fellow) works on extractivism in Bolivia. She recently published *Potosí in the Global Silver Age (16th–19th Centuries)*. The main focus of this book is the new human and environmental landscape that emerged for the production of one of the world’s major commodities.⁶³ Rossana Barragán and Carmen Soliz (eds), *The Struggle for Natural Resources: Findings from Bolivian History* is forthcoming.⁶⁴

In his NWO VIDI project “[Land Grabbing Empire: State Strategy and Large Scale Land Transfers in Dutch Expansion \(16th–18th century\)](#)” (2022–2027), principal investigator Pepijn Brandon looks at land grabbing, defined as the forced transfer of land from peasant producers to commercial investors, which deeply affects the organization of global agriculture. This project investigates how the highly market-oriented early modern Dutch state and colonial companies employed land grabbing to advance commercial agriculture. By focusing on the Dutch state, a driving force in early modern commercial globalization, this project sheds light on the importance of land grabbing for the history of capitalism, and offers insights into the mechanisms connecting the violent dispossession of peasant populations and the development of commercial agriculture.

New projects in this cluster will link labour and labour relations, on the one hand, with environmental justice on the other, and connect both with collective action, bringing together three of our four research clusters (Global Labour Relations; Commodities, Environment, and Labour; and Individual and Collective Action). Ulbe Bosma’s project on the success of the Dutch anti-nuclear movement, which received a KNAW Onderzoeksfonds in autumn 2023 is one such example. These projects align with the HuC’s Environmental Humanities Lab. Hopefully with help of an ERC grant, Bosma will be able to combine the Commodity Frontiers approach with the data of the Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations in the project “The Global South in the Age of Early Industrial Capitalism: Commodity Frontiers and Social Transformations (1816–1870)”. It will examine the immense transformative effects of commodity frontiers in the Global South that contributed to the rise of early industrial capitalism and would have lasting global social and ecological repercussions. It will do so by measuring the required labour input (specified for categories such as gender and ethnicity) and the extent to which it was forced through a globally applicable taxonomy; by identifying the diversity of changes in labour and land relations at the commodity frontiers and putting our gaze on the trading networks based in the global periphery.

Social and Economic Inequality

Identifying individual mechanisms that create new or perpetuate existing social inequalities is no simple task. Many of our approaches use history as a laboratory, in which we control for time and space to single out these factors. As such, time and space have a central position in our research. Such approaches involving local or regional differentiation across time come with a specific set of challenges: from dealing with “messy”, context-dependent historical data to avoiding incorrect levels of spatial aggregation (the modifiable areal unit problem), and to identifying, disambiguating, and geospatially defining historical localities. To confront these challenges, many of our historical analyses are based on data that is gathered at the most granular level. This mirrors tendencies in the social sciences to use increasingly large data in research, and actively engages with the “spatial turn” in humanities and social sciences research.⁶⁵ Our work in this field is conducted together with several national and international partners, including the ENCHOS network,⁶⁶ CLARIAH,⁶⁷ and SSHOC-NL.⁶⁸ There are also strong links with the HSNDB project.⁶⁹

At the core of this cluster are various forms of social and economic inequality. Some address categorical or durable inequality – which, as explained above, can reinforce other forms of social inequality. Durable inequalities refer to the persistent and pervasive disparities in power, wealth, and opportunities that have endured over time and across different regions of the world. These inequalities are not just the result of random or natural factors but are often created and sustained by social and economic structures, institutions, and policies that privilege some groups over others. Durable inequalities can manifest themselves in different forms, such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, or religion, and can have wide-ranging implications for individuals, communities, and societies. Understanding the dynamics of durable inequalities is therefore crucial for grasping the complexities of social and economic relations in history and today. For example, the role that categorization plays in enslavement or the exclusion of immigrants from the city and its labour market, which is central to Samantha Sint Nikolaas’s [PhD research](#), and the unequal access to education of [second-generation immigrant children, as studied by Eva van der Heijden](#).

In future, we will sharpen our gender perspective with, inter alia, a pilot study to analyse our existing datasets and infrastructures with new methods – borrowed from projects such as Maria Ågren’s [“Gender and Work”](#) project, with whom we already have a close [collaboration, which has resulted](#) in a first publication in the IISH’s *International Review of Social History*. What do the court records of the VOC, the Inquisition, and the Spanish Cortes tell us about women’s work and men’s work in Asia and Africa if we look for verbs that express work activities? But also: what are the differences in the effects of slavery on women and men, to what extent do their options to change their position individually or collectively differ? Other projects address inequality in regional demographic, economic, and infrastructural developments.

Both types – categorical/durable inequality and regional demographic/economic development – overlap significantly. For example, the shift of labour from the countryside to the city before the nineteenth century, often cited as a driver of urban manufacturing, was, at best, negligible in China while it made a major contribution to urban areas in Western Europe. This changed in the twentieth century, when extensive rural–urban migration in China drove the government to implement policies that excluded rural migrants from inter alia education in cities.⁷⁰

These studies on social and economic inequality can be performed with different kinds of data and methodologies, such as micro studies. For example, in 2019 a project was initiated (still ongoing) on “Metal smelting in Qing China, 1720–1910”, which has collected ca. 3,000 data points on individual mining and smelting operations from gazetteers. The data is currently being entered into Excel. Besides this project, over the past few years, various other micro studies have been done on China, including on eighteenth- to nineteenth-century agricultural household inventories.⁷¹

Another option for looking at this from an economic perspective is to examine how goods and services were produced. An analysis of modes of production (in a household context or more commodified) can be linked with labour relations. The efficiency of the mode of production has an impact on labour and product markets, and thus on productivity. An important issue in this regard is the extent to which technology is used in production. Labour relations can determine access to technology, and vice versa, and can lead to various inequalities. The availability of advanced technology, such as Artificial Intelligence, will determine the work and labour relations of many in the very near future; unequal access to AI and unequal distribution of the benefits and drawbacks of this technology will impact social and economic inequality worldwide.

Instead of looking at the individual/household dynamics, one might also take a regional perspective, such as the move from agricultural areas to urbanized centres.⁷² For example, a current international collaboration at the IISH studies why certain industries concentrated in particular regions in China in ca. 1933 and 2010. This project involves data collection at the prefectural level for ten coastal Chinese provinces, spatial (GIS analysis), regression analyses, and international comparison. We can also approach issues from a global or continental level. Currently, for example, the collaborative project “The Roots of Divergence: Innovation and Economic Development in Eurasia ca. 500 BCE–Present” is an intercontinental/global comparison on technology, labour productivity and growth in China, the former Soviet Union area, and Western Europe. The project compares descriptions of the role of labour and theories on growth over time and across continents.

Regional differentiation in long-term economic and demographic development is also central in Rombert Stapel’s [“\(Re\)Counting the Uncounted” project](#) (now). This study involves replicating four often-used publications with provincial and national population estimates for the Netherlands and Belgium prior to 1800. This requires the digitization and contextualization of 2000 medieval and early modern censuses, which are linked to digital GIS maps of premodern boundaries in the Low Countries.⁷³ The project will produce significantly revised and more robust population estimates at an unprecedented granular level (namely, that of the parish-equivalent territory). Moreover, the project contributes significantly to Open Science, in particular via the Linked Open Data model that we are developing to improve transparency with respect to how data-driven scientific knowledge is produced.⁷⁴

The project’s focus on data quality in a humanities perspective, as well as producing fine-grained spatially defined data on human movement and settlement in premodern times, provides two important strands of scholarly intervention that carry meaning well beyond the confinements of historical demography. It allows us to apply new research questions on how people, land, labour, and migration interact in an area of the world characterized by dynamic economic development. The project also helps in identifying and understanding potential weaknesses in existing data-driven humanities research practices, thus allowing for the creation of more robust analyses in the future.

Another major research strand involves partners from the KNAW HuC’s Digital Infrastructure department,⁷⁵ the Rijksdienst voor Cultureel Erfgoed, and Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Together, we have started work towards the digitization of the so-called Napoleonic cadastre of the Netherlands (HisGIS 1832). Over the next few years (2023–2025), this will lead to a fully open-access, geospatial data model and database of all cadastral units (both urban and rural, including their taxed wealth, land use, and owners) in the Netherlands in 1832 – prior to the largescale industrialization of the country. Existing HisGIS data from 1832 is already used in a wide range of IISH and KNAW HuC projects,⁷⁶ and can be employed to reconstruct multi-modal transport networks in GIS, linking up directly with similar projects regarding the transport history of China.

However, the project will also open new research into the interaction between land use, commodification of the countryside, and land ownership. For this reason, we have established close connections with other colleagues, especially within the Commodities, Labour, and Environment

cluster. Moreover, because of the uniform set-up of the Napoleonic cadastre in Europe, our data model will be applicable to much of Western Europe. In the future, we plan to combine the population estimate data and the land-use data from HisGIS 1832 to build simulation models of the Dutch premodern economy and its impact on the environment and the people who lived and worked there.⁷⁷

[“The Lives and Afterlives of Imperial Material Infrastructure in Southeastern China”](#)

(hereafter InfraLives now NWO Open Grant) and its sister project, led by Hilde de Weerd, at KU Leuven (“Regionalizing Material Infrastructures” or Reginfra, ERC Advanced Grant) (both 2022–2027) study regional and social inequality in infrastructural development between ca. 1000 and 1900 in the Chinese territories.

InfraLives and Reginfra hypothesize that the history of infrastructures in the Chinese and neighbouring territories has been regional in scope. In late imperial times, the lives and afterlives of infrastructural works, while called into the service of empire-building projects, often depended on local organization, and were frequently motivated by local and regional interests. These projects will test prior models of regional difference and inequality, and develop new models that also allow for cross-border infrastructural colonization and contraction. In order to facilitate such a *longue-durée* cross-infrastructure study, we are constructing a large dataset containing all events of construction, destruction, disuse, and renovation documented in inscriptions for city walls and bridges, gathered in 6000 fully digitized local gazetteers covering the period from the eleventh through the twentieth centuries. InfraLives and Reginfra also aim to bring together inequality studies with critical theoretical insights of modern historical and anthropological studies on the mediating effects of infrastructures.

Individual and collective action

The projects in this cluster focus on how people perceive their position and social inequality, and especially how they try to change their situation individually and collectively. In terms of individual action, we have a unique infrastructure in the [Historical Sample of the Netherlands Database](#) (HSNDB), which contains individual life courses of a sample of the Dutch population born between 1811 and 1922. This infrastructure has been used by [many scholars](#) in their research on, amongst others, social inequality. In future, we hope to connect these data to modern data (a [short pilot](#) has already revealed the possibilities of linking HSN data to modern data collected by Statistics Netherlands) to create a life tree of the Dutch population from the late eighteenth century to date, consisting of basic life course data and additional datasets on migration, education, income, and health. This research infrastructure will enable researchers to analyse the development of social inequality and especially the stacking of various forms of social inequality over more than six generations.

PhD student Joris Kok is one of the scholars using HSN life course data for his work on [Individual life strategies employed by Dutch Jews and the relation between these strategies and outcomes in integration, social mobility, and \(de\)segregation](#). His work is part of “Tegen de stroom in”, a KNAW Research Fund (KRF) project (with the Huygens Institute) that focuses on social mobility patterns of Jewish Dutch citizens in the period 1870–1940. Looking at individual strategies of women, PhD student Hanna te Velde uses indexed VOC court records to investigate the [Socio-economic position of women in the early modern Dutch empire](#) (briefly mentioned in the Global Labour Relations cluster) and how they tried improving their position.

Migration as an individual strategy is studied in the 2019 (KRF) funded IISH-NIDI project [“The Multicultural Drama in Perspective: 40 Years of Life Cycles of Migrants and Non-Migrants”](#), led by Leo Lucassen. It analyses the integration process of children of migrants through the educational system and partner choice. This has resulted in a much more nuanced and optimistic view than is commonly assumed. Finally, in the [“Tolerant Migrant Cities”](#) project, we look at how internal and international

migrants in early modern Amsterdam and Leiden are treated by both legal authorities and their native neighbours, and how this relates to the length of their stay, gender, and occupation. (For both projects, see the description relating to the Social and Economic Inequality cluster.)

More generally, IISH researchers have been agenda-setting in the field of global migration history, especially by introducing the innovative Cross-Cultural Migration (CCM) approach (Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen),⁷⁸ which allows global comparisons through time and space, and by which includes forms of coerced mobility, as testified in four chapters (by Erik Odegard, Matthias van Rossum, Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, and Leo Lucassen) of the *Cambridge History of Global Migrations*.⁷⁹

Collective actions are central in [Rosa Kösters's PhD project](#) (mentioned in the Global Labour Relations cluster) on the consequences of and reactions to changing labour relations by the shop-floor and trade union movement in the Netherlands, 1970–2020, as well as in the Jens Aurich's [PhD project](#) on the workers' resistance and how it shaped the organization of production in Britain, the Netherlands, and Germany, and their colonies in the extended nineteenth century (1750–1950). Rosa Kösters, Jens Aurich, and Matthias van Rossum also initiated a project [to expand our Hub on Global Labour Conflicts](#) into a data infrastructure that includes various forms of collective labour actions. Recently published output includes Marcel van der Linden's two-volume *Cambridge History of Socialism*⁸⁰, Francisca de Haan's, *The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activists around the World*⁸¹ and Touraj Atabaki's *Fada'i Guerilla Praxis in Iran 1970–1979*.⁸² Marcel van der Linden's book on the rise and fall of classic labour movements is forthcoming.

The already mentioned Vidi project "[Resisting Enslavement: A Global Historical Approach to Slavery in the Dutch Atlantic and Asian Empires \(1620–1815\)](#)" contributes to this by studying how slave resistance to different modes of enslavement impacted slavery, the slave trade, and processes of categorization in the early modern Dutch Atlantic and Asian Empires. The closely linked ERC project "[Voices of Resistance: A Global Micro-Historical Approach to Enslavement across the Atlantic and Indian Ocean](#)" will expand the research on enslavement and racialization using colonial court records across different European empires, most notably the Portuguese, Dutch, French, Spanish, and English/British empires.

Future

Many of the above projects have started recently and will run for four years or more. Consequently, part of our strategy for the coming period is already in place. We will continue to develop our research programme: developing projects, often funded by external grants, based on research questions grounded in the Global Labour History programme. This programme provides us with a solid foundation that allows us to respond flexibly to current social and academic issues. These projects are based on empirical research and are mostly transnational and comparative. This empirical research is linked to the theoretical and methodological approaches mentioned in the introduction to the clusters. With this combination of micro-research and global insights, we try to build data infrastructures that can be used for different projects, including future ones. We continue to use and develop typologies (of labour relations, labour protests, forms of social inequality, to name a few) that help us compare and link data within clusters, across our research programme and with data from colleagues around the world.

¹ Jan Lucassen and Marcel van der Linden, *Prolegomena for a Global Labour History* (Amsterdam: IISH, 1999) <https://iisg.nl/publications/prolegom.pdf>; Marcel van der Linden, *Globalizing Labour Historiography: The IISH Approach* (Amsterdam: IISH 2002) <https://iisg.amsterdam/files/2018-06/Marcel%20van%20der%20Linden%20Globalizing%20Labour%20Historiography.pdf>; Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays towards a Global Labor History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

² Leo Lucassen, "Working Together: New Directions in Global Labour History", *Journal of Global History*, vol 11, no 1 (2016), 66–87, <https://iisg.amsterdam/files/2018-09/Leo%20Lucassen%20Working%20Together.pdf>.

³ Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 249.

⁴ For our definition of labour relations, see: Karin Hofmeester, Jan Lucassen, Leo Lucassen, Rombert Stapel, and Richard Zijdeman, "The Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations, 1500–2000: Background, Set-Up, Taxonomy, and Applications" (2015), <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/4OGRAD>, 5. Going back even further in time is Jan Lucassen's magnum opus *Work: A Concise History* (London: Yale University Press, 2021), whose starting points is the hunter-gatherers, around 700,000 BCE.

⁵ Charles Tilly and Chris Tilly, *Work under Capitalism* (Boulder, CO: ? 1998), p. 22.

⁶ Hofmeester, Lucassen, Lucassen, Stapel and Zijdeman, "The Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations"; Karin Hofmeester, "Labour Relations, Introductory Remarks", in Karin Hofmeester and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Handbook Global History of Work* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 317–327, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110424584-016>; Karin Hofmeester, Gijs Kessler, and Christine Moll-Murata (eds), "Conquerors, Employers and Arbiters: States and Shifts in Labour Relations, 1500–2000", *International Review of Social History*, Special Issue 24, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859016000523>; Karin Hofmeester and Pim de Zwart (eds), *Colonialism, Institutional Change and Shifts in Labour Relations* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789462984363>; Karin Hofmeester and Elise van Nederveen-Meerkerk (eds), "Family, Demography and Labour Relations", Special Section of *The History of The Family*, vol 22, no 1, March 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2016.1271993>.

⁷ Marcel van der Linden and Magaly Rodríguez García, *On Coerced Labor: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016); Matthias van Rossum and Karwan Fatah-Black, "Beyond Profitability: The Dutch Transatlantic Slave Trade and Its Economic Impact", *Slavery and Abolition* 36 (2015) 1, 63–83; Pepijn Brandon and Ulbe Bosma, "De betekenis van de Atlantische slavernij voor de Nederlandse economie in de tweede helft van de achttiende eeuw", *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, vol 16, no 2 (2019), 5–46; P. Brandon, N. Frykman, and P. Røge (eds), "Free and Unfree Labor in Atlantic and Indian Ocean Port Cities (1700–1850)", *International Review of Social History* 64, S27 (2019), p. 262; Matthias van Rossum, "Labouring Transformations of Amphibious Monsters: Exploring Early Modern Globalization, Diversity, and Shifting Clusters of Labour Relations in the Context of the Dutch East India Company (1600–1800)", *International Review of Social History* vol. 64 SI (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 19–42, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859019000014>; Filipa Ribeiro da Silva and Helder Carvalhal, "Ocupações, sectores económicos e relações laborais em Loulé nos meados do século XVIII. Novas interpretações no âmbito da História Global do Trabalho", in *Actas do II Encontro de História de Loulé* (2019), 107–126; Filipa Ribeiro da Silva and Catia Atunes, "Windows of Global Exchange: Dutch Ports and the Slave Trade, 1600–1800", *International journal of maritime history* vol 30, no 3 (2018), 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0843871418782317>; Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, "Political Changes and Shifts in Labour Relations in Mozambique, 1820s–1920s", *International Review of Social History*, Special Issue 24, 115–135, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859016000468>.

⁸ Jan Breman and Marcel van der Linden, "Informalizing the Economy: The Return of the Social Question at a Global Level", *Development and Change* 45, 5 (2014): 920–940; Jan Breman et al. (eds), *The Social Question in the Twenty-First Century: A Global View* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019); Moira van Dijk, Matthias van Rossum, Loran van Diepen, Rosa Kösters, and Bob Scholte, *Precaire polder* (Amsterdam: ?, 2018); Karin Hofmeester et al. (eds), *Moving In and Out of Self-Employment: Labour Relation Mechanisms in Historical Perspective* (forthcoming); Gijs Kessler, "Wage Labor and the Household Economy: A Russian Perspective, 1600–2000", in M. Van der Linden and L. Lucassen (eds), *Working on Labor: Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 353–369.

⁹ Ulbe Bosma, *The Making of a Periphery: How Island Southeast Asia Became a Mass Exporter of Labor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019); Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, *Women, Work and Colonialism in the Netherlands and Java: Comparisons, Contrasts and Connections, 1830–1940* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

¹⁰ Gijs Kessler and Jan Lucassen, "Labour Relations, Efficiency and the Great Divergence: Comparing Pre-industrial Brick-making across Eurasia, 1500–2000", in M. Prak (ed.), *Technology, Skills and the Pre-Modern Economy in the East and West: Essays Dedicated to the Memory of S.R. Epstein* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 259–322; B. van Leeuwen, R. Philips, and E. Buyst (eds), *An Economic History of Regional Industrialization* (Abingdon: Routledge 2021); J.L. van Zanden, B. van Leeuwen, and Y. Xu, "Consequence of Growth: Living Standards and Inequality 1700–1900", in S.N. Broadberry, *The Cambridge Economic History of the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); for commodity production, chains, and frontiers, see Ulbe Bosma, *The Sugar Plantation in India and Indonesia: Industrial Production 1770–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge

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¹¹ For shipyards, see Pepijn Brandon’s project “Naval Shipyards in the Atlantic World as Centers of Innovation in Production, Administration and Labor Control (1720–1870)”; for the Potosí silver mines, see Rossana Barragan, “Dynamics of Continuity and Change: Shifts in Labour Relations in the Potosí Mines (1680–1812)”, in Hofmeester, Kessler, and Moll-Murata (eds), *Conquerors, Employers and Arbiters*, 93–114, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859016000511> see: <https://iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/potosi>; for ships and VOC stations and strategies, see

Matthias van Rossum, *Werkers van de wereld. Globalisering, arbeid en interculturele ontmoetingen tussen Aziatische en Europese zeelieden in dienst van de VOC, 1600–1800* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2014); Matthias van Rossum, Alexander Geelen, Bram van den Hout, and Merve Tosun, *Testimonies of Enslavement Sources on Slavery from the Indian Ocean World* (London [etc.]: Bloomsbury, 2020); for collective action, see Matthias Rossum and Jeanette Kamp (eds.), *Desertion in the Early Modern World: A Comparative History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Matthias van Rossum, Titas Chakraborty, and Marcus Rediker (eds), *Runaways: Workers, Mobility, and Global Capitalism, 1650–1850* (Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 2019); Matthias van Rossum, “Amok!”: Mutinies and Slaves on Dutch East Indiamen in the 1780s”, *International Review of Social History*, vol. 58, SI 21 (2013), 109–130, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085901300031X>.

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¹⁵ B. van Bavel, *The Invisible Hand? How Market Economies have Emerged and Declined Since AD 500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁶ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Branko Milanović, *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

¹⁷ Jan Luiten van Zanden et al. (eds), *How Was Life? Global Well-Being since 1820* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2014).

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¹⁹ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory. India and Its Contradictions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 49.

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