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Global History of Agrarian Labor Regimes, 1750-2000. Charles S. Maier / Sven Beckert, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 25.04.2013-27.04.2013.

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Global History of Agrarian Labor Regimes, 1750-2000

During the past 250 years, agrarian labor regimes throughout much of the world have undergone radical changes, with an impact on billions of people. Not only has the majority of humanity lived in the countryside until very recently, but the two greatest transformations of modern times–the rise of capitalism and of nation-states–were deeply rooted in transformations in the countryside. To explore these often neglected histories, a truly global conference on the "Global History of Agrarian Labor Regimes," sponsored by the Weatherhead Initiative on Global History (WIGH) at Harvard University, took place in Cambridge, USA, from April 25 to 27, 2013. The aim of the conference was to discuss the connected histories of propertied farming, sharecropping, wage labor, slavery, cultures obligatoires, and other such forms of labor, and their connections to the spatial and social spread of capitalism.

As conference co-organizer SVEN BECKERT (Cambridge, USA) noted in his introduction, agrarian labor regimes deserve to be at the center of the study of modernity. Slaves belong next to proletarian wage workers, the sugar plantation in Mauritius next to the steel works in Bochum, and the coffee workers in Brazil next to the textile operatives in Osaka. More broadly, Beckert pointed out that the conference theme serves as an ideal starting point for a newly global conversation on history at large.

The first panel on "International Impulses and Agrarian Change" set the stage for the rest of the conference with theoretical overviews and illustrative case studies. PAUL ADAMS (Shippensburg) opened with a presentation on the relationship between labor and demographics in southern France and the Philippines through the long nineteenth century. Adams stressed the crucial role of population growth and the transportation revolution in shaping labor regimes in both regions. Next, ERIC VANHAUTE (Ghent) introduced a systematic blueprint to study agrarian labor regimes across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Among other things, Vanhaute foregrounded the crucial fact that peasants are still with us today and suggested that processes of peasantization and depeasantization should be at the center of research. Peasantries, he concluded, represented crucial non-territorial frontiers in the rise of global capitalism as they fed empires and their armies. RAFAEL DE BIVAR MARQUESE (São Paolo) then explored the abolition of slavery in the Americas and its impact on the reconfiguration of coffee cultivation in Brazil. Rising international coffee prices in the wake of the U.S. Civil War and the arrival of railroads and steamships, he showed, brought a renewed impetus to the Brazilian coffee economy as well as the internal slave trade until final abolition in 1888. As Brazilian slavery declined, economic changes in the Veneto in northern Italy pushed smallholders across the Atlantic to Brazil where they helped to replace freed slaves on coffee plantations. In the final presentation of the panel, MELTEM TOKSÖZ (Istanbul) traced the labor regimes that emerged around cotton cultivation in Anatolia under Ottoman rule. In line with revisionist scholarship on the economic vitality of the late Ottoman Empire, Toksöz argued that Cilician cotton production became highly integrated with world markets and attracted nomads as seasonal laborers.

The second day of the conference brought a series of panels ranging from slavery and contract labor to the role of gender in agriculture. In the first panel on "Slavery, Tenancy, and Resistance," STEVEN SERELS (Cambridge, USA) explored the transition from slave to free labor in Northern Sudan at the turn of the twentieth century. He argued that while constant food insecurity had initially reinvigorated agricultural slavery, famine ultimately led to the collapse of the slave system and to its substitution with other forms of dependent labor. In a closely related presentation, CHRISTOPHER CRAIG (New York) illuminated the role of famine in Japanese agriculture in the first decade of the twentieth century. In what he referred

to as 'hunger games,' Japanese landlords and administrators used the threat of starvation to force tenants into more coercive labor regimes. ADRIAN SMITH (Ottawa) concluded the panel with a presentation on the crucial role of the law in agrarian labor. In a sweeping socio-legal history of the present, Smith compared sugar production in the British Caribbean in the nineteenth century with migrant horticultural production in Canada in the mid- to late twentieth century and stressed the concept of 'exit' (as a legal pathway to freedom) as a common theme in both cases.

In the second panel, the discussion returned to agrarian labor regimes in Africa. OMAR GUEYE (Dakar) explored the myriad labor regimes in former French West Africa after the Second World War to the present. He argued that economic centers were structured around certain cash crops such as groundnuts in Senegal, rubber and banana in Guinea, cotton and sisal in Sudan, and coffee and cocoa in the Ivory Coast. Massive displacement, food insecurity, and poverty persisted into the postcolonial present, Gueye argued, turning many West African peasants into de facto second-class citizens. The second presentation by REMIJIUS F. OBINTA (Ile-Ife) focused on agrarian labor in Nigeria. Obinta argued that cash crops (such as cocoa) helped to integrate rural southwestern Nigeria into a global market and introduced new forms of land and labor regimes (such as leasing, sharecropping, and pawning). Land owners in Ife and Ibadan, Obinta concluded, defied political and economic pressures and held tenaciously to their communal notions about land.

The third panel on contract labor started with a presentation by LUIS PLASCENCIA (Phoenix) about contract labor regimes across Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Against the backdrop of current debates on comprehensive immigration reform in the United States, Plascencia sketched out the longer history of Mexican farm labor migration to the North, stressing the need to go beyond the widely analyzed bracero program during World War Two. Next, AMIT K. MISHRA (Hyderabad) situated the emigration of Indian contract laborers to Mauritius and Fiji within the larger expansion of the British commercial empire in the nineteenth century. He emphasized the racialized character of contract labor and the harsh discipline on sugar plantations on both islands. Despite this violent reality, Indian laborers, Mishra argued, used the weapons of the weak to resist wherever they could. In the panel's final presentation, AMITAVA CHOWDHURY (Kingston, Canada) picked up where Mishra had left off and compared post-emancipation labor regimes and identity-making by 'coolies' in the Indian Ocean and 'creoles' in the Caribbean. The emergence of Indian identities among contract laborers in both regions, Chowdhury argued, was the result of white racism, Indian caste and color prejudices, and the planters' need to segregate African slaves from Indian contract laborers.

The gendering of agrarian labor formed the theme of the last panel of the day. First, SUSIE JACOBS (Manchester) gave a conceptual overview of the relationship between agrarian labor and gender with case studies from Brazil and collectivization programs in the Soviet Union and China. Jacobs presented a forceful case for the inclusion of female labor in peasant households in the study of agrarian labor history and global history at large. Indeed, the gendered dynamics of agrarian labor had already been discussed at preceding panels, both implicitly and explicitly. In the second presentation, KEITH GRIFFLER (Buffalo) analyzed the gendered serfdom of South African women in the twentieth century. Following Jacobs's lead, Griffler as well argued for the central role of women in agriculture and encouraged researchers to devote more time to their study.

The third and last day of the conference was opened by a panel on commodity production in Asia. WILLEM VAN SCHENDEL (Amsterdam) compared indigo production in colonial India and Indonesia from the 1790s to the 1860s. Based on a conceptual framework developed by French comparative agricultural economists, van Schendel analyzed the rural agro-industrial production regimes in Bengal and Java and concluded that more coercion was needed in Bengal because indigo was not as profitable for local peasants in the region. The second presentation took the audience from indigo to tea in Asia. ANDREW LIU (New York) contrasted the tea trade in Assam and China by pointing to differences in plantation size and racialized representations of unfree coolies in India and parasitic compradors in China. Liu concluded that Chinese modernizers took India as a model for tea production at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The conference's closing panel on "Constructing Regions, Integrating Nations," included case studies of agricultural regions in Mexico, Argentina, and Iran. IVÁN SANDOVAL-CERVANTES (Eugene) started by investigating Zapotec subsistence agriculture in Oaxaca, Mexico, in the second half of the twentieth century. Local agriculture there is based on the milpa system (corn, beans, and squash) and characterized by multiple migration flows from villages to Oaxaca City, Mexico City, and across the border to California and Oregon. These migrations, Sandoval-Cervantes reasoned, intensified the importance of land as a security net for returning mi-

grants and as a support for global households. In the second presentation, JULIO DJENDEREDJIAN (Buenos Aires) looked at sugar production in the remote region of Jujuy in northern Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century. He argued that, in contrast to the globally integrated markets of Buenos Aires and the Pampas, Jujuy's geographical isolation made the cheap labor supply of local Indians essential. Not least due to difficult access to world markets, Jujuy's agricultural productivity remained low throughout the period. Finally, ERIC HOOGLUND (Lund) gave a sweeping historical overview of agriculture and agrarian labor in Iran. Among other things, he emphasized the local roots of agricultural production (particularly irrigation schemes) over state policies.

In the their concluding remarks, co-organizers CHARLES S. MAIER and SVEN BECKERT (both Cambridge, USA) reiterated the necessity of global approaches to the history of agrarian labor regimes as well as the centrality of agriculture to global history. Maier called for a more careful examination of the specific ways in which global capital entered local agricultural frontiers, while Beckert stressed the increasing role of the state in the transformation of the global countryside. In the lively discussion that ensued, participants debated definitions of labor (peasant, temporary/permanent, free/unfree) as well as the various dimensions of the global. What makes history global?- Its practioners, the themes investigated, the geographical distribution of case studies, or a combination of all? Some cautioned against the dilution of the nation and reminded the audience of the uneven processes of legal denationalization and economic globalization. Several issues remain to be addressed in the future: non-agricultural labor in the countryside, collective mobilization of peasants vis-à-vis the state, agrarian labor in the postcolonial era, and the role of intermediaries such as lawyers and surveyors. In the words of an attendee who gave a passionate plea for the public role of historians, the conference had not ended, but was merely adjourned.

Conference Overview

Session I: International Impulses and Agrarian Change:

Paul Adams, Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania: Labor Force Demographics in Commercializing Agriculture - France and the Philippines, 1800-1940

Eric Vanhaute, University of Ghent, Belgium: Into Their Labors: Peasant Frontiers in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Towards a Comparative and Global Perspective

Rafael de Bivar Marquese, University of São Paolo, Brazil: From Veneto to São Paulo: The Global Crisis of Slavery and the Reconfiguration of the Coffee World Market, c.1860-1900

Meltem Toksöz, Boğaziçi University, Turkey: Nomadism, Migration and Seasonal Labor: Ottoman Anatolian Cotton Production in the Age of Industrialization

Commentator: Gerald Steiner, Harvard University

Session II: Slavery, Tenancy, Resistance:

Steven Serels, CMES, Harvard University: Famine and the Transition from Slave Labor to Free Labor in Northern Nilotic Sudan, 1898-1930

Christopher Craig, Columbia University: Hunger Games: Landlords, Tenants, and the Evolution of Agricultural Policy in Japan, 1897-1910

Adrian Smith, Carleton University, Canada: Law, Resistance and Pathways of Exit from Agrarian Labor Regimes

Commentator: Alison Frank Johnson, Harvard University

Session III: Colonial Labor; Comparative Regimes

Omar Gueye, Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal: Unfree Labor, Unpaid Work, Low-paid Salaries and Poorest Citizens: Agrarian Labor World throughout French West Africa

Remijius Friday Obinta, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Land Tenure Practices, Cash-Crops Cultivation and Transformations in Agrarian Labor Regimes in the Countryside: A Case-Study of Rural South-Western Nigeria 1880-1990

Commentator: Cyrus Veeser, Bentley University

Session IV: Contract Labor across Borders

Luis Plascencia, Arizona State University: Continental Contract Labor Regimes: The Formation and Indispensability of Agricultural Contract Labor Across Canada, Mexico, and the United States, 1909 to 2000

Amit K. Mishra, University of Hyderabad, India: Subtexts of Servitude: Indentured Indian Labor Regime in British Plantation Colonies

Amitava Chowdhury, Queens University, Ontario: The "Coolie" and the "Creole": Post-emancipation Labor Regimes and Identarian Invocations in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean

Session V: Gendered Labor

Susie Jacobs, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK: Gendered Labor and Agrarian Reforms: An Overview

Keith Griffler, SUNY Buffalo: The Gendered Serfdom of African Women: The Colonial Agricultural Labor Regime and the Rise of Capitalism

Commentator: Hue-Tam Ho Tai, Harvard University

Session VI: Commodity Production Compared

Willem van Schendel, University of Amsterdam: Agrarian Labor? Contrasting Indigo Production in Colonial India and Indonesia

Andrew Liu, Columbia University: The Two Tea Countries: Agrarian Labor in Coastal China and Eastern India in the Nineteenth Century

Commentator: Sugata Bose, Harvard University

Session VII: Constructing Regions, Integrating Nations

Iván Sandoval-Cervantes, University of Oregon: Shaping Subsistence Agriculture: Politics, Religion, and the Rural/Urban Divide in an Indigenous village in Oaxaca, Mexico, 1940-2000.

Julio Djenderedjian and Gustavo Paz, University of Buenos Aires/Conicet: A National Market in Progress. Traditional and Modern Agrarian Labor Regimes in Argentina, 1860s-1930s

Eric Hooglund, Lund University, Sweden: Iran's Changing Agricultural Labor and Production Regimes

Commentator: Charles Maier, Harvard University

Wrap-up summaries

Sven Beckert and Charles Maier, Co-chairs of WIGH, Harvard University

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