
REVIEWS AND NOTES

GLOBAL COMMODITY CHAINS AND LABOR RELATIONS

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Review of Andrea Komlosy and Goran Musić (Eds.) *Global Commodity Chains and Labor Relations*. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2021. ISBN: 978-90-04-44804-9. Series: Studies in Global Social History, Volume 42.

The present volume, printed beautifully and with considerable care by the Dutch publishers Brill, is now the end-result of the conference ‘*Commodity Chains and Labour Relations*’ of the Conference of Labour and Social History (ITH), which took place between September 15, 2016 and September 17, 2016 in the old industrial city of Steyr in Austria. As Goran Musić, one of the editors of the present book, already highlighted in his Conference Report in *H/Soz/Kult* time ago, indeed the global commodity chain model has its origins in the world-systems perspective, where it was used to shed light on the mechanisms of unequal exchange, international division of labor and the synchronicity of different work regimes. Andrea Komlosy, one of the two editors of the present volume, argues all along that global labour history and global labor studies with their emphasis on topics such as unfree labor, subsistence work, precarization and informalization could serve as a source of inspiration for the understanding of commodity chains beyond business strategies.

The present volume thus focuses on the application of the commodity chain model to preindustrial settings, the role of commodity chains in the formation, reproduction and reversal of core, semi-periphery and periphery relations, the analysis of various actors involved in the functioning of these chains and the question of workers' agency.

Thus, the volume could be a welcome addition to the already existing literature on the subject, like ‘*Commodity Chains and Global Capitalism*’ by Gary Gereffi and Miguel Korzeniewicz (1994); ‘*From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500–2000*’ by Steven Topik, Carlos Marichal, and Zephyr L. Frank (2006); and ‘*Geographies of Commodity Chains*’ (Hughes and Reimer 2004).¹

The present book was finalized at the Department of Economic and Social History at the University of Vienna, Austria, a department which presents many promising research directions in the field.² In this academic environment, Andrea Komlosy, Associate Professor at the Department, is certainly no newcomer to world systems debates in the social sciences. Her already most widely received articles (often with co-authors, not mentioned here) include the essays for ‘*Review*’.³ Here the present reviewer mentions: *Capital Accumulation and Catching-up Development in Eastern Europe* (Hof-

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bauer and Komlosy 2000), *State, Regions, and Borders: Single Market Formation and Labor Migration in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1750–1918* (Komlosy 2004), *Centers and Peripheries Revisited: Polycentric Connections or Entangled Hierarchies?* (Kaps and Komlosy 2013), and *Transitions in Global Labor History, 1250–2010. Entanglements, Synchronicities, and Combinations on a Local and a Global Scale* (Komlosy 2013). For the *Socionauki* journals in Russia, too, she has already published in *Social Evolution and History* (the essay *Peripheralization and Catching up in Eastern Europe in Historical Perspective* [Komlosy and Hofbauer 2019]) and in the present journal (*Crises, Long Waves, and World-System Analysis* (Komlosy 2019)). As a book publisher, her *Work: The Last 1,000 Years* (Komlosy, Watson, and Balhorn 2018), has been already widely circulated at global libraries.⁴

The co-author of this collective volume is Dr. Goran Musić, who is a social historian of labor in East-Central and Southeast Europe, now associated with Vienna University. With Komlosy, he shares the Global History approach. Some of his most well-known articles,⁵ published so far, include *'Approaching the Socialist Factory and its Workforce: Considerations from Fieldwork in (former) Yugoslavia'* (Archer and Musić 2017) and *'Between Facebook and the Picket Line: Street Protests, Labour Strikes and the New Left in the Balkans'* (Musić 2013). His book *'Making and Breaking the Yugoslav Working Class: The Story of Two Self-Managed Factories'* (Musić 2021), too, already has achieved a notable global library circulation.⁶

Certainly, a collective volume is always the attempt to bring together certain and very diverse approaches. For the present reviewer, who is not a historian but a political scientist by profession, the following Chapters are of particular interest:

- Theorizing Commodity Chains, Labor Relations and Upgrading (Andrea Komlosy and Goran Musić);
- Global Commodity Chains and Labor Relations in Textiles and Garments from the 17th to the 21st Century (Andrea Komlosy);
- Soy Expansions. China, the USA and Brazil in Comparison (Ernst Langthaler);
- Who's Upgrading? Class Differentiation and Labor Relations in Argentinian Agribusiness (Christin Bernhold);
- Labor as a Bottleneck. Entangled Commodity Chains of Sugar in Hawaii and California in the Late Nineteenth Century (Uwe Spiekermann);
- Outward Processing Production and the Yugoslav Self-Managed Textile Industry in the 1980s (Goran Musić);
- Uneven Development in the European Automotive Industry. Labor Fragmentation and Value-Added Production in the Hungarian Semi-periphery (Tamás Geröcs, Tibor T. Meszmann, and András Pinkasz);
- Transnational Solidarity Networks between Workers and Global Production Networks (Jörg Nowak);
- Corporate Social Responsibility in the Global Cocoa Chocolate Chain. Insights from Sustainability Certification in Ghana's Cocoa Communities (Franziska Ollendorf);
- On the (Re)Production of Informal Work in Argentina's Auto Industry (Stefan Schmalz and Johanna Sittel) have the potential to lead to further research in political science and offered valuable insights into the structures of global capitalism.

Indeed, then, and due to the increasing linkage of global production sites, the concept of commodity chains has become indispensable for the investigation of production

at a global scale. So, in the final analysis, the volume is indeed 392 pages worthwhile reading, but still it is to be hoped that a real conclusion by the editors at the end will accompany a second, paperback edition.

NOTES

¹ Result of a bibliometric analysis, based on Open Syllabus, <https://opensyllabus.org/results-list/titles?size=50&findWorks=commodity%20chains>.

² <https://wirtschaftsgeschichte.univie.ac.at/en/>.

³ Bibliometric analysis, based on Scopus.

⁴ Bibliometric analysis, based on OCLC Classify, OCLC Worldcat.

⁵ Bibliometric analysis, based on Scopus.

⁶ Bibliometric analysis, based on OCLC Classify, OCLC Worldcat.

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