



ISHA NEWSLETTER

International Social History Association

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The Politics of History: A Global family Story¹

by
Catherine Hall



First – let me thank the History of the Ruhr Foundation, the City of Bochum, Ruhr University Bochum, and the Foundation for the Support of Culture and Science of Sparkasse Bochum for awarding me with this distinguished prize. It is a great honour. I am especially proud to be the first woman to receive the prize, preceded as I am by a line of eminent historians. I am deeply appreciative. May I thank you also for this evening, and for the generous hospitality I have enjoyed that has been organised by the Institute, particularly the visits to sites in the Ruhr, with all the evidence of industrialization and de-industrialization, of wealth making and economic and social change.

Those sites of industrial heritage are evidence of the deep interest in public history in Germany and I would like to focus my talk this evening on questions of public history and memory in the UK – which are as contested in my country as in yours. Hence the first part of my title – the politics of history – national histories are always a matter of political debate and concern and Britain has had intensive ‘history wars’ over the last decades. The arguments over history teaching in schools and universities, over the ways in which history is represented in the great national museums and galleries, not to speak of cinema and TV and popular histories, have ebbed and flowed over the last decades, responsive to shifts in political mood and contemporary concerns, interventions from governments alongside pressing claims from different constituencies who feel unrepresented. While in Germany key debates have raged over histories of fascism and the Holocaust, in Britain the most controversial are-

¹ Acceptance speech by *Catherine Hall* for the sixth Bochum Historians' Prize at the House of the History of the Ruhr, Bochum, November 15, 2017.

na has been the history of Britain's empire and its legacies. I gather this is a growing concern here too – with the major exhibition on colonialism at the German Historical Museum perhaps signalling an increasing preoccupation with this partially forgotten history. It is vital that these issues are addressed; they surface if not dealt with, erupting in unexpected ways, the evidence of repressed guilt and shame. The need to recognise harms done and take responsibility has a political urgency in Britain in the context of claims being made for reparations for slavery (Ppt 1: Penrhyn Castle).

Let me open with this image of Penrhyn Castle – a massive 'Norman' construction in North Wales, in the heart of Snowdonia, built in the early nineteenth-century and now owned by the National Trust. It receives many visitors. What stories are told about this building – what is remembered and what has been forgotten here? Who built this castle, where did the money come from, what histories can be illuminated here? What kind of site of memory is this?

You will be familiar with Renan's famous dictum that national histories always require forgetting. The version of national history that has dominated in Britain since the nineteenth century has been a story of progress – an 'island story', that has paid scant attention to Britain's role in empire except as a sign of its gift of 'civilisation' to benighted 'others'. The focus has been on what is sometimes described as 'the golden thread of liberty' – the narrative of improvement and an expanding polity, from the days of Magna Carta, through the Great Reform Act of 1832 which granted middle-class men the franchise, and on into the twentieth century. In this narrative Britain's involvement in slavery has been remembered through the story of abolition – that Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807 and slavery in the British Caribbean, Mauritius and the Cape of Good Hope in 1833. Britain's glorious role is celebrated as connected with the granting of liberty to others. Such a history occluded Britain's involvement in slavery over centuries, whether that of the crown, the state, or individuals.

Debates have been taking place since the 1980s over the place of empire in British history. Pressing demands for new labour in the post-war period brought large numbers of Caribbean and South Asian migrants, British subjects, into the industrial cities of England & Scotland. Their children, the second generation, faced with systematic discrimination on the grounds of 'race', raised urgent questions in the 1980s and 90s on their status – did they belong in Britain, was it possible to be black and British? Was British identity one which could only be enjoyed by those who were white? The politics that erupted around questions of 'race' in the late twentieth century raised new questions for historians about the interconnected histories of metropole and colonies, and about the impact of empire on Britain. It had always been understood that Britain had a profound influence on its colonies – but what about the impact of those colonies on the homeland? What were the legacies of those centuries of imperial power?

My first preoccupation as a feminist historian was with gendering history, grasping the connections between gender and class, exploring how class was gendered and gender classed, investigating gender as an axis of power and of historical change. It was not enough to put women back into history, rather it was important to understand how the relations between men and women were key to the organisation of the economic, social and political world.² In the 1980s my concerns shifted to the question of 'race' and the ways its presence and significance had been disavowed and denied in British history. I turned first to an exploration of the forgotten historical connections between England and Jamaica in the post-emancipation period and investigated the impact of colonialism on English identities.³

In 2007 there was a powerful incentive to turn my attention to slavery. The bi-centenary of the abolition of the slave trade provoked a year of intensive conversation – in schools and

² Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes, Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780 – 1850*, Routledge: London, 1987.

³ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830 – 1867*, Polity: Cambridge, 2002.

universities, in museums and galleries, in the media, and in innumerable community groups right across the country - as to the meanings of that abolition. Was it something to celebrate that Britain abolished the trade in 1807 but did not abolish slavery until 1833? Why did Prime Minister Blair refuse to apologise? Did we need to think more about the slavery business and its legacies in Britain? What were the connections between Britain's imperial past and its present?

In 2009 these debates were the context for a project at University College London to explore British involvement in slavery through research on the slave-owners and the compensation they received when slavery was abolished. £20 million (approximately 16.6 billion in today's money using 'labour value' or average wages) was paid to the owners, in compensation for the loss of 'their' human property. This was the largest bail out made by the British state until the financial crisis of 2008. We have documented the 47,000 men and women who received this compensation and done biographical work on those (c3,500) who lived in Britain; following the money through their financial and commercial connections, exploring their social, cultural and political activities, and their impact on the physical environment. All this information is on our database (www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs) and has been widely used in Britain, the Caribbean, the US and beyond.⁴ Since 2012 the second phase of our research has focused on the structure and significance of British slave-ownership in the Caribbean, investigating the importance of slave-ownership to Britain's global wealth and power. Much new material has been added to the database (Ppt 2: Home page of our database www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs).

So let me focus on one family, the Pennants, who received significant compensation and follow their activities over four generations.⁵ I will draw attention to the ways in which colonial wealth contributed to the expansion of British power and the importance of the white colonial family in this process.

The Pennant family came from Wales. In 1655 Cromwell sent an expedition to the New World, hoping to challenge the Spanish empire. The attempt to seize Hispaniola was a dismal failure but troops landed successfully in Jamaica, which was much less defended. A war followed, to defeat the Spanish and drive them from the island. Gifford Pennant was a captain of horse in the army and received land in Clarendon, in the centre of the island (Ppts 3 & 4: Jamaica & Clarendon).

His son Edward Pennant extended the family estates. This was a time when plantation society was becoming firmly established, dependent on the labour of enslaved Africans and producing sugar and rum. Establishing a clear legal and political division between 'Whites', those who were free, and 'Negroes', fit only to labour and to serve, was key to the organisation of this slave society. At his death in 1736 Edward Pennant owned 610 enslaved Africans and was one of the largest slave-owners on the island. There was an ever-increasing demand for sugar and Jamaica was known as a place for white settlers to make a fortune.

Pennant divided his estate between his three sons, Samuel, Henry and John. All three were rich enough to leave Jamaica and establish themselves in England. They became absentees, their wealth partially derived from their plantation property. Samuel became a very suc-

⁴ In addition to the database there is a book in which we published our major findings. Catherine Hall, Nicholas Draper, Keith McClelland, Katie Donington & Rachel Lang, *Legacies of British Slave Ownership, Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2014

⁵ I have drawn on a variety of sources: 'Penrhyn Castle', The National Trust, 2009; Trevor Burnard, 'From periphery to periphery: the Pennants' Jamaican plantations and industrialisation in North Wales, 1771 – 1812', in (ed) H. V. Bowen, *Wales and the British Overseas Empire, Interactions and Influences 1650 – 1830*, Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2011; Chris Evans, *Slave Wales: the Welsh and Atlantic Slavery 1660 – 1850*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2010; Alistair Hennessy, 'Penrhyn Castle' *History Today*, Vol. 45, No. 1, January 1995; Jean Lindsay, 'The Pennants and Jamaica, 1665 – 1800', I and II, *Trans. Caernarvonshire Historical Society*, 1982 and 1983; Jean Lindsay, 'Pennant, Richard, Baron Penrhyn (c. 1737 – 1808)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; 'Pennant, Richard, (?1736-1808), of Penrhyn Hall, Carnarvon and Winnington, Cheshire' in *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1754 – 1790*, ed. L. Namier and J. Brooke, Boydell and Brewer, 1964.

successful merchant in London dealing with West Indian commodities. He and his brother Henry both died without heirs and left their property to John's son Richard. John had married the daughter of a Jamaican slave-owner, Bonella Hodges, and became a prosperous merchant with interests in Liverpool. Questions of marriage and inheritance were crucial for these colonists (Ppt 5: Richard Pennant, 1739-1808).

Richard Pennant (1739-1808) greatly expanded the family fortunes. He married an heiress, Anne Susanna Warburton, who had inherited land on the Penrhyn estate in Wales. This was a vital factor in expanding his power and influence. He was gradually able to acquire the whole Penrhyn estate. Through his West Indian connections he gained a seat in Parliament and was very vocal in defence of slaving interests. His wife's grandfather was an MP for Liverpool. This assisted him in becoming a member of parliament for the town, a place which owed its wealth to the slave trade and supporting businesses. He spoke 30 times in the House of Commons and was a vocal defender of the slave trade which was beginning to come under attack by the 1770s.

By the 1770s the Pennants had 5 estates in Jamaica and owned more than 1,000 enslaved men and women. From the evidence of Richard Pennant's marriage settlement we know the properties had been averaging £6,500 (£10.4 million in today's money) per annum over 10 years, making him a very rich man.

He used the wealth of his Jamaican plantations to develop his Penrhyn estate. There were 3 sugar plantations (Denbigh, Thomas River, and Kupius), and 2 pens for breeding cattle and growing provisions. Sugar plantations are known as 'factories in the field', for they combined farming with manufacturing processes. Conditions of work were extremely harsh, with violence, coercion and terror at the heart of the plantation economy. A major revolt of the enslaved in 1760, which spread across the island, was met with brutal repression. Fear governed the planter class, living as they did in a society where they were totally outnumbered. Enslaved women did the majority of the field work, enslaved men worked in the mills and boiling houses, drove cattle and acted as drivers of the gangs, under the supervision of white men. Mortality rates were exceedingly high and in the eighteenth-century planters had little interest in fostering the reproduction of their enslaved labour force, relying on buying 'new blood' from Africa (Ppt 6: Denbigh on LBS map; Ppt 7: Denbigh estate evolutions; Ppt 8: Cotes Pen on map; Ppt 9: Cotes Pen evolutions).

Richard Pennant invested in agricultural improvements on the plantations, hoping to increase profits. He sent out ploughs, mechanics and carpenters. He was also concerned with his Penrhyn estate. This was the time of the development of agrarian capitalism bringing the enclosure of common lands and new styles of farming involving drainage, manure, and crop rotation. Peasants were being transformed into waged agricultural labourers. He also used his colonial money to invest in slate mining. North Wales was rich in slate and slate was much in demand – it had been quarried on a small scale by independent workers – Pennant called in all the leases and took control of the quarry. Hundreds of quarrymen were employed to create a gigantic new quarry.

He built new roads, and a new port at Bangor from which the slates could be exported all over the world. The Industrial Revolution may have been founded on textiles and guns and powered by steam, but it was roofed by slates.⁶ He also encouraged tourism to Wales – its wild scenery was beloved by the Romantics.

By the 1790s the quarry was employing 400 men. At this time an average textile factory might be employing 80-100 men, women and children. By 1830s there were 900. The conditions of the slate workers were very hard; slate had to be prised off the rock, with men dangling on ropes over precipitous drops. The dust was extremely damaging to health, their homes were simple, their food barely adequate. Tea with sugar, both imperial products, pro-

⁶ R. Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales Quarryman, 1874 – 1922*, University of Wales Press: Cardiff, 1981. A. H. Dodd, *The Industrial Revolution in North Wales*, University of Wales Press: Cardiff, 1971.

vided one of the vital means of survival for these new waged labourers. The Welsh slate-quarrier became the archetypal figure of Welsh industrialisation. The men were Welsh speakers, while the managers were English. Sidney Mintz argues ‘Slave and proletarian together powered the imperial economic system’.⁷

Richard Pennant died in 1808. He had been created Baron Penrhyn.

A cousin’s son, George Hay Dawkins, inherited the estate and added Pennant to his name. His great interest seems to have been in spending the money that his cousin had amassed, in particular building an enormous castle, an expression of power over the surrounding countryside (Ppt 10: Penrhyn Castle – Menai Straits; Ppt 11: Penrhyn Castle).

In this huge edifice, replete with a keep, arrow slits and ramparts, built to suggest long lineage, the only traces of Jamaica are 2 water colours of the estates and some picturesque images, hidden away on a back corridor. Slavery has no presence in these representations.

Dawkins-Pennant was a Tory MP, strongly opposed to emancipation and to parliamentary reform (Ppt 12: Dawkins-Pennant claims).

Much of the money he received (£14,500 – 12.06 million in today’s money) in compensation for the 764 enslaved men and women that he ‘owned’ at the time of abolition went into the building. The Pennant family kept the estates in Jamaica until the 1940s.

The sequel (Ppt 13: Bethesda Monument)

The Pennants were very hard employers. In the 1890s the quarrymen were struggling with Baron Penrhyn over skilled labour, sub-contracting and a demand for a minimum wage. There was a lockout for over a year in 1896. Then in 1900 Penrhyn refused to permit union dues to be collected. Again there was a lockout- this time it lasted for 3 years – a third of the labour force of 4,000 men were forced to migrate to the coal mines of South Wales. There is a monument to this struggle in the small town of Bethesda, next to the quarry.



Penrhyn Castle (Photo by Mark Harvey)

⁷ Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power. The place of Sugar in Modern History*, Viking: New York, 1985, p. 184.

Conclusion

The fortunes of the Pennant family remind us of the global nature of eighteenth and nineteenth century capitalism – its roots in colonial slavery as well as agrarian and industrial capital. It points attention to the linked histories of enslaved Africans, Welsh slate miners and agricultural labourers – to the significance of ‘otherness’ to patterns of exploitation - Africans were racialized, the Welsh denied their language. It also reminds us of the importance of family, of gender, marriage and inheritance.

Penrhyn Castle could act as a site of memory in ways that would help Britons today to grasp the interconnected histories of colonial slavery and industrial capitalism. Efforts are now being made to bring these stories into the open – we need to open our eyes to the history which is all around us.

Let me end with James Baldwin: ‘The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do’.

Laudatio for Prof. Catherine Hall¹

by
Benedikt Stuchtey



She should have actually been a Medievalist, writes Catherine Hall in her autobiographical essay for the recently published *How Empire Shaped Us* (Antoinette Burton and Dane Kennedy, eds., 2016). As she began her studies in Birmingham in 1964, Rodney Hilton was teaching there, one of the most well-known members of the legendary Communist Party Historians group, alongside Christopher Hill and Eric Hobsbawm. Yet, the history of feudalism and the English peasantry during the High Middle Ages ultimately captivated her less than participation in the political engagement of her generation. As a contemporary witness to Enoch Powell’s infamous racism- and chauvinism-stoking speech *Rivers of Blood* in April 1968, Catherine Hall was able to recognize earlier than most that British history and contemporary events were rooted and intertwined in the colonial past.

As the Empire made rapid steps towards decolonisation, signs of former colonial rule were evident in daily life across the world, and less in Great Britain itself. Whether it was the Vietnam War or South Africa’s Apartheid politics, the Cuban Crisis or in Palestine, The Troubles in Northern Ireland or the massacres during the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, or simply the xenophobia and racism that faced immigrants from Central America, Africa and Asia in Great Britain or other European countries – it was clear to see that the colonial past had left its mark across space and time. It was in this period while living in Jamaica with her husband, the highly regarded sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall that convinced Catherine Hall history is best understood through the categories of *race*, *class*, and *gender*. Until today, these remain the cornerstones of her work and present Hall as a Marxist-socialized, but predominantly feminist intellectual that is known as an unmatched expert on the history of British colonial expansion. After all, the Empire is an excellent backdrop for the examination of fundamental methodological and theoretical questions for the historical sciences and contemporary analysis.

¹ Laudatio delivered for Catherine Hall’s receipt of the Bochum Historians’ Prize at the House of the History of the Ruhr, Bochum, November 15, 2017.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the same period when Hall had a shaping influence on the *Feminist Review* and her seminal, socio-historical books on the middle classes - *Family Fortunes* (1987, with Leonore Davidoff) and *White, Male and Middle-Class* (1992) - were published, it was Thatcherism and its aftermath that refused to acknowledge either the burning social problems or racial discrimination as pertinent issues, let alone recognize the relationship between the two. Yet, with pointed clarity and admirable knowledge of detail, Hall challenged this by demonstrating that class-identity, gender relations and ethnic thought patterns (*ethnische Denkmuster*) were intimately interrelated and part of the question of belonging to an imagined nation. It is no exaggeration to state that these books were groundbreaking for the establishment of feminist perspectives, while also fundamentally altering the research of social history, by both men and women.

And all of this in politically turbulent times. After all, if anything of Margaret Thatcher is remembered, it is her abolition of the welfare state, the gradual erosion of solidarity and polarisation of social life, the unshackling of capitalism and the domination of the London finance sector, the revitalisation of imperial claims during the Falklands War, and of course the relentless – bordering on hysterical - anti-European rhetoric. Tirelessly, Catherine Hall worked against this, stressing that the badly needed solution to the gender problem couldn't be found without addressing issues of discrimination based on social status or skin colour. An intimate knowledge of the development of the British Empire, of the interrelations between the colonial 'periphery' and the metropolitan 'centre', mixed with the actuality of its shrinking to a few remaining pieces in this period equipped the historian (Catherine) with the tools to establish herself as a political and public intellectual with an unmistakable voice.

To the list, one might even be tempted to add her unique and individual writing style that makes each of her thoroughly composed books a literary treat. It is the style of the English essay that Catherine Hall transforms through in extensive scholarly works with a sublime balance of distanced scholarship and personal touch. In fact, it is both her extraordinary life as well as the accomplishments of her academic career that belong together, and for which she is receiving this year's Bochum Historians' Prize. Nowhere is this more evident than in her groundbreaking study from 2002, *Civilising Subjects. Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1820-1867*. At its heart, a work on the web of colonial relations between England and Jamaica, which was based on slavery, exploitation, political suppression and profit-seeking, but into which forces, such as globally active missionaries, were also interwoven. At the same time, the book is about two places that share the same name: the town of Kettering in central English Northamptonshire, and a village called Kettering on Jamaica's northern coast.

Born in the former as the daughter of a nonconformist pastor, Hall was impressed by the Baptist congregation's significant influence in the civilizing mission on the Caribbean island. As the mission aimed to establish a global and lasting Christendom, rather than be content with the temporary and limited state of the Empire, it reflected anything but an uncomplicated form of colonial rule. This division soon became evident in the English public over the Anti-Slavery movement, with a minority of radical advocates and anti-racist *avant la lettre* on the one hand, and the clear majority in support of a patriarchal "white", English-nationalist feeling of superiority on the other. Ultimately, however, the civilising mission aimed at nothing more than the implementation of free-trade capitalism. As a result, the early Victorian Empire emerges as a highly differentiated space, but also as increasingly coalesced in political-moral issues and economic interest, which can't be considered without the metropole, but also well beyond it. It is through this that Hall's argumentation and empirically rich tools demonstrate the excellent way this topic can be debated.

It was in the social divisions that arose from the large number of immigrants from the Caribbean since the 1950s, in cities such as Birmingham that Hall found her case studies. These were cities that had considered themselves early proponents of political reform and abolition at the beginning of the 19th Century but had become increasingly divided. Hall used this to

demonstrate the need to rethink the spatial relationship between the alleged colonial ‘periphery’ and metropolitan ‘centre’ from a historical-theoretical perspective, making it a decentred and fruitful analytical framework. This occurred alongside the works of Anna Laura Stoler, Frederick Cooper, Homi Bhabha and others, who helped birth the *New Imperial History*, the solid foundation that contemporary Empire Studies builds off of. It was not only the readjusting of fields of reference across the imperial map, nor the overcoming of the simplistic, binary understanding of hegemonial entities that this new area opened. It was the insistent, historical realization of the political reality that the history of Great Britain, even of Europe, could not be understood in the past nor the present without the inclusion of its colonial expansion; be this slavery, forced migration or colonial wars. Furthermore, it showed that the histories of the individual empires and their colonies were constructive in the development of national histories across Europe.

These were the questions that Catherine Hall considered in her internationally recognized works, such as *At Home with the Empire* (2006, Ed. With Sonya Rose) and her fascinating double portrait of the influential and widely-circulated Victorian liberal historian Thomas B. Macaulay and his father Zachary, an abolitionist (*Macaulay and Son*, 2012). Here, as in her other works, Hall continued her use of a familial perspective. The liberal Whig-Historians, of which Macaulay certainly remains the most prominent, had, at least according to leading opinion, little interest in the colonial side of national history. Yet, Hall convincingly shows her audience that that was far from the truth. Even in the recent and successful European research project, *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership* (2014), the connection between nation and empire is brought to the forefront. The project, carried over into public light by a BBC series, showed the impact of the indescribable wealth of former slave-owners and made clear to the extent that abolitionism was not only an issue of political morality but also of financial compensation – for women and men alike, whose institutional and familial descendants continue to profit from it and the roots of which can be traced to this day across the United Kingdom.

Like a red thread, precise and revisionist research into the hierarchical relations between the colonized and the colonizing, the tension between imperial rule and freedom, as well as a resolved scrutiny of the linguistic utilisation of historical portrayals runs through Hall’s work. It was Edward Said’s classic *Orientalism* (1978) that taught us, it is mental control and cultural hegemony, ala a civilising mission that concentrates and makes an imperial power long lasting. And while Said’s criticism of a hidden agenda promoting western superiority is not without its own critics, it is, nevertheless, worth thinking about how much effort has actually been put into overcoming the stereotypical presentation of ‘others’ and whether ‘Othering’ isn’t timeless in a certain sense. This is also a challenge to examine apparent identity formation as hidden power relations and to openly confront, in the colonial as in the postcolonial moment, those ethnic and other classifications that influence us, in order to overcome them. For this, Hall’s primary subject of enquiry, Victorian England and her Empire, is excellently suited to this challenge as an epoch that was decisive in shaping terms such as ‘Englishness’, ‘whiteness’ and others.

From her touching portrait of Edward Said, drawn up one year after his death for the *History Workshop Journal* (2004), it is clear to see the significance Catherine Hall gives to the symbiosis of research, teaching, and active political participation of a ‘public intellectual’. And it is this that she carries as a historian in her intellectual backpack, a central political message shaped by her own personal experience, first at the University of East London, later in Essex, and since 1998 at University College London. In these difficult times of “Brexit” and the rise of anti-democratic attitudes across Europe, it is the non-European perspective that teaches/reminds us that today’s Europe, including Great Britain, owes much of its material security and diversity to the history of its colonial expansion and immigration from all over the world. In many ways, Europe was *also* constructed beyond its geographical borders. But what repercussion this will have for Europe’s understanding of itself – of which the British

play an important part – remains to be seen. Those who study Hall’s analyses, which is informed by a deep ethical responsibility, will quickly learn how relevant and partially unresolved problems of the 19th century and aspects of imperial rule remain to this day.

And as of yet, there is no reason to regard Said’s, Frantz Fanon’s or other’s plea for a deeper examination of the social and cultural dimensions of European history of expansion as obsolete. There is, however, all the more reason to firmly fix colonial, imperial, and global history – undoubtedly among the most attractive today – in both schools and university. Without a doubt, all of these points will have been of great value to the sponsors of the Bochum Historian’s Prize in conferring it to Catherine Hall, for her highly innovated theoretically and methodologically work, immensely inspiring in her scholarliness, criticalness and her internationally influential body of research. She is a person who not only exemplifies the award but one who gives more meaning to its importance, and for whom we are very grateful to have.

Walking Fish: How Conservative Behaviour Generates and Processes Radical Change¹

by
Marcel van der Linden



Ladies and gentlemen,

My inspiration for today’s lecture is a well-known quotation from the philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). Shortly before he died, Benjamin wrote:

“Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite otherwise. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train – namely, the human race – to activate the emergency brake.”²

The message from Benjamin may seem somewhat paradoxical: revolutions might be attempts to force a standstill. I aim to argue that Benjamin’s statement conceals a deeper logic. I will substantiate my assertion by taking you back to prehistory. Unlikely thought it may seem, palaeontology – the study of early life forms and fossils – may offer the answers we seek.

If I mention crossopterygians, most of you probably do not know what I mean. Crossopterygians are a group of primitive, lobe-finned, bony fishes.

They first appeared on Earth about 416 million years ago, at the beginning of the Devonian Period, and became extinct a long time ago, except for two or perhaps three species of so-called Coelacanths or *Latimeria*. For many years the Coelacanths were believed to be extinct as well, until in 1938 the trawler Captain Hendrick Goosen caught a live specimen near the South African coast.

Since this first discovery, almost 200 coelacanths have been found in the Comoros, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, Indonesia, and of course South Africa. They live at depths of 150 to 200 meters and cannot survive on the surface. But they have been filmed

¹ Valedictory lecture given at the University of Amsterdam, October 27, 2017.

² “Paralipomena to ‘On the Concept of History’”, in: Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*. Vol. 4, 1938-1940. Edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 401-411, at 402.

under water. They use their fins strangely, paddling with them alternately, *as if they are walking*.

Crossopterygians are considered to be the ancestors of all amphibians and other vertebrate animals living on land. By the 1930s the famous palaeontologist Alfred Sherwood Romer (1894-1973) argued that crossopterygians were the historical bridge between fish in the sea and vertebrate animals on land. Romer wondered why amphibians and other animals previously living under the sea had moved to the land. Why should fish have become amphibians, and why had they developed limbs and become land dwellers? “Not to breathe air, for that could be done by merely coming to the surface of the pool. Not because they were driven out in search of food, for they were fish-eating types for which there was little food to be had on land. Not to escape enemies, for they were among the largest animals of the streams and pools of that day.” No, Romer found a different and more convincing reason:

“The development of limbs and the consequent ability to live on land seems, paradoxically, to have been an adaptation for remaining in the water, and true land life seems to have been, so to speak, only the result of a happy accident.” If the water dried up and did not soon return, the fish were helpless and had to die. But if they became amphibian and developed land limbs, they could crawl out of the shrunken pool, walk up or down the stream bed or over land and reach another pool where they might resume their aquatic existence. “Land limbs were developed to reach the water, not to leave it.”³

Romer’s explanation was a kind of Copernican revolution in palaeontology. The astronomer Copernicus once demonstrated that the sun did not revolve around the earth, but, conversely, that the earth revolved around the sun. Romer used a similar rationale to reverse our mindset. In addition to explaining convincingly why fish had left the water, he argued that this radical transformation had been inspired by a conservative impulse. *Change had been caused by the attempt to resist it*.

In 1964 the anthropologists Charles Hockett and Robert Ascher rediscovered this idea and called it *Romer’s Rule*: innovations may render possible “the maintenance of a traditional way of life in the face of changed circumstances.”⁴ Soon, the rule was applied to human societies. For example, Conrad Kottak, another anthropologist, held that people “usually wish to *change just enough to maintain what they have*. Although people do want certain changes, their motives to modify their behaviour derive from their traditional culture and minor concerns of everyday existence.”⁵ Unlike intellectuals, planners, or strategic thinkers, most people are driven not by abstract motives (such as “revolution” or “innovation”) but by conservative desires. On aggregate, most people seek to avoid serious risks and try to suffice, to make do.⁶

Romer’s Rule in history

Careful observers will notice countless examples of Romer’s Rule in social and economic history. The voyages of discovery by Columbus, Da Gama, and others, for example, were responses to the reduced access to the Levant. As a consequence of the rising influence of Is-

³ Alfred Sherwood Romer, *Man and the Vertebrates* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1933), pp. 52-53.

⁴ Charles F. Hockett and Robert Ascher, “The Human Revolution”, *Current Anthropology*, 50 (1964), pp. 135-168, at 137.

⁵ Conrad Phillip Kottak, “Culture and `Economic Development””, *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 92, 3 (September 1990), 723-731, at 724.

⁶ Eric Rothstein, “Broaching a Cultural Logic of Modernity”, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 61: 2 (June 2000), 359-394, at 367. Rothstein also quotes the psychologist Stephen Kaplan: “selection pressures in early humans favored acquiring new information about one’s environment while not straying too far from the known”. Stephen Kaplan, “Environmental Preference in a Knowledge-Seeking, Knowledge-Using Organism”, in: Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Cosmides and John Tooby (eds), *The Adapted Mind. Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 585.

lamic power in the Middle East and North Africa, trade routes over land to Asia were blocked. They tried sailing around Africa or searching for a Western route to Asia in the hope of finding different ways of reaching India. They resorted to new means in the hope of restoring the old situation.

Romer's Rule surfaces continually in the history of social movements as well. E.P. Thompson, possibly the most important founder of modern labour history and author of the renowned work *The Making of the English Working Class* from 1963, concluded that in eighteenth-century England "a rebellious traditional culture" prevailed among the lower classes: resistance to the advancing capitalist economy, which the plebeian masses perceived as "exploitation, or the expropriation of customary use-rights, or the violent disruption of valued patterns of work and leisure." Accordingly, plebeian culture was rebellious, but "rebellious in defence of custom."⁷ Such observations have also been made with respect to other European countries in this era.⁸

George Rudé, who was a contemporary of Thompson and in my view the greatest historian of riots and popular protest in Britain and France, made a similar argument. He believed that rebellious peasants and artisans "tended to prefer the 'devil they knew' to the one they did not." They wanted "to be 'backward' rather than 'forward'-looking, in the sense that they were more inclined to demand the restoration of rights that were lost or were threatened with expropriation than change or reform?"⁹ In *Captain Swing*, a study Rudé published in 1969 with Eric Hobsbawm about violent uprisings by agricultural workers in Southeast England in 1830, the authors submit that "the labourers and their sympathizers did not normally want a disruption of the old society, but a restoration of their rights within it."¹⁰ People rebelled, because they hoped to block disconcerting innovations.

Romer's Rule also sheds a different light on later developments. As a witness for the defence, I call upon the historian, sociologist, and criminologist Frank Tannenbaum (1893-1969).

Tannenbaum had an intriguing life course. He was born in the Habsburg Empire and emigrated to the United States when he was about twelve. There he became very active for the new radical trade union the Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW). Charged with instigating a riot, Tannenbaum was sentenced to a year's imprisonment in 1914. Following his release, Tannenbaum immediately reconnected with the IWW. All the same, he seized the opportunity he was offered by a philanthropist to study at a university, completed his PhD, and even went on to become a professor at prestigious Columbia University. Tannenbaum therefore knew from personal experience what a radical and even a revolutionary trade union was. But this same experience also led him to a remarkably idiosyncratic interpretation.

His book *A Philosophy of Labor* starts with the provocative sentence: "Trade unionism is the conservative movement of our time. It is the counterrevolution." Conceivably, Tannen-

⁷ E.P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?" *Social History*, 3, 2 (May 1978), pp. 133-165, at 154.

⁸ "Es könnte der Eindruck entstehen, daß die Bauern gegen den historischen Fortschritt ankämpften, wenn sie sich gegen das Bauernlegen und die steigende Ausbeutung im Zusammenhang mit der Entwicklung der Produktion für den großen Markt zur Wehr setzten. Bekanntlich forderten sie in ihren Kämpfen mit den Gutsherren meist die Rückkehr zu alten Zuständen und die Wiederherstellung alter Rechte. Aber indem sie für eine Verringerung der Lasten, für die Befreiung von den Frondiensten, für die Aufhebung der Leibeigenschaft, für ein besseres Besitzrecht kämpften, erschütterten sie die Grundlagen des Feudalismus. Sie bekämpften damit die ökonomische und politische Vorherrschaft des Adels gegenüber dem Bürgertum. Sie traten damit ein für einen anderen Weg der Entwicklung des Kapitalismus in der Landwirtschaft [...]." Johannes Nichtweiss, *Das Bauernlegen in Mecklenburg. Eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte der Bauernschaft und der zweiten Leibeigenschaft in Mecklenburg bis zum Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin [GDR]: Rütten und Loening, 1954), p. 48.

⁹ George Rude, *Ideology and Popular Protest*. With a New Foreword and Updated Bibliography by Harvey J. Kaye (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), p. 25.

¹⁰ E. J. Hobsbawm and George Rudé, *Captain Swing* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1969), p. 61.

baum could have been evolving into a union-buster here. But nothing was further from the truth. Tannenbaum did not mean to condemn trade unions. Rather, he believed they arose from conservative motives. The Industrial Revolution had destroyed the traditional ways of life in the countryside. “The peasant who had been reared in the intimacy of a small village, where customary values prescribed for every act between the cradle and the grave and where each man played a role in a drama known to all, now found himself isolated and bewildered in a city crowded with strangers and indifferent to a common rule. The symbolic universe that had patterned the ways of men across the ages in village, manor, or guild had disappeared.” Once they were in the city, the workers had to fend for themselves. They had become completely dependent upon wages. “If they lose their jobs they lose every resource, except for the relief supplied by the various forms of social security. Such dependence of the mass of the people upon others for *all* of their income is something new in the world. *For our generation, the substance of life is in another man’s hands.*” Tannenbaum believed that the role of trade unions had to be considered from this perspective. “In terms of the individual, the union returns to the worker his ‘society.’ It gives him a fellowship, a part in a drama that he can understand, and life takes on meaning once again because he shares a value system common to others. Institutionally the trade-union movement is an unconscious effort to harness the drift of our time and reorganize it around the cohesive identity that men working together always achieve.” “The trade-union movement is an unconscious rebellion against the atomization of industrial society.”¹¹ Basically: “trade unions restored social connections that the imposition of a labor market had undone.”¹²

This idea will not be a complete surprise to Dutch historians. Back in the 1970s, the historian Theo van Tijn argued that early socialism in the Netherlands derived from what he called a “defensive estate reflex.” “Trade unions were formed to defend the estates of furniture makers, of typographers, and the like, as respectable types of workers. Manifestations of awareness of their estate and professional pride are especially pronounced among the oldest trade unions. They objected to working with youths and adolescents and struggled for wage increases [...] to sustain their estate.”¹³

The Red Queen in reverse

You may know that wonderful book from 1871 *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* by Lewis Carroll. In this book Alice meets the Red Queen. Racing along continuously, the Queen tells Alice that she should not expect to “get anywhere” by running. Inhabitants of Looking Glass Land were obliged to run as fast as they could just to stay where they were: “*here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!”

Romer’s Rule may be interpreted as a case of the Red Queen Effect, an evolutionary principle formulated in 1973 by the biologist Leigh Van Valen.

According to Van Valen, in an evolutionary system, continuing development is needed, simply to remain fit relative to the systems with which it is co-evolving.¹⁴ In daily life we encounter the Red Queen Effect all the time, for example when we keep having to master new technologies (I-phones, apps, etc.), because we would otherwise fall behind.

¹¹ Frank Tannenbaum, *A Philosophy of Labor* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), pp. 3, 4, 7-11.

¹² Michael Merrill, “Even Conservative Unions Have Revolutionary Effects: Frank Tannenbaum on the Labor Movement,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 77 (Spring 2010), pp. 115-133, at 126.

¹³ Theo van Tijn, “Voorlopige notities over het ontstaan van het moderne klassebewustzijn in Nederland”, *Mededelingenblad. Orgaan van de Nederlandse vereniging tot beoefening van de sociale geschiedenis*, 45 (May 1974), pp. 33-48, at 44. See also Bert Altena’s thesis that the sense “that you had to maintain your estate as a respectable person” was an important condition for a socialist movement to emerge. Bert Altena, “*Een broei-nest der anarchie*”. *Arbeiders, arbeidersbeweging en maatschappelijke ontwikkeling. Vlissingen 1875-1929* (1940). 2 volumes (Haarlem: Thesis, 1989), pp. 62-63, 93.

¹⁴ Leigh Van Valen, “A New Evolutionary Law,” *Evolutionary Theory*, 1 (1973), pp. 1-30.

What happens, if the Red Queen effect reverses direction? In other words, what if the surroundings start moving more slowly than the people who are present there? What if we suddenly have far more opportunities than in the past? Examples abound. Consider, for example, people who become rich overnight. Conservatism often turns out to be a powerful driving force there as well. Keeping in mind the time available, I will provide a single historical example. In 1879 the German economist Alphons Thun was travelling across the Rhineland and reported that the income of the families of local textile workers was up sharply. Even though they could now afford better, they continued to drink the same weak coffee and ate the same potatoes and the same bread they always had. As a consequence, they obviously had more money left and spent that on weekends indulging in binges or occasionally on going to an opera.¹⁵

Many people who win a fortune in the lottery at first have no idea what to do with all that money. Like the textile workers and their families from the Rhineland, they usually combine old habits with exorbitant excesses. Sociological research has revealed that the adjustment requires about a year.¹⁶

Cognitive conservatism

In 1291, on his journey from China back to Italy, Marco Polo was stuck on Sumatra for five months waiting for the monsoon winds to change course, so that he could sail westward. On Sumatra he saw enormous animals that were not familiar to him. They seemed like the mythical unicorns, except that whereas that unicorns were appealing and elegant.

And these animals were not: “They have the hair of a buffalo and feet like an elephant’s. They have a single large, black horn in the middle of the forehead. [...] They have a head like a wild boar’s and always carry it stooped towards the ground. They spend their time by preference wallowing in mud and slime. They are very ugly brutes to look at. They are not at all such as we describe them when we relate that they let themselves be captured by virgins.”¹⁷

Marco Polo uses several *analogies* here (“hair of a buffalo,” “feet like an elephant’s,” “head like a wild boar’s”), but because of the single horn in the middle of the forehead, he regarded them mainly as unicorns, those animals he knew from myths and legends – except that they appeared as monsters here.

Acknowledging what is truly new as such often takes us a long time. The platypus was another such case. Was it fake? A kind of duck? A kind of mole?

Over eighty years passed after the animal was discovered, before science accepted that this was a previously unknown species. In his *Essays on Language and Cognition*, Umberto Eco rightly noted: “Often, when faced with an unknown phenomenon, we react by approximation: we seek that scrap of content, already present in our encyclopedia, which for better or worse seems to account for the new fact.”¹⁸

This pattern is common in many contexts. The first passenger trains, for example, were connected coaches without horses. Locomotives replaced draught animals, but everything else remained as it had been.

Precisely because of the difficulty coming to terms with the unexpected, those taking part in social protests may be completely astonished at the consequences of their own actions. The Russian Revolution, for example, was for many peasants and workers an unanticipated and unintended consequence of their collective actions. Maurice Merleau-Ponty captures this

¹⁵ Alphons Thun, *Die Industrie am Niederrhein und ihre Arbeiter*, vol. I (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1879), p. 68.

¹⁶ Mark Abrahamson, “Sudden Wealth, Gratification and Attainment: Durkheim's Anomie of Affluence Reconsidered,” *American Sociological Review*, 45, 1 (February 1980), pp. 49-57.

¹⁷ *The Travels of Marco Polo*. Translated and with an introduction by Ronald Latham (London: Penguin, 1958), p. 253.

¹⁸ *Kant and the Platypus. Essays on Language and Cognition*. Trans. Alastair McEwen (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 2000), p. 57. I borrowed the unicorn and platypus examples from this magisterial book.

nicely in *Phénoménologie de la perception*: “it is doubtful,” he writes, “whether the Russian peasants of 1917 expressly envisaged revolution and the transfer of property. Revolution arises day by day from the concatenation of less remote and more remote ends. It is not necessary that each member of the proletariat should think of himself as such, in the sense that a Marxist theoretician gives to the word. It is sufficient that the journeyman or the farmer should feel that he is on the march towards a certain crossroads, to which the road trodden by the town labourers also leads. Both find their journey’s end in revolution, which would perhaps have terrified them had it been described and represented to them in advance.”¹⁹ In other words: Walter Benjamin’s paradox of the revolutionary emergency brake reflects great historical insight.

Of course Romer’s Rule and the Red Queen effect are ephemeral. After an adjustment period (which may be very protracted), people usually grow accustomed to the radical change they have brought about or are experiencing.

Causal mechanisms

Based on my arguments thus far, I will focus on two ideas. First, different disciplines can learn from one another. Even palaeontology and biology can inspire historians and social scientists. Second, I have tried to highlight the value of a *mechanismic approach*. In my inaugural lecture in 1999 I urged that as social scientists we should abandon our quest for general transhistorical patterns and should instead concentrate on reconstructing social mechanisms. As Alfred Cobban said more than fifty years ago: “In practice, general social laws turn out to be one of three things. If they are not dogmatic assertions about the course of history, they are either platitudes, or else, to be made to fit the facts, they have to be subjected to more and more qualifications until in the end they are applicable only to a single case.”²⁰

At the time I argued that social-scientific and social-historical progress are more likely to be forthcoming from growing knowledge of causal mechanisms than from devising increasingly general theories. That remains my point of view.

Statements based on Romer’s Rule, for example, lack predictive value. Nobody can predict whether fish will learn to walk. Only in hindsight, *ex post facto*, can one say with certainty whether the Rule applied. Romer’s Rule might more accurately be called a mechanism in Jon Elster’s sense. Elster defines a mechanism as a frequently occurring and easily recognizable causal pattern that is triggered under generally unknown conditions or with indeterminate consequences.²¹ Unlike a covering law, a mechanism does not say “if A, then always B,” but “if A, then sometimes B,” or “if A, then often B.”

Causal mechanisms may recur over time. The greater the accuracy and detail in the description, the more precisely we can determine whether a mechanism will recur, and whether history is repeating itself in this very limited sense. At the time I said: “Participants in social movements know this; in some situations they recognize causal mechanisms that occurred previously.” Romer’s Rule and the Red Queen effect may be regarded as examples of such causal mechanisms.

Thank you for listening.

¹⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 517.

²⁰ Alfred Cobban, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 13-14.

²¹ Jon Elster, *Alchemies of the Mind. Rationality and the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

The Ohara Institute for Social Research: One of the Largest Archives of Labor and Social Movements in Japan

by
Kazue Enoki, Ohara Institute for Social Research, Hosei University



The Ohara Institute for Social Research, Hosei University, was established in 1919 and is going to celebrate its 100 year anniversary in 2019. The Ohara Institute is the oldest privately-established research institute on social and labor issues, which has collected a wide range of historical documents and materials on labor and social movements, the livelihood of workers, and the culture of working people since its establishment. The archive of the Ohara Institute is one of the largest public records repositories in the area of labor and social movements in Japan. Its collection includes proceedings of union conventions, bulletins and journals published by labor unions and social movement organizations, posters and billets of labor, social movements and political parties, as well as police records of labor disputes in the prewar period.

The Institute's website (oisr.org) provides databases of documents and materials in the possession of the Institute. In addition to this, it makes available contents of the Institute's publications. Also, the website enables viewing images of about 5,100 posters/billets and about 1,200 pictures collected by the Institute. The titles of some of the posters and billets were translated from Japanese into English. The website also homes the on-line version of the *Journal of Ohara Institute for Social Research*, the monthly academic journal on labor and social issues published in Japanese.

The Ohara Institute for Social Research welcomes visiting researchers from overseas, especially those scholars who are interested in comparative and historical studies of labor movements and global labor history. Moreover, ample research space is offered to visiting researchers who also have opportunities to present their projects and to have academic exchanges with Japanese researchers. Since the Institute currently is not able to provide visiting scholars with funding, those who are interested in applying for visiting researcher positions at the Ohara Institute are encouraged to obtain outside funding.

For more information, please contact Akira Suzuki, Director of the Ohara Institute for Social Research (e-mail address: insmove@hosei.ac.jp).

Two ISHA Sessions at the 18th World Economic History Congress, Boston, July 29 – August 3, 2018¹



Why Labour Relations Matter: Global Labour History and New Institutional Economic History

The undeniably big achievement of New Institutional Economic History (NIEH) is that it returned the historical and political dimensions to the economic discipline. Dimensions, that despite their centrality in the work of Smith and Marx have been notoriously neglected in neo-classical economics. NIEH has developed the ambition to explain why certain national economies show a better long-term performance than others. Acemoglu's and Johnson's definition of property rights as institutions that 'provide citizens protection against government and elite appropriation' has given further focus to discussions and research projects on how colonial exploitation might have impinged upon long-term economic growth prospects.

Interestingly enough, the way in which NIEH views the effects of rapacious colonialism is not that different from the Dependencia scholars; the divergence pertains rather to the purported mechanisms of this rapaciousness. Whereas the latter focus on power as the key variable and attribute a major role to exogenous factors, the institutionalists take an endogenous approach by attributing a central role to 'extractive institutions'. These are defined as the exact opposite of the property rights. This is not a contentious point for those who agree that colonial conquest is about disrespect for existing property rights and about withholding citizen rights. What merits further discussion, however, is what mechanisms cause these extractive institutions and what mechanisms of transmission make them persistent. This is still a black box. There are roughly two strategies to deal with that. One is the strategy proposed by Douglas North 20 years ago to include more and more variables in a macro-scale analysis in the hope to find the golden bullet or, alternatively, to scale down the unit of analysis and hypothesize historically discrete causes.

The latter strategy can build upon the early work of Engerman and Sokoloff who developed the notion of plantations as key vehicles in what they termed a reversal of fortune for resource rich tropical environments. This is an obvious point of entrance for labour historians. It is also an exciting strand of research among economic historians. The long-lasting consequences of systems of forced labour coercion have been examined by Nunn and Dell, for example. Yet they found out that correlations between extent of extraction of wealth and severe labour coercion and contemporary poverty may sound plausible but they can sometimes be inverse and that the mechanisms of transmission are not that obvious and sometimes counter-intuitive.

The good news is that labour relations matter and do seem to be an important explanatory factor for long-term economic development, but the bad news is that we still have no consistent theory or set of theoretical notions about how they do. In our view there is room for theoretical reflexion and hypothesis building on *how* labour relations matter for long-term economic growth and what mechanisms of transmission are involved.

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Engendering the History of Capitalism. Joint Session with the International Federation for Research in Women's History (IFRWH)

Over the last decade, scholars have rediscovered capitalism as economic process, analytic, and historical force. This “new” history of capitalism emerged in response to developments of our time, including neoliberalism and uneven and the unequal globalization and financialization that appeared to have reshaped the world economy. As Jürgen Kocka underscores in *Capitalism: The Reemergence of a Historical Concept* (2016), the end of the Cold War, the prominence of ideological market liberalism, the Great Recession, and growth of capitalist development within all sorts of regimes has sparked renewed interest. We now have robust reconsideration of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the violence of primitive accumulation, and the continuum between free and unfree labor. The significance of banks, risk-taking, speculation, and other means of financing capital have joined studies of labor conflict, commodification, and appropriation of resources. Waged labor no longer seems as central to the definition of capitalism as it once did, though it retains a prominent place in historical scholarship.

While some question whether a “new” history of capitalism is more than a repackaging of business, labour, and economic history, we argue that it has the potential to explain the relationship between regions and sectors as well as between people. Rich research under its rubric, however, too often stands apart from women’s history, the history of sexualities, and gender analysis. It is not just that the working (or capitalist) class has two sexes, but that sexual divisions of labour, gender definitions, kinship and family formation, and normative sexuality have shaped even as they have reflected the mode of production. Indeed, reproductive labour stands as part of but also as its own force in the making of capitalist social relations. Reproductive labour refers to those activities that make people through the tasks of daily life necessary to develop and sustain labour power. These activities are both material (like feeding), emotional (like love), and assimilative (like transference of norms and values), whether occurring in the family, school, church, workplace, or community. Conflated with the unpaid, usually intimate, duties of mothers, wives, and daughters, reproductive labour, when commodified as employment, rarely has commanded adequate wages or even recognition as work. Women’s responsibility for caring for and maintaining households has justified low pay, irregular working hours, short-term jobs, and exclusion from labour law. But such unwaged, low-waged, or non-waged work has served capitalist economies in multiple ways over time and space.

For this joint session, we seek papers that intervene in the various debates surrounding the history of capitalism through gender analysis. Papers might be micro or macro, looking inside the firm or shopfloor, the community or family, or global processes. We invite historians of sexualities and gender to consider how their research intersects with the history of capitalism and we ask historians of capitalism to consider the place of gender, sexualities, and reproductive labour in their analysis. The resulting session will thus serve two purposes: first to present new empirical research, whether social, economic, cultural, or intellectual history in orientation; second, to advance the engendering of the history of capitalism and reinforce the materialist (re)turn in the history of gender and sexuality that is connecting the discursive to social and economic processes.

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Submissions are welcome including brief notes, such as reports on conferences; personal accounts related to ISHA issues; announcements of forthcoming conferences and meetings on issues related to ISHA; readers' comments sharing your reactions to and thoughts about materials published in the Newsletter. All documents need to be formatted using Microsoft Word (.doc). Please send all manuscripts as an e-mail attachment to the editor.

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