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Beyond Wage Labour: Livelihood Activities and *Lebenslage* as Complementary Tools for a Cross-Epochal and Global History of Work*

Abstract

In both capitalist and non-capitalist economies and societies, the boundaries between different labour relations are often not clear-cut, and different types of labour intersect. This makes it necessary to reflect on the traditional categories of labour history such as labour, labour relations, and social classes, and to develop appropriate analytical frameworks and tools that can be applied to different historical and global contexts. In order to facilitate comparative research, this article suggests a praxeological perspective on work and working actors that goes beyond the frame of labour and labour relations. By proposing the concepts of livelihood activities and *Lebenslagen* (life situations) as analytical tools that can be applied to different historical and global contexts, this approach offer new perspectives on social structures and inequalities connected to labour and labour relations without modern and Eurocentric biases. In addition, the article demonstrates how these terms can be applied to comparative research and the analysis of capitalist labour.

Keywords: *Labour Relations; Early Modern History; Contemporary History; Global Labour History; Methodology; Precarious Work; Informal Work; Lebenslage; Livelihood Activities*

In recent decades, the literature on non-Eurocentric global labour history has begun to challenge the key concepts and assumptions surrounding the history and theory of work. Regarding the actors in questions, Marcel van der Linden argued in 2008 that

> the boundaries between 'free' wage laborers and other kinds of subaltern workers in capitalist society are in reality rather finely graded or vague. Firstly, there are ex-

* I would like to thank the editors of this issue and the peer reviewers for their critical reading and comments, as well as Ian Copestake for proofreading.

DOI: 10.46586/mts.69.2023.113-130 Moving the Social · 69 (2023) · p. 113–130

> tensive and complicated 'grey areas' replete with transitional locations between the 'free' wage laborers and the slaves, the self-employed and the lumpenproletarians. Secondly, almost all subaltern workers belong to households that combine *several* modes of labor. Thirdly, *individual* subaltern workers can also combine different modes of labor, both synchronically and diachronically. And finally, the distinction between the different kinds of subaltern workers is not clear-cut.[1]

On the one hand, such claims raise questions about the theoretical significance of free wage labour under capitalism.[2] On the other hand, they call on historians to reflect upon the categories of labour, labour relations and social classes.[3] Currently, key concepts of labour history must be questioned and reconceptualized, "starting from the free wage labourer and the very notion of the working class to the male-breadwinner model and the chronology of labor relations."[4] Lutz Raphael, for example, recently emphasized the need to develop and apply tools depending on the region, sector, and time period, according to the specific labour relations in question.[5] As a consequence, a new framework to describe social inequalities related to labour relations and to categorize the working actors is required, especially since conventional categories often make clear classifications difficult: As van der Linden argues "the 'classical' proletariat is surrounded by, and intermingled with, a variegated 'semi-proletariat' of peddlers, sharecoppers, home workers, prostitutes, self-employed workers, beggars and scavengers."[6] Should we thus understand each of these individuals and groups of subaltern workers as "one great mass"[7] and subsume them under the concept of a non-specific 'proletariat'? What understanding of work does one apply? In line with Thomas Welskopp's analysis, all forms of work and labour should not be lumped together,

1 Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World. Essays toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 32.

2 Thomas Welskopp, "Kapitalismus und Konzepte von Arbeit. Wie systematisch zentral ist 'freie Lohnarbeit' für den Kapitalismus?," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43, no. 2 (2017): 197–216.

3 On the recent debate see Sebastian Voigt, "Kapital und Arbeit in Bewegung," *Neue Politische Literatur* 65, no. 1 (2020): 45–75.

4 Christian de Vito, Juliane Schiel, and Matthias van Rossum, "From Bondage to Precariousness? New Perspectives on Labor and Social History," *Journal of Social History* 54, no. 2 (2020), 645; Brigitta Bernet, Juliane Schiel, and Jakob Tanner, eds., special issue on "Arbeit in der Erweiterung" in *Historische Anthropologie* 24 (2016).

5 Lutz Raphael, "Arbeit im Kapitalismus," *Arbeit – Bewegung – Geschichte. Zeitschrift für historische Studien* 19, no. 1 (2020): 7–25, 12.

6 Marcel van der Linden, "Globalizing Labour Historiography: The Amsterdam Approach," in *'Arbeit': Geschichte – Gegenwart – Zukunft*, ed. Josef Ehmer, Helga Grebing, and Peter Gutschner (Leipzig: AVA, 2002), 151–164, 159.

7 Van der Linden, *Workers of the World*, 17.

nor should all workers be conceived as one big working class.[8] In order to adequately illuminate the principal characteristics of work, labour and working actors in capitalist and non-capitalist contexts, cross-epochal as well as global comparisons are vital.[9] For this purpose, categories and tools are required that can be applied to different historical contexts and can offer perspectives to describe social structures and inequalities connected to labour and labour relations outside dominant modern and Eurocentric interpretations.[10]

By means of a praxeological approach to work and working actors, the following is intended to contribute to this conceptual discussion by suggesting the concepts of livelihood activities (Sigrid Wadauer, *Lebensunterhaltsaktivitäten*)[11] and *Lebenslage* as analytical tools that go beyond the frame of work and labour relations and allow for cross-epochal and global comparisons. The first concept, livelihood activities, refers to "what women and men actually did to support themselves and those dependent on them."[12] It is defined not only as material subsistence, but also as social and material reproduction — namely maintaining oneself materially as well as socially. The scope for action in earning a living has always depended on intersecting factors, including social and legal status, residence, origin, age, gender, access to information, social relations, economic resources, power relations, and the possession of different forms of capital (understood here in the Bourdieusian sense). Although such an understanding of livelihood is reminiscent of early modern concepts of a respectable standard of living as a normative category within a moral economy,[13] it should be emphasized that livelihood is used here strictly as an analytical category without moral connotation. In

8 Welskopp, "Kapitalismus und Konzepte von Arbeit," 215.

9 Andrea Komlosy. "Work and Labor Relations," in *Capitalism. The Reemergence of a Historical Concept*, ed. Jürgen Kocka and Marcel van der Linden (London et al.: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 33–69, 47; Welskopp, "Kapitalismus und Konzepte von Arbeit," 215; De Vito, Schiel, and van Rossum, "From Bondage to Precariousness." Currently, there are several attempts to bring together different research communities, see e. g. "the COST Action WORCK," http://worck.eu and the "Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies," www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/, especially Research Area D Labor and Spatiality.

10 Andreas Eckert, "What is Global Labour History Good for?," in *Work in a Modern Society. The German Historical Experience in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Jürgen Kocka (New York: Berghahn, 2010), 169–181, 176.

11 Sigrid Wadauer, "Immer nur Arbeit? Überlegungen zur Historisierung von Arbeit und Lebensunterhalten," in *Semantiken von Arbeit: Diachrone und vergleichende Perspektiven*, ed. Jörn Leonhard and Willibald Steinmetz (Cologne: Böhlau, 2016), 225–246.

12 Maria Ågren, "Introduction," in *Making a Living, Making a Difference. Gender and Work in Early Modern European Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1–23, 19.

13 Daniel Schläppi, "Logiken der Subsistenz in historischer Perspektive. Der wirtschaftlich tragfähige Haushalt als gesellschaftliche und politische Leitgröße der Vormoderne," in *Strategien der Subsistenz. Neue prekäre, subversive und moralische Ökonomien*, ed. Kerstin Poehls, Leonore Scholze-Irrlitz, and Andrea Vetter (Berlin: Panama, 2017), 31–47, 39; Robert

particular, it is not referred to in an affirmative or utopian manner in the sense of subsistence, as a 'better' "way of satisfying one's needs without the market and money."[14] The second concept, *Lebenslage,* "is defined as the entire set of external conditions that influence the lives of individuals or groups."[15] This includes not only the framework of possibilities and scope of action of individuals, but also the form of a person's social integration, namely their "socio-economic, socio-cultural, [and] socio-biological living conditions," and is connected to the individual's agency.[16] As will be shown below, the translation of the German term Lebenslage into English carries with it the risk of misunderstanding. For that reason, the German term will be used here.

The article is divided into two parts: In the first, the concepts of livelihood activities and Lebenslage are explained. In the second, these abstract concepts are applied to historical examples from Europe, Africa, India, colonial Peru, and the Soviet Union, from the early modern period to the present. These examples were chosen rather randomly and are by no means exhaustive. Instead, they are intended to highlight the perspectives and potential that can arise from the use of these analytical tools, including in terms of cross-epochal and global comparisons and the analysis of capitalist labour.

Brandt and Thomas Buchner, eds., *Nahrung, Markt oder Gemeinnutz. Werner Sombart und das vorindustrielle Handwerk* (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2004).

14 Komlosy, "Work and Labor Relations," 43. Such a utopian and rather idealising and glorifying view on subsistence is held by Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, *The Subsistence Perspective. Beyond the Globalised Economy* (London: Zed Books, 1999). Similarily: Kerstin Poehls, Leonore Scholze-Irrlitz, and Andrea Vetter, eds., *Strategien der Subsistenz. Neue prekäre, subversive und moralische Ökonomien* (Berlin: Panama 2017). A contrary and more critical position is taken in the same volume by Schläppi, "Logiken der Subsistenz," 34. Taking into account the memoirs of people who lived under agrarian subsistence economies in the twentieth century, it is doubtful if such a view is empirically tenable in any way. See for example, Anna Wimschneider, *Herbstmilch. Lebenserinnerungen einer Bäuerin* (München: Büchergemeinschaft, 1984) and Roland Girtler, *Aschenlauge. Die alte Kultur der Bauern* (Wien: Böhlau, 2012).

15 Dietrich Engels, "Lebenslagen," in *Lexikon der Sozialwirtschaft*, ed. Bernd Maelicke (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2008), 643–646, 643.

16 Ibid.: "Als 'Lebenslage' wird die Gesamtheit der äußeren Bedingungen bezeichnet, durch die das Leben von Personen oder Gruppen beeinflusst wird. Die Lebenslage bildet einerseits den Rahmen von Möglichkeiten, innerhalb dessen eine Person sich entwickeln kann, sie markiert deren Handlungsspielraum. Andererseits können Personen in gewissem Maße auch auf ihre Lebenslagen einwirken und diese gestalten. Damit steht der Begriff der Lebenslage für die konkrete Ausformung der sozialen Einbindung einer Person, genauer: ihrer sozioökonomischen, soziokulturellen, soziobiologischen Lebensgrundlage." (Translated by the author).

Beyond Work and Labour: Livelihood Activities and *Lebenslage*

As Jane Whittle has stressed, analytical concepts such as 'labour,' 'work,' or the 'economy' are not neutral, but "loaded with gendered and historically specific assumptions introduced by classical economic thought in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and perpetuated by modern economics."[17] Etymologically, 'labour' (and its equivalents in other European languages) is associated with "an unequivocal connotation of pain and trouble,"[18] while 'work' encompasses both positive and negative associations.[19] Analytically, work can broadly be defined as "any human effort adding use value to goods and services,"[20] while labour is usually connected to commodification and refers to activities that create exchange-value.[21] Thus, in theory, labour as commodified work creating exchange-value is considered a core characteristic of the capitalist economy.

Such theoretical reflections on the significance of labour under capitalism must be tied to empirical analyses from various historical periods and different parts of the world. However, as a starting point for such comparisons, the concepts of work and labour seem rather problematic: They are part of a modern Western understanding, refer only to specific activities and focus only on certain actors. Many cultures and

17 Jane Whittle, "A Critique of Approaches to 'Domestic Work': Women, Work and the Pre-Industrial Economy," *Past and Present* 243, no. 1 (2019): 35–70, 67. See also Welskopp, "Kapitalismus und Konzepte von Arbeit," 211.

18 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* [Original 1958], 2nd ed., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 80.

19 Raffaella Sarti, Anna Bellavitis, and Manuela Martini, "Introduction," in *What is Work? Gender at the Crossroads of Home, Family, and Business from the Early Modern Era to the Present*, ed. idem (New York/ Oxford: Berghahn, 2018), 1–84, 5. For a discussion on the concepts of work and labour in different European and Non-European languages see: Ibidem, as well as: Maurice Godelier, "Work and its Representations: A Research Proposal," *History Workshop Journal* 10, no. 1 (1980): 164–174, and Jürgen Kocka, "Work as a Problem in European History," in *Work in a Modern Society. The German Historical Experience in Comparative Perspective*, ed. idem. (New York: Berghahn, 2010), 1–15.

20 Charles Tilly and Chris Tilly, *Work under Capitalism* (Boulder: Routledge, 1998), 22.

21 See Sarti, Bellavitis, and Martini, "Introduction," 48, endnote 23. Regarding a proper English translation of the terminology used by Marx see Christian Fuchs, *Reading Marx in the Information Age: A Media and Communication Studies Perspective on Capital Volume 1* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 28: "Given the etymological difference between 'work' and 'labour' as general creative practice and hard alienated toil, it is in my view best to translate Marx's usage of the term 'Arbeit' for the concrete creation of use-values as 'work' and the abstract production of value as 'labour'. This is, however, not the case in the Penguin edition of *Capital*, where the terms 'concrete labour' and 'abstract labour' are used."

languages do not have a general concept of work, and even in Western languages, it emerged only haltingly over the course of the early modern period and lacked a clear, singular definition.[22] Only the advent of modern Western economics introduced the abstract and narrow concept of labour as strongly connected to gainful employment and market-related activities.[23]

In contrast, Alexandra Oberländer argues for an "understanding of work that is not necessarily linked to gainful employment but rather takes into consideration those activities […] people undertook to provide for themselves materially."[24] The category of livelihood activities can instead encompass work or wage labour, but is not restricted to them.[25] Maintaining social or sexual relationships that contribute to subsistence, or receiving income without work can also fall under this umbrella. Forms of work and labour are thus captured and related to each other in their interplay with other economic and social activities and practices.[26]

Beginning the analysis from the standpoint of livelihood activities and not labour relations thus allows for both a better contextualization of these activities within the life situation or Lebenslage of the given actor and the reconnection of the history of labour with debates on social structures and inequalities. Since these cannot be determined by labour relations alone, analyzing Lebenslagen becomes a suitable tool for describing and classifying working individuals and groups. For example, sociological research on precarity has shown that insecure labour relations alone do not solely explain an overall precarious situation.[27] In response, Klaus Kraemer has suggested the inclusion of other dimensions of Lebenslage—in addition to gainful employment—in any analysis and highlighted the need to consider not only the legal nature of any employment relationship, but also the concrete form of the work performed.[28]

22 Kocka, "Work as a Problem in European History," 2f.

23 Sarti, Bellavitis, and Martini, "Introduction," 17; Wadauer, "Immer nur Arbeit?," 230; Welskopp, "Kapitalismus und Konzepte von Arbeit," 211.

24 Alexandra Oberländer, "Cushy Work, Backbreaking Leisure. Late Soviet Work Ethics Reconsidered," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 18, no. 3 (2017): 569–590, 572.

25 Wadauer, "Immer nur Arbeit? "

26 See Daniel Schläppi, "Ökonomie als Dimension des Relationalen. Nachdenken über menschliches Wirtschaften jenseits disziplinärer Raster und Paradigmen," in *Die Ökonomie sozialer Beziehungen. Ressourcenbewirtschaftung als Geben, Nehmen, Investieren, Verschwenden, Haushalten, Horten, Vererben, Schulden*, ed. Gabriele Jancke and Daniel Schläppi (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2015), 37–64.

27 Klaus Kraemer, "Prekarität – was ist das?," *Arbeit* 17, no. 2 (2008), 77–90, 81; Michèle Amacker, "'Da haben wir wenig Spielraum' – Familienernährerinnen in prekären Lebenslagen," *WSI-Mitteilungen* 64, no. 8 (2011): 409–415, 414.

28 Kraemer. "Prekarität – was ist das?," 77–79.

The Lebenslage approach dates back to both Otto Neurath and Gerhard Weisser, and was translated into English as both "life situation" and "living standard."[29] The latter, in particular, can be misleading, because Lebenslage does not explicitly mean an economically measured standard of living. Instead, it "refers to the material and immaterial personal circumstances such as e. g. the work situation, the access to and power over material resources, the housing, the social network as well as the own physical abilities and health."[30] The concept of Lebenslage is multidimensional; "it always encompasses several areas of life simultaneously and is therefore in opposition to unilinear, monocausal explanations."[31] Thus, the concept captures the entanglement and interdependencies of different material and non-material factors, enabling historians to study aspects of work and labour within a framework of intersecting and interdependent inequalities.[32] Thus, while livelihood activities describe the practices engaged in by the actors in question, Lebenslage captures their economic, social and cultural situations. This allows for a structural analysis that is not dependent on single factors such as property, legal status (free/unfree) or employment (employed/self-employed), but instead takes into account the interdependencies of various material and immaterial aspects.

29 See Otto Neurath, *Empiricism and sociology* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing, 1973), 401; Original: Otto Neurath: *Empirische Soziologie. Der wissenschaftliche Gehalt der Geschichte und Nationalökonomie* (Wien: Springer, 1931), in: *Gesammelte philosophische und methodologische Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. Rudolf Haller and Heiner Rutte (Wien: öbv, 1981), 511f). For Gerhard Weisser, see Ortrud Leßmann, *Konzeption und Erfassung von Armut. Vergleich des Lebenslage-Ansatzes mit Sens "Capability"-Ansatz* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot), 2007, chap. 3.3. There are some minor differences in both understandings of the notion and approach of *Lebenslage,* see ibid., ch. 3.

30 Robert Nadler, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? International Migrants in the Rural Town of Zittau (Saxony) and their Potential Impact on Rural Development," *European Countryside* 4, no. 1 (2012): 57–72, 62.

31 Engels, "Lebenslagen," 643 (translated by the author).

32 For an examination of labour relations in terms of intersectionality analysis as power relations, see Gabriele Winker and Nina Degele, "Intersectionality as Multi-Level Analysis: Dealing with Social Inequality," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 18, no. 1 (2011): 51–66. For historical analysis, I speak of interdependence rather than intersectionality. See for this debate Andrea Griesebner, "Intersektionalität versus Interdependenz und Relationalität," *EWE. Erwägen – Wissen – Ethik* 24, no. 3 (2013): 381–383; Julia Roth, "Entangled Inequalities as Intersectionalities: Towards an Epistemic Sensibilization (desiguALdades.net Working Paper Series 43)," Berlin 2013, www.desigualdades.net/Resources/Working_Paper/43_WP_Roth_Online.pdf; Nira Yuval-Davis, "Beyond the Recognition and Re-Distribution Dichotomy. Intersectionality and Stratification," in *Framing Intersectionality. Debates on a Multi-Facetted Concept in Gender Studies*, ed. Helma Lutz, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar, and Linda Supik (Farnham: Routledge, 2011), 155–169.

Comparative Perspectives and the Analysis of Capitalism

In pre-industrial economies, "most work was unpaid and centred around the maintenance and future survival of the family," as Jane Whittle recently summarized with regard to early modern England.[33] It is thus often not possible to draw clear distinctions between money-earning and money-saving activities or between production and consumption. This is particularly true for the agricultural sector but also applies to others. Survival was not based on gainful employment or regular income; rather, households as units of production and consumption were integrated into complex forms of circulation and exchange of material and immaterial resources.[34] Within a "mixed economy,"[35] different people contributed to the livelihood of a household in different ways and carried out different activities depending on season and situation as well as on their gender, age, and status.[36] Based on the digital analysis of a large corpus of early modern Swedish court records, the Gender and Work project lead by Maria Ågren at the university of Uppsala demonstrated that

> even for people who did have an occupation proper, a salary and an occupational title, the concept 'multiple employments' describes well what their time-use consisted in, and this was true for both men and women. However, most people performed unsalaried and unwaged work and had no occupational title at all.[37]

Regarding the division of tasks within early modern households, Ågren stresses the importance of the "two-supporter model," wherein "both spouses contributed in various ways, though not necessarily financially, to the household economy"[38] through various combinations of, for example, self-employed and dependent activities, petty trade, providing services, or giving and receiving loans.

33 Whittle, "A Critique of Approaches to 'Domestic Work'," 36. Regarding the significance of the so called "unpaid contributing family worker" see Rossana Barragán, "Women in the Silver Mines of Potosí: Rethinking the History of 'Informality' and 'Precarity' (Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries)," I*nternational Review of Social History* 65, no. 2 (2019): 289–314, 313. See also Sheilagh C. Ogilvie, *A Bitter Living: Women, Markets, and Social Capital in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2003).

34 Schläppi, "Logiken der Subsistenz," 42.

35 Gunter Mahlerwein, "Mixed Economy," in *Encyclopedia of Early Modern History Online* (2019), http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2352-0272_emho_SIM_024144.

36 Sarti, Bellavitis, and Martini, "Introduction," 11.

37 Website of the research project Gender and Work at the Uppsala University, https://gaw.hist.uu.se/what-is-gaw/research+project/resultat/.

38 Ågren, "Introduction," 2.

In parallel, Valentin Groebner has stressed that late medieval and early modern municipal officials were not officials in the modern sense, but rather a kind of subcontractor of the local authorities, who provided both municipal and their own services. Their income only consisted in small part of a fixed remuneration in the modern sense. Rather, their income was in large part their personal share of revenues collected as fees, duties, or fines on behalf of the city. And a large proportion of the city servants had private side activities in addition to their official functions.[39] Such a diversification of one's livelihood was common also for teachers in the early modern period and into the nineteenth century.[40]

A narrow focus on work and labour risks losing sight of such arrangements of different practices and forms of income; looking through the lens of livelihood activities, however, these combinations become visible. This is also apparent in the proto-industrial early modern export trades. For example, the bleacheries of St. Gallen's linen industry were municipal institutions, run by master bleachers.[41] The masters were responsible for their bleacheries both organizationally and financially and employed journeymen in wage labour. In addition to these formal contracts, both masters and journeymen carried out other activities and had other forms of income that contributed to their respective livelihoods, including bribes and tips, as well as illegal washing or driving services connected to their work in the bleacheries.[42] There is also indirect evidence of child labour. Municipal mandates in the seventeenth century decreed that certain alms in St. Gallen were only intended for the foreign poor. Residents of St. Gallen were not allowed to receive them; the mandates in particular mention 'bleacher boys' and 'dyer boys' who were not legally authorized to receive these alms.[43] It can be assumed that these boys were working in the St. Gallen bleacheries in the

39 Valentin Groebner, "'Gemein' und 'Geheym'. Pensionen, Geschenke und die Sichtbarmachung des Unsichtbaren in Basel am Beginn des 16. Jahrhunderts," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 49 (1999): 445–469, 453.

40 See Schläppi, "Logiken der Subsistenz in historischer Perspektive," 32f.; Johannes Westberg, "How Did Teachers Make a Living? The Teacher Occupation, Livelihood Diversification and the Rise of Mass Schooling in Nineteenth-Century Sweden," *History of Education* 48, no. 1 (2019): 19–40, https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2018.1514660; Peter-Paul Bänziger, *Die Moderne als Erlebnis. Eine Geschichte der Konsum- und Arbeitsgesellschaft, 1840–1940* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020), chap. I.3.

41 For the examples from the St. Gallen textile industry see also: Marco Tomaszewski, "Practices and Dependencies. Research Perspectives on the History of Proto-Industrial Labour and the St. Gallen Linen Industry (1450–1700)," *RiSES. Ricerche di Storia Economica e Sociale (Journal of Economic and Social History)* VI, no. 1–2 (2020): 3–33 (released 2022).

42 Town book of St. Gallen from von 1673: Ernst Ziegler, ed., *Rechtsquellen des Kantons St. Gallen II/2: Die Stadtrechte von St. Gallen und Rapperswil, Das Stadtbuch von 1673* (Aarau: Sauerländer, 1996), 235ff.

43 Stadtarchiv St. Gallen, Bücher 547, Mandatenbuch 2, mandates of 1658, 1661, 1670.

summer and begged and sought alms in winter. Little is known about these child labourers. Perhaps they were children from poor parents who were sent to work in the summer, resembling the famous "Schwabenkinder" who from the seventeenth to the twentieth century were sent from Tirol to Upper Swabia in order to work there as farmhands and maidservants.[44] Or they were orphans, like the boys who served the soldiers and mercenaries in the baggage trains of early modern armies.[45] Such child labour is especially difficult to capture in terms of labour relations.[46] In these examples, boundaries between labour and non-labour, and between freedom and unfreedom are hard to determine and can better be explained by categories such as Lebenslage. The Lebenslage of orphans, for example, could be characterized by their age, their physical and mental condition, the lack of reliable family or other social relationships, and homelessness. The latter made it easy to exploit their labour in exchange for room and board (and thus without contracts or regular payment), and to leave them to fend for themselves in winter.

Grey zones between free and unfree forms of labour also become apparent in the mita system of colonial Peru. This system was usually "characterized as a form of draft labour, corvée labour, or unfree labour."[47] Yet as Rossana Barragán has shown, work in the mines in Potosí actually "consisted of shifts to work one week out of three throughout one year. Some of the mitayos or 'unfree workers' could then be engaged as 'free workers' in the mines in their 'rest' (huelga) weeks."[48] Low-wage corvée or mita labour was thus combined with better paid free work; unfree workers and free workers were thus not necessarily different groups, and unfree work and free work could be closely intertwined.[49] This example illustrates "that the free or unfree condition of labour is not defined (only) by the juridical status of the worker," and that the quality of labour relations "cannot be summed up neatly in a clear dichotomy between the

44 Stefan Zimmermann and Christine Brugger, eds., *Die Schwabenkinder. Arbeit in der Fremde vom 17. bis 20. Jahrhundert*, 2nd. ed. (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2016).

45 Peter Burschel, *Söldner im Nordwestdeutschland des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts. Sozialgeschichtliche Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 253.

46 Katharina Simon-Muscheid, "Formen der Kinderarbeit in Spätmittelalter und Renaissance. Diskurse und Alltag," in *Arbeit im Wandel. Deutung, Organisation und Herrschaft vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart = Le travail en mutation: interprétation, organisation et pouvoir, du Moyen Age à nos jours*, ed. Ulrich Pfister, Brigitte Studer, and Jakob Tanner (Zürich: Chronos, 1996), 107–125. For an overview of recent research on early modern child labour, see Andrea Caracausi, "Beaten Children and Women's Work in Early Modern Italy," *Past and Present* 222 (2014): 95–128, footnote 5. For the twentieth century, see Girtler, *Aschenlauge*, 78–91 and 114–129.

47 Barragán, "Women in the Silver Mines of Potosí," 292.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 291f.

free and unfree conditions."[50] Beyond their legal status and labour relations, however, these actors can be characterized by certain features of their Lebenslage, which presents a starting point for the elaboration of alternative analytical concepts in the future.

With regard to the colonial period in Africa, Frederick Cooper notes that here too, "neither 'free' nor 'coerced' labour was an unambiguous category"[51] and that even during the height of the slave trade in the early nineteenth century, there was quite often a continuum in the forms of appropriation of labour power, from labour as a commodity that could be bought, to slavery and other forms of appropriation based on various relations of dependency.[52] The actors involved in such dependency and labour relations are difficult to describe when exclusively using dichotomous categories such as free and unfree. With the concept of Lebenslage, however, they can be identified by their common characteristics beyond the level of the individual.

The examples presented thus far can be regarded as typically early-capitalist, pre-capitalist or non-capitalist and thus only marginally relevant for a discussion of labour under capitalism. Yet, multiple forms of employment and the combination of activities remained important in industrial economies and societies—including for the prototypical industrial workers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Workers' households cultivated land or sublet beds and hosted boarders; women, in particular, practised a broad range of activities that were not reflected in official statistics.[53] Instead of the often-cited male-breadwinner model, one can observe "family-based

50 Luca Mocarelli and Giulio Ongaro, *Work in Early Modern Italy, 1500–1800* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 14; see also Doris Bulach and Juliane Schiel, "Von der Rente zur Rendite. Nachgedanken zu Sklaverei und Servilität von der Gegenwart bis ins Mittelalter. Ein Gespräch mit Ludolf Kuchenbuch," *Werkstatt Geschichte* 66/67 (2014): 149–164; Juliane Schiel, "The Ragusan 'Maids-of-all-Work' Shifting Labor Relations in the Late Medieval Adriatic Sea Region," *Journal of Global Slavery* 5 (2020): 139–169; see also Michael Mann, "Die Mär von der freien Lohnarbeit. Menschenhandel und erzwungene Arbeit in der Neuzeit. Ein einleitender Essay," *Comparativ* 13, no. 4 (2003): 7–22; Jairus Banaji, "The Fictions of Free Labour: Contract, Coercion, and So-Called Unfree Labour," *Historical Materialism* 11, no. 3 (2003): 69–95.

51 Frederick Cooper, "From Enslavement to Precarity? The Labour Question in African History," in *The Political Economy of Everyday Life in Africa: Beyond the Margins*, ed. Wale Adebanwi (Suffolk: James Currey, 2017). 135–156, 144.

52 Frederick Cooper, *Von der Sklaverei in die Prekarität? Afrikanische Arbeitsgeschichte im globalen Kontext* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), 14; see Cooper, "From Enslavement to Precarity," 142.

53 Josef Mooser, *Arbeiterleben in Deutschland 1900–1970. Klassenlagen, Kultur und Politik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), 85; Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, "'Volle Kost voll'. Die Wohnungsverhältnisse der Bergleute an der Ruhr um die Jahrhundertwende," in *Glück auf, Kameraden! Die Bergarbeiter und ihre Organisationen in Deutschland*, ed. Hans Mommsen and Ulrich Borsdorf (Köln: Bund, 1979), 151–173.

self-sufficient economies"—even in industrial capitalism.[54] Almost forty years ago, Josef Mooser had already concluded that in the German Reich the pre-industrial rural 'mixed economy' survived in the urban working classes well into the twentieth century.[55] In nineteenth and twentieth-century Western and Southern Europe, many wage earners also relied on land ownership, self-employment, and multiple livelihood activities.[56] Thus, if we take into account all the possible forms of self-employed and unpaid labour, the so-called 'working society' at no time realized full employment in the sense of gainful employment.[57] Many actors in industrial capitalism depended on various livelihood activities conducted by different members of the household in addition to wage labour. The 'normal employment relationship' appears more and more as a historical exception rather than the rule, even in the history of capitalism.[58] From a wholly different twentieth-century perspective, Alexandra Oberländer has shown that, in the Soviet Union, "work in the sense of the eight-hour workday as gainful employment was not necessarily the primary means to provide for oneself or one's family." Instead, other livelihood activities were important: "moonlighting, engagement in petty trade, and making money from all sorts of different services became popular means of earning additional income" and "the alleged line between work and leisure became blurred."[59]

Regarding twentieth-century African workers, Frederick Cooper points to the volatility and variety of forms of political and social relations: as workers used their earnings to develop small-scale enterprises or their kinsmen's farms, or as women found niches in urban production and marketing as well as rural production, as young men found that personal clientage to 'big men' could be more fruitful than wage labour.[60]

54 Alf Lüdtke, "Über-Leben im 20. Jahrhundert. Krieg und Arbeit in den Lebensläufen von Arbeiterinnen und Arbeitern in Deutschland – mit vergleichenden Ausblicken nach Frankreich und Großbritannien," in *'Arbeit': Geschichte – Gegenwart – Zukunft*, ed. Josef Ehmer, Helga Grebing, and Peter Gutschner (Leipzig: AVA, 2002), 48" (translated by the author).

55 Mooser, *Arbeiterleben in Deutschland 1900–1970*, 85.

56 Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, "Besitz und Selbstständigkeit als Teil von Arbeiterstrategien im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Beispiele aus West- und Südeuropa," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43 (2017): 240–263.

57 Peter Gutschner, "Von der Norm zur Normalität? Begriff und Deutung von Arbeit im Diskurs der Neuzeit," in *'Arbeit': Geschichte – Gegenwart – Zukunft*, ed. Josef Ehmer, Helga Grebing, and Peter Gutschner (Leipzig: AVA, 2002), 137–148, 142.

58 Eloisa Betti, "Precarious Work: Norm or Exception of Capitalism? Historicizing a Contemporary Debate. A Global Gendered Perspective," in *The Power of the Norm. Fragile Rules and Significant Exeptions. IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conferences*, Vol. 35, ed. Eloisa Betti and Katherine Miller (Vienna, 2016), www.iwm.at/publications/5-junior-visiting-fellows-conferences/vol-xxxv/precarious-work/; Timo Luks, "Prekarität. Eine nützliche Kategorie der historischen Kapitalismusanalyse," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 56 (2016): 51–80, 52

59 Oberländer, "Cushy Work, Backbreaking Leisure," 584.

60 Cooper, "From Enslavement to Precarity," 137–138.

Even for the classical example of the Western industrial worker, a clear designation can be difficult, as illustrated by the category of *Arbeiterbauern*, labourers who also run a farm. Jürgen Schlumbohm stresses that, in pre-industrial Europe, "what seem to be social classes in a cross-sectional perspective, can turn out to be stages in individual life courses" and that this holds true both for agricultural and proto-industrial regions.[61] The concept of Lebenslage offers an instrument to capture these dynamics analytically, as it, unlike class for example, allows for a consideration of shifting, interdependent factors.

In order to categorize the many forms of self-employed, non-waged, unregulated and legally unprotected economic activities in the so-called Global South, the concept of informal work was introduced in the 1970s. The concept was first elucidated by Keith Hart, a development economist, based on a study of labour in Accra, Ghana, but was soon used to describe and categorize the activities of street vendors, transporters, waste pickers, and prostitutes in various countries.[62] During this time, female protagonists in this so-called informal sector in India organized themselves in the Self Employed Women Association (SEWA); despite their unregulated economic activities, they insist on being recognized as workers. Rejecting the terminology of the informal, they call themselves self-employed.[63] It remains, however, unclear what conceptual tools are appropriate to analyse the economic relations between the actors in the informal sector. What Frederick Cooper asks of the African contexts could also be applied to female Indian textile workers, male rikshaw drivers, or early modern European home-based textile producers: "What were the relationships of the 'big men' to the varied categories of market sellers, street vendors, artisanal apprentices, beggars, and small-scale economic enterprises over whom they exercised different degrees of control?"[64] A potential way to answer this question is to focus on the vertical and horizontal dependencies between the given actors that become apparent in an analysis of livelihood activities and Lebenslage.[65]

61 Jürgen Schlumbohm, "Labour in Proto-Industrialization: Big Questions and Micro-Answers," in E*arly Modern Capitalism. Economic and Social Change in Europe, 1400–1800*, ed. Maarten Roy Prak (London: Routledge, 2001), 123–132, 127.

62 Denning, "Wageless Life," 89.; Keith Hart, "Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana," in *Third World Employment. Problems and Strategy*, ed. Richard Jolly et. al. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 66 –70. See Nicole Mayer-Ahuja, "Die Globalität unsicherer Arbeit als konzeptionelle Provokation," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43 (2017), 264–296, 264; Cooper, "From Enslavement to Precarity," 138.

63 Denning, "Wageless Life," 92. See Ela R. Bhatt, *We are Poor but so Many. The Story of Self-Employed Women in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), and the self-portrayal of SEWA on: www.sewa.org/history/ (accessed 18 October 2022). SEWA currently represents about two million women in India.

64 Cooper, "From Enslavement to Precarity," 139.

65 De Vito, Schiel, and van Rossum, "From Bondage to Precariousness," 648. See Tomaszewski, "Practices and Dependencies."

Informal forms of work were also an important part of the economic and labour history of contemporary Western societies.[66] In addition, gainful employment in the Global North—especially since the end of the twentieth century—is increasingly characterized by flexibilization, subcontracting, micro-entrepreneurs, and self-employed actors. In many cases, employment relationships are associated with considerable risks and precarious conditions for working people.[67] For employers, this has been framed as labour flexibility, while workers perceive it as precarity.[68] This points to remarkable similarities between the twenty-first century and the historical examples presented above, as well as between the so-called Global North and Global South.[69] Especially precarious entrepreneurship and self-employment seem to be characteristic not only of pre-industrial contexts, but also of post-industrial or 'post-fordist' societies.[70] This challenges dichotomous social classifications such as entrepreneur versus worker or labour versus capital,[71] as well as well as overly simplistic concepts of class.[72]

With regard to the terminology, however, Sibylle Marti recently pointed to "the problem of an androcentric as well as a Eurocentric reductionism" connected with the term 'precarity.' It is linked to a narrative of decline, centred around the erosion of the normal employment relationship, a model which has "predominantly been established for white males, whereas the working conditions of women and migrants, as well as people living outside the 'global North' tend to be overlooked."[73] This "elucidates how

66 Thomas Buchner and Philip Hoffmann-Rehnitz, "Introduction: Irregular Economic Practices as a Topic of Modern (Urban) History—Problems and Possibilities," in *Shadow Economies and Irregular Work in Urban Europe. 16th to early 20th Centuries*, ed. idem (Wien/Berlin/Münster: LIT, 2011), 3–36, 36.

67 See Keim and Marti in this volume; Gutschner, "Von der Norm zur Normalität?," 140f.; Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *Der neue Geist des Kapitalismus* (Konstanz: UVK, 2003).

68 Christian de Vito, "Labour Flexibility and Labour Precariousness as Conceptual Tools for the Historical Study of the Interactions between Labour Relations," in *On the Road to Global Labour History. A Festschrift for Marcel van der Linden*, ed. Karl Heinz Roth (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017), 219–240; De Vito, Schiel, and van Rossum, "From Bondage to Precariousness?," 653.

69 See also Gutschner, "Von der Norm zur Normalität?," 140 and Robert Neuwirth, *Stealth of Nations. The Global Rise of the Informal Economy* (New York: Pantheon, 2011), 156ff.

70 Luks, "Prekarität," 52.

71 Gutschner, "Von der Norm zur Normalität?," 141.

72 Thomas Welskopp, "Der Wandel der Arbeitsgesellschaft als Thema der Kulturwissenschaften. Klassen, Professionen und Eliten," in *Unternehmen Praxisgeschichte. Historische Perspektiven auf Kapitalismus, Arbeit und Klassengesellschaft*, ed. Thomas Welskopp (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 135–168, 158 (translated by the author); Michael Denning, "Wageless Life," *New Left Review* 66 (2010): 79–97, 81.

73 Sibylle Marti, "Precarious Work—Informal Work: Notions of 'Insecure' Labour and How They Relate to Neoliberalism," *Journal of Modern European History* 17, no. 4 (2019): 396–401, 400.

'nonstandard' labour is theorised differently on a global scale,"[74] as the concept of informal work was "initially used in an explicitly positive way" to describe forms of work in the Global South that would, in the Global North, be described as precarious.[75] Marti convincingly proposes 'insecure labour' as an appropriate alternative terminology that evades the inherent risk of reproducing an existing "uneven perception of the 'global North' and 'South' already on a conceptual level."[76]

Furthermore, there are also substantial differences between the definitions of precarity and informality: While precarious work is primarily understood as a combination of standard violations, the definition of informality focuses primarily on the legal aspect.[77] Therefore, a precise contextualization of insecure labour is indispensable. With regard to India and Germany, Nicole Mayer-Ahuja rejects assumptions that the increase in insecure labour in both the Global South and the Global North will diminish differences between these world regions. Following Mayer-Ahuja, only by placing analysis of work and labour at the local level in its relevant socio-economic and regulatory context (which, I would add, includes the actors' Lebenslage) is a solid basis for the analysis of global connections and comparisons possible.[78]

It must be stressed here that the concepts of livelihood activities and Lebenslage on the one hand and (free wage) labour on the other hand are not mutual exclusive but complement each other. To take livelihood activities into account can thus be a starting point for the analysis of capitalism. It is only from this perspective that forms of labour such as free wage labour can be contextualized as one possible livelihood activity among many.[79] The value of this perspective lies in pointing out the mutual entanglements of economic and non-economic practices under capitalism. The focus on livelihood activities makes visible the "'non-economic' background conditions" on

74 Ibid., 401

75 Ibid., 400.

76 Ibid., 401. The scholarship on precarious work in the Global North and informalisation of work in the Global South also rarely intersects, see: Nicole Mayer-Ahuja, "Die Globalität unsicherer Arbeit als konzeptionelle Provokation," 268.

77 Ibid., 269.

78 Ibid., 296.

79 The perspective of livelihood could be supplemented by existing categories of labour relations such as the taxonomy developed by the Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations. See Karin Hofmeester et al., "The Global Collaboratory on the History of Labour Relations, 1500–2000: Background, Set-Up, Taxonomy, and Applications (IISH Data Collection, V1)," Amsterdam 2016, http://hdl.handle.net/10622/4OGRAD, 9: "The Collaboratory fully recognizes that persons may experience different labour relations at the same time. In those cases (serfs who are permitted to perform wage labour part of the year), the researcher may attribute a primary labour relation to the main activity (as defined by hours spent) and a second or even a third to the subsidiary activity".

which capitalism's "'economic,' foreground features depend on."[80] A central concept in this context is reproductive work, introduced by feminist Marxist scholars as a reaction to the strict distinction between productive and unproductive labour in modern theorizations of labour. Reproductive work can be defined as

> those activities that exist as a counterpart, but also prior, to employment or income generation, what usually is considered production. Also referred to as social reproduction, such work is about the making of people through the tasks of daily life which are necessary to develop and sustain labor power. These activities are both material (like feeding), emotional (like love), and assimilative (like the transferring of norms and values), whether occurring in the family, school, church, or community.[81]

Such reproductive work can be understood as productive even in a Marxist understanding, because "the work of reproduction performed in the home by women added value not only to the necessary work of reproduction carried out in the factory by the laborers but also to the surplus labor."[82] Therefore, "social reproduction is an indispensable background condition for the possibility of capitalist production,"[83] since "wage labour could not exist in the absence of housework, child-raising, schooling, affective care and a host of other activities which help to produce new generations of workers and replenish existing ones, as well as to maintain social bonds and shared understandings."[84]

On a different level, Sven Beckert emphasizes that "capitalist expansion continued to thrive on the basis of a variety of forms of labor mobilization. […] Not only did different forms of labor coexist under the conditions of global capitalist expansion—they depended on one another for their very existence."[85] Recently, for example, the importance of informal labour for (capitalist) society was emphasized by SEWA in their

80 Nancy Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode. For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism," *New Left Review* 86 (2014): 55–72, 65.

81 Eileen Boris, "Regulating Home Labors. The ILO and the Feminization of Work," in *What is Work? Gender at the Crossroads of Home, Family, and Business from the Early Modern Era to the Present*, ed. Raffaella Sarti, Anna Bellavitis, and Manuela Martini (New York: Berghahn, 2018), 269–294, 272.

82 Alessandra Pescarolo, "Productive and Reproductive Work. Uses and Abuses of an Old Dichotomy," in *What is Work? Gender at the Crossroads of Home, Family, and Business from the Early Modern Era to the Present*, ed. Raffaella Sarti, Anna Bellavitis, and Manuela Martini (New York: Berghahn, 2018), 114–138, 121.

83 Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode," 61

84 Ibid.

85 Sven Beckert, "Labor Regimes after Emancipation: The Case of Cotton," in *Grenzüberschreitende Arbeitergeschichte. Konzepte und Erkundungen/Labour History Beyond Borders. Concepts*

demands for economic support from the Indian state for informal workers during the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020:

> many informal workers are providing valuable essential services, including street vendors reaching fresh fruit and vegetables, agriculture workers growing food for the nation, truck drivers, auto drivers and other transporters reaching essential goods and services, waste pickers and garbage cleaners ensuring healthy environment, manufacturers of masks and medicines ensuring essential supplies, contract workers in hospitals, electricity companies etc.[86]

Thus, Andrea Komlosy calls for us to "de-privilege the significance of wage labor as a means to commodify labor and to appropriate indirect surplus value"[87] and sees "the synchronicity of various modes of labor […] as a fundamental characteristic and a necessary condition of capitalism."[88] Assessing the significance of free wage labour within the framework of other livelihood activities can thus contribute to the debate on the role of free wage labour under capitalism.

Livelihood Activities and *Lebenslage*

In conclusion, in order to prevent Eurocentric, modern, and gender biases and to enable cross-epochal and global comparisons, the scope of analysis must be expanded beyond the narrow frame of wage labour to focus on different forms of livelihood activities in interdependence with other dimensions of a given actor's Lebenslage. A consideration of livelihood activities makes visible practices and "modalities of domination and dependence"[89] that are connected to but also move beyond work and labour. It thereby helps to reconnect the separate spheres of labour history, economic history, and social history. This includes historicizing other aspects such as the market, which, like work, should be understood as the "result of certain social and political relationships" rather than as an abstract category.[90]

and Explorations, ed. Marcel van der Linden (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 2010), 139–153, 153.

86 SEWA's Appeal submitted to the Minister of State (IC) for Labour and Employment & Union Minister of Finance for Helping Informal Sector Workers during COVID 19 crisis (23 March 2020), www.sewa.org/reports-appeal/, accessed 18 October 2022.

87 Komlosy, "Work and Labor Relations," 58.

88 Ibid., 51.

89 De Vito, Schiel, and van Rossum, "From Bondage to Precariousness?," 648–651.

90 Maria Aleksandrova, "Markets and their Agents in History: Some Theoretical Reflections," in *Markets and their Actors in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Tanja Skambraks, Julia Bruch, and Ulla Kypta (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 121–144, 135.

Lebenslage and livelihood activities are categories that can be applied to all contexts, regardless of time period, culture, or geographic space. To make comparisons across time and space fruitful, the next step involves developing specific concepts appropriate to the contexts, regions, or historical periods in question. This could enable a differentiation of conceptual terms historically as well as spatially without limiting the objects of study in advance to certain forms of labour. Working actors could then be typologized on the basis of what they live on and how they can shape their lives. Rather than labour relations and freedom, the vanishing point of such a perspective would be actors themselves, their livelihood activities and their Lebenslagen. In parallel, identifying forms of livelihood as part of Lebenslagen could precede the description and categorization of groups and individuals. In a further step, this could lead to the elaboration of social structure models that take into account interdependent dimensions of work as well as the agency of the historical actors. Unlike the open category of Lebenslage, such models of social structures would be more substantially influenced by their respective historical contexts and could thus be developed for specific periods or regions. Whether and to what extent one wants to speak respectively of class, social strata, or social situations, or whether one decides in favour of inclusive/exclusive models would then derive from the analysis of livelihood and Lebenslage.[91]

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91 Rainer Geißler, *Die Sozialstruktur Deutschlands*, 7th. ed. (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2014), chap. 5 gives an overview of different approaches.