SUGGESTIONS AND DEBATES

An Agenda for Transnational Labor History

Michael P. Hanagan

Transnational labor history is attracting considerable interest today.[1] Is it just another recondite buzzword or does transnational labor history offer a serious long-term program for discussion and research? This article defends the integrity of transnational labor history as a field, discusses the contributions it can make, and outlines some of the questions that it can most profitably address.

Transnational labor history studies state border crossings that result from labor market demand, state labor policies, the actions of workers, or the practices of working-class institutions. The definition is meant to be inclusive and accommodating but not so broad as to be meaningless. Following our definition, studies of internationalist sentiments in France or of Italian and Jewish migrant labor in Chicago may be, but are not *prima facie*, transnational labor history. Neither are comparative studies of labor movements in two or more states, unless border crossings play a significant role in the analysis. As a term, "transnational" avoids the universalist implications inherent in "global", or "international", and it permits a focus on bi-state or multi-state intercourse. It is to be contrasted with "nationalization", "localization", or "regionalization", where regions are defined as substate units.

Instead of seeing the globe as a world of separate but interrelated states, transnational labor history sees it as a world of interconnected processes. Transnational labor history follows processes across borders, but it is not

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1. See Linda Basch, Nina Blick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Luxembourg, 1994); Daniel B. Cornfeld, "Labor Transnationalism?", *Work and Occupation*, 24 (1997), pp. 278–287; Michael Gordon and Lowell Turner (eds), *Transnational Cooperation among Trade Unions* (Ithaca, NY, 2000); Marcel van der Linden, "Transnationalizing American Labor History", *The Journal of American History*, 86 (1999), pp. 1078–1092; Tomas Risse-Kappen, *Bringing Transnational Relations Back in: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions* (Cambridge, 1995); and Jackie Smith and Hank Johnson (eds), *Globalization and Resistance: Transnational Dimensions of Social Movements* (Lanham, MD, 2002).

"borderless" history; it investigates the character of borders and how processes are affected by border crossings. Structured comparisons are important tools for understanding processes and their interaction with borders. Together, processes, borders, and structured comparisons constitute the elements of an agenda for transnational labor history.

PROCESSES

Transnational labor history's commitment to following processes wherever they lead places it in a strong strategic position, for the study of open-ended processes has become increasingly central to all labor history. Important processes in labor history that often cross borders include: industrialization and de-industrialization, labor migration, proletarianization, changes in the organization of work and the gendered division of labor, class mobilization, and the influence of class institutions on global governance.[2]

Processes replace dichotomized categories as the central focus of research in transnational labor history; in so doing, transnational labor history follows a path charted but sadly neglected by labor historians. Forty years ago, E.P. Thompson emphasized that class should not be studied "as a 'structure' or even a 'category'", but as "arising from processes which can only be studied as they work themselves out over a considerable historical period".[3] Thompson's project contrasts with other approaches that still find support within the field. Although Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marx have attempted to give new life to the hoary question of why there is no socialism in America, their recent work still suffers from the fatal flaw of posing the problem in a dichotomized manner – European socialist consciousness versus American lack of consciousness. The besetting sin of the debates over "American excep-

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2. Verity Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism: The Industrial Workers of the World in Australia* (Melbourne, 1996); Christine Collette, *The International Faith: Labour Attitudes to European Socialism* (Aldershot, 1998); Leon Fink, *The Maya of Morgantown: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003); Janet Finn, *Tracing the Veins: Copper, Culture, and Community from Butte to Chuquicamata* (Berkeley, CA, 1998); Dale Hathaway, *Allies across the Border: Mexico's "Authentic Labor Front" and Global Solidarity* (Cambridge, MA, 2000); Frits L. van Holthoon and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Internationalism in the Labour Movement, 1830–1940* (Leiden, 1988); Marcel van der Linden and W. Thorpe (eds), *Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective* (Aldershot, 1990); Patrick Pasture and Johan Verberckmoes (eds), *Working-Class Internationalism and the Appeal of National Identity: Historical Debates and Current Perspectives on Western Europe* (Oxford, 1998); Susan Milner, *The Dilemmas of Internationalism: French Syndicalism and the International Labour Movement 1900–1914* (Oxford, 1990); Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrone and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880–1930* (Cambridge, 2000); Jan Luiten van Zanden, *The Rise and Decline of Holland's Economy: Merchant Capitalism and the Labour Market* (Manchester, 1993).
3. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1964).

tionalism", as of dichotomized comparisons in general, is that they minimize categorical properties in one case, exaggerate them on the other, and ignore important qualitative distinctions within categories.[4] In the exceptionalist literature, American workers are denied class-consciousness while European workers brim over with it. No attention is paid to consciousness in any other arena but that of membership and participation in formally socialist parties.

In contrast to dichotomized categories, processes such as "proletarianization" and "mass mobilization" are not ideal types; they actually occur and can be studied and compared. Processes imply movements towards ends but not that ends must be accomplished. Moving away from categories allows us to concentrate on identifying processes and the mechanisms that drive them. Historians can examine the relationship between separate processes without assuming that they are all yoked to a common historical purpose or moving towards a determined end. Of course, labor history has always been interested in processes and relationships but, as we concentrate more intently on them, historians may begin to appreciate the limitations of earlier approaches that remain too confined to the world of individual states.

A case in point is international migration. Important aspects of this quintessentially transnationalist process have been obscured by a single-minded focus on migration as a movement from a *place in one state* to a *place in another*, ignoring the continuing links between migrant and sending area and the internal movements within migrant flows. In the nineteenth century, mostly in its second half, approximately 100 million people migrated across continents; about half were Europeans, going to the Americas, the other half Asians, to the Caribbean, Africa and South Asia. Work now being done on transnational European labor migration in the era of the early Second Industrial Revolution (1870–1914) suggests new ways of understanding class formation among European migrants.

In part, the great European migrations of the late nineteenth century were a product of both transportation and communications revolutions, and the effect of these revolutions on ordinary people was complex.

4. Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York, 2001). For the current state of the continuing debate on American exceptionalism, see Daniel T. Rogers. "Exceptionalism", in Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood (eds), *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret Their Past* (Princeton, NJ, 1998), pp. 21–40; Ian Tyrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History", *American Historical Review*, 96 (1991), pp. 1031–1055 and 1068–1071; Michael McGerr, "The Price of the 'New Transnational History'", *American Historical Review*, 96 (1991), pp. 1056–1068; Jonathan A. Glickstein, *American Exceptionalism, American Anxiety: Wages, Competition and Degraded Labor in the Antebellum United States* (Charlottesville, VA, 2002); Michael Kammen, "The Problem of American Exceptionalism: A Reconsideration", *American Quarterly*, 45(1993), pp. 1–43; and Boyd E. Shafer (ed.), *Is America Different? A New Look at American Exceptionalism* (New York, 1991).

Transportation and communication revolutions restricted European workers' and farmers' options as much as they enlarged them. After all, most migrants would have probably preferred to stay at home. But revolutions in steamer construction and propulsion that enabled North America to send large quantities of cheap wheat to European markets, and the refrigerator ships that brought cheap meat from Argentina and Australia drove agriculturalists from the land. The same transportation revolution that brought agricultural hard times also offered new opportunities by reducing the cost of travel to distant lands. For the first time, ordinary working-class Europeans could afford the cost of a transatlantic trip and, if they so desired, a return.[5]

Migration historians long ago discovered the central role of kinship and village networks in European migration, and demonstrated how migrants adapted their skills to the specialized needs of growing urban economies.[6] But much recent research had begun to reveal that European migrants had kin ties to several locations in the Americas, considered multiple destinations, and some moved back and forth among several nations.[7] More importantly, migrants often retained significant links to homelands, and migrants used current events in both sending and receiving lands in the shaping of their actions and identities. [8]

Striking examples of how multinational migration could shape working-class movements are the cases of James Connolly or James Larkin, easily the two most influential Irish labor leaders of the twentieth century.[9] Neither was an Irish native. Connolly was born and grew up in Edinburgh, Larkin in Liverpool; they arrived in Ireland as mature men with first-hand knowledge of industrial society and with years of experience in the British labor movement. Once established in Ireland, both moved to the US, where they played a prominent role in socialist movements and in the IWW, in the process coming into contact with activists from other migrant streams. At points in their careers both men could have been fairly identified as English labor activists or Irish-American syndicalists; today they are almost exclusively remembered as Irish working-class leaders and, in the case of Connolly, commemorated as a nationalist martyr. Both worked to translate UK and US forms of labor militancy to Irish conditions.

5. Mark Wyman, *Round Trip to America: The Immigrants' Return to Europe, 1880–1930* (Ithaca, NY, 1993).
6. John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: The History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, IN, 1985)
7. Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality* (Berkeley, CA, 1998), pp. 147–152.
8. David M. Emmons, *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town, 1875–1925* (Urbana, IL, 1989).
9. Emmet Larkin, *James Larkin, 1876–1947: Irish Labor Leader* (Cambridge, MA, 1965), and Samuel Levenson, *James Connolly: A Biography* (London, 1973).

In a world where both labor leaders and rank-and-file workers moved back and forth between countries, tactics that proved successful for one labor movement quickly disseminated to others. During the strike of 1912 in Lawrence, Massachusetts, Italian Socialist Federation members originated a proposal to send strikers' hungry children to be fed and sheltered by Italian working-class families in New York. This tactic, used by Italian workers in several strikes, graphically demonstrated the privations inflicted by the strike, as well as the importance of class solidarity among workers. In fact, the tactic was successfully used in Lawrence; the brutal efforts of the Lawrence police to prevent children from being sent away provoked a storm of outrage that reached Italy. Within the year, Lawrence strike tactics, originating in Italy and passed to the US by Italian-American migrants, returned to Europe, passed by Irish-American migrants to Irish labor leaders. The tactic was used during the Dublin general strike of 1913 when strikers' children were to be sent to stay with English dockworkers' families.[10]

For all the numerous studies of transatlantic migration, we are only just beginning to learn about migration as an ongoing interactive process, in which migrants forged new identities based on their continuing involvement in the politics of both "old" and "new" countries. The best work on this subject so far has been done by Italian labor historians, and is illustrated in the works of scholars such as Donna Gabaccia, Franca Iacovetta, and Fraser M. Ottanelli.[11] Recent work has shown that many in the first wave of Italian emigration had village or regional identities, and only acquired an Italian identity in the New World in response to nativist attacks. Italians, freshly-minted in the Americas, became involved in the politics of the newly forming Italian state. Abroad, most working-class migrants rallied to the republican cause because only republicans tried to attract popular support in the diaspora. While the republican cause was lost in nineteenth-century Italy, republican Italian migrants adapted their politics to their new homelands, where they brought valuable recruits to democratic politics. In subsequent years, as the Italian labor movement radicalized, migrants played an important role in bringing socialist, anarchist, and syndicalist notions to the labor movements of the nations to which they emigrated.

In the past, as Jan and Leo Lucassen have argued, our understanding of migration has been too often obscured by our focus on debates over dichotomized categories. Was migration voluntary or involuntary? Was it

10. "Saving the Children", in Padraig Yeates, *Lockout: Dublin 1913* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 231–368.
11. Donna R. Gabaccia and Fraser M. Ottanelli (eds), *Italian Workers of the World: Labor Migration and the Formation of Multiethnic States* (Urbana, IL, 2001); Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle, WA, 2000); and Donna R. Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta (eds), *Women, Gender and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World* (Buffalo, NY, 2002).

motivated by politics or by economics? Did ethnicity survive or did migrants assimilate?[12] The discovery of ongoing connections between migrants and homelands and their connections to fellow migrants in other countries emerged from a more careful attention to migration as process, to an open-ended exploration of the channels and connections created by migratory flows.

BOUNDARIES

While transnational labor history shares with mainstream labor history a common concern with processes and their relationships, its concern with borders and their characteristic features is peculiar to the field. Attention to borders requires labor history to consider explicitly the role of the state, and thus the different kinds of states. For US and European labor historians, the most relevant state form is the "consolidated state". In what follows, the term is intended to replace the more commonly used "nation-state", a name suggesting a degree of cultural unity that nationalists ardently desire but almost no existing nation actually possesses. Even in Europe, the home of the nation-state, few states meet these standards.

"Consolidated", on the other hand, refers to structures of central power that are constitutive of capitalist-industrialized states. The distinction is important, and still constitutes a key analytical distinction in the study of contemporary polities. For the purposes of this essay, the watchwords of the consolidated state are: centralization and penetration, citizenship, and meaningful territorial borders. The "consolidated state" traces its origins to seventeenth-century Europe and expanded rapidly during the French Revolution and its aftermath. It annihilated intermediary institutions previously buffering citizens from government and penetrated into the tiniest local community. Through taxation and conscription, this state asserted increasingly exclusive claims on its members but, in return, responding to popular pressure, began to confer legal rights to a growing number of "citizens".

State penetration and conferral of citizenship gave borders new significance. Over the course of the last two centuries, consolidated states enforced compulsory instruction in a "national" language, and developed social policies that extended pensions and medical benefits to a growing number of citizens. For the first time, whether one lived on this side of the border or that mattered in the daily lives of men and women. European researchers, such as Peter Sahlins, have generally focused on how borders took on a greater and greater meaning in the nineteenth and twentieth

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12. Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, "Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives", in *idem* (eds), *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigm and New Perspectives* (Bern, 1997), pp. 9–38, 10.

centuries.[13] In western and central Europe, between 1870 and 1960 , Susan Cott Watkins has demonstrated that major demographic features became more similar among major administrative regions of consolidated states, while differences among states increased.[14] Not only did borders take on new meaning but membership in the state polity became an important entitlement. Citizenship, of course, was also an exclusionary concept that denied rights to whole categories of people, defined as non-native and conceived as precariously residing within the nation's borders.[15]

Borders can set limits on interstate relations but they can structure them as well, as shown by the growing literature on the US/Mexican borderlands. This literature focuses on complex interdependence across the lands adjacent to these international borders. In the recent period, economic and social complementarity reign in the borderlands. In twin city complexes that straddle borders, such as Brownsville–Matamoros, Laredo–Nuevo-Laredo, Ciudad Juárez–El Paso, San Diego–Tijuana, transnational inter-action includes such phenomena as "migration, employment, business transactions, tourism, trade, consumerism, cultural interchange and social relationships".[16] Oscar J. Martinez distinguishes a whole series of *national identities* along the borders held by transient migrants, newcomers, nationalists, and uniculturalists, but also a series of *transnational identities* espoused by settler migrants, commuters, biculturalists, and binationalists. Whether we emphasize their constraints or their opportunities, borders matter!

The preceding section on processes discussed the millions of Europeans who migrated across continents in the nineteenth century. The importance of borders in nineteenth-century migration is powerfully demonstrated by an examination of the other section of the migration flow, the case of the millions of Asian migrants to Africa and the Americas. Borders and their *characteristics* exerted relatively little influence on Europeans migrating to the US. They played a much more important role in the case of East Indian migrants moving from colony to colony within an empire. Characteristics of borders, such as whether they were interstate or intra-imperial,

13. Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, CA, 1989).

14. Susan Cott Watkins, *From Province to Nation: Demographic Interactions in Western Europe, 1870–1960* (Princeton, NJ, 1991).

15. See Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color and Power in Chicago, 1890–1945* (Oxford, 2003), and Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

16. Oscar J. Martinez, *Border People: Life and Society in the US–Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson, AZ, 1994), p. 59. See also, Lawrence Herzog, *Where North Meets South: Cities, Space and Politics in the US–Mexico Borderlands* (Austin, TX, 1990); Kathryn Kopinak, *Desert Capitalism: Maquiladoras in North America's Western Industrial Corridor* (Tucson, AZ, 1996); and Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880–1940* (Oxford, 1987).

influenced migrants' routes, their ultimate direction, and the nature of their insertion into local economies.

At the same time as young Europeans were leaving for the Americas, young Madrasis and Bengalis were also leaving British India for the Americas, south and central Africa, south Asia and the South Pacific. Unlike Europeans, kinship and village connections played a less central role in this migratory flow. In the case of Indian migrants to Trinidad, for example, few families or wives migrated and British colonial authorities labored mightily to recruit single females in India. In the case of East Indians, the British Colonial Office was key in selecting migrants' destinations, a selection that determined their place in the economy of the receiving country.

Madrasis and Bengalis were departing from an even grimmer agrarian world than European peasants, escaping large-scale food shortages originating in climatic changes in the Pacific Ocean.[17] As in Europe, the forces that provided Indians with means of escape were also at least partially the ones that sent them packing. In the case of the East Indians, this driving force was a British regime unable to cope with famine. The death of millions resulted, at least in part, because colonial administrators, fanatically committed to free trade, abandoned or failed to replenish precolonial famine reserves. Even established reserves would have been inadequate to prevent hardship, faced with the extraordinary weather conditions of the 1870s and 1880s. Still if traditional food reserves had survived the imposition of colonial rule, they might have saved many lives.[18]

The British state dominated labor recruitment because East Indian laborers were closed out of the more promising labor markets. Destinations open to Europeans were forbidden to Madrasis and Bengalis. Racist bans imposed by consolidated states in the Americas and Australasia prevented Madrasis and Bengalis from joining Europeans in relatively more remunerative job markets.[19] But there were other reasons as well. Indian migrants could not afford tickets to the Americas. The willingness of employers in the Americas, subsidized by public funds, to buy tickets for East Indian workers, who became indentured to them, was the lynchpin of the whole system. Pressured by powerful colonial interests, British colonial authorities directed Asian migrant flows to destinations in Africa and the Caribbean. To find workers for their sugar fields, in the wake of the abolition of slavery, planters in the British Caribbean turned

17. Stephen Constantine (ed.), *Emigrants and Empire: British Settlement in the Dominions Between the Wars* (Manchester, 1990).
18. Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London, 2001).
19. Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in US History* (New Haven, CT, 1997).

to indentured servitude. Prodded by the British Colonial Office, the Indian government passed legislation allowing emigration to Jamaica, British Guiana and Trinidad (1844), St Lucia (1856), and Grenada (1858).

Colonial administrators dictated the nature of migrants' insertion into local economies. Europeans who came to the US worked in a variety of environments, in family-owned small businesses, as day laborers, or in industry. East Indian migrants' choices were more stark; they labored on Caribbean plantations, compelled to work there for a specified period of years. Their point of insertion into local economies proved of utmost significance. In the US, immigrants struggled to control employment niches that could offer support for migrating kin. In the Caribbean, there was little alternative to plantation labor, and colonial governments, responding to employers' requests, worked to further restrict workers' alternatives; by limiting the sale of Crown land, British authorities sought to restrict the growth of proprietorship among migrants whose indenture had expired. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the sugar economy was under great pressure, as new sources of supply competed with established centers. The decline of the sugar economy led to a further deterioration in the position of Indian laborers, as planters tried to extend indentures and to abrogate the government's insistence on the Indians' right to return to their home country.

Directed by the British Colonial Office, East Indian migrants went to states that offered them only meager political entitlements. Migrants to consolidated states generally shared in the extension of rights occurring in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while migrants within empires found themselves with far more limited and less rapidly increasing imperial entitlements. Shocked by the disparity between the rights of white and Indian laborers, Gandhi began his political career, and his critique of British imperialism, by demanding rights for Indian migrants in South Africa.

Political struggles in sending countries could also influence politics in receiving countries. In colonial settings, as immigrants sought to better their political position, struggles for rights spread across imperial boundaries. Immigrants were often influenced both by struggles in their homelands and by struggles in the countries where they had settled. Citizens' rights varied greatly in the British Caribbean. In Trinidad, Indians fighting to broaden the scope of representation formed an East Indian National Association, and in 1909 the East Indian National Congress. As in the case of Italians, Indian migrants to the Caribbean drew on the political repertoires of their homelands to pressure British colonial authorities.[20]

20. K.O. Laurence, *A Question of Labour: Indentured Immigration into Trinidad and British Guana, 1875–1917* (New York, 1994).

These were not the only borders that existed in the nineteenth and twentieth century world. Within the British Empire, there were borders between the United Kingdom, including colonial Ireland, and the rest of the empire, as well as borders between the so-called "white dominions" and the non-white empire. Within individual colonies, there were often borders between peoples, and the character of these border crossings has attracted a growing number of researchers. As migrants crossed borders, states attempted to impose new identities upon them. When Spanish workers entered the US canal zone in 1905, they became, for most purposes, non-white.[21]

In the mid or late nineteenth century countries like Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, and the US were territorially contiguous empires which possessed internal political borders. Some of these contiguous empires, such as the US and Germany, and to a lesser extent Austria-Hungary, had consolidated states at their core and more decentralized, multisovereign polities at their periphery. At the same time, other great powers developed partly legal, partly informal ways of putting pressure on weaker states without incorporating them into empires.[22] The power of the UK within the late nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire is one model of such hegemony, the US in Central America, another. Examining how the different characteristics of borders shaped labor processes is an important task before transnational labor historians.

Recently a new postcolonial and postnationalist current within colonial historiography has begun to pay more attention to relationships between empires, interstate movement, and the colonial subject.[23] A number of fine monographs study the connection between India and particular destinations in Africa or the Caribbean. We are only beginning to learn about the mechanisms by which labor moved throughout the empire, how imperial/subject migrant relations were negotiated, and the variety of agreements that were made. Colonial peoples sometimes assumed, sometimes asserted, that membership in an empire should convey some core of common political rights that protected colonial workers as they traveled throughout the imperial domain. More attention also needs to be devoted to the politics of colonial rights, a subject of considerable debate among administrators, and of protests among colonials.

Characteristics of borders can help us understand migrant flows and their effects on local economies but they are also can contribute

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21. Julie Greene, "Spaniards on the Silver Roll: Labor Troubles and Liminality in the Panama Canal Zone, 1904–1914", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 66 (forthcoming).
22. Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ, 1999).
23. See the introduction to Gyan Prakash (ed.), *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (Princeton, NJ, 1998), and Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire; Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, PA, 1998).

importantly to the understanding of other problems, such as the formation of class identities. Transnational labor history can address questions of the transformation of class identities. Labor internationalism was an important element of class identity, and an understanding of its role in class identity requires a transnational analysis. European workers' impulses to solidarity tended to concentrate heavily around the European, and to a lesser extent North American, world with its large contingent of industrial workers. Outside this world, and particularly in the colonial world, labor "internationalism" often faltered.

Since its foundation, the labor movement has always been torn by nationalist and internationalist currents. The new and substantial claims of the consolidated state on citizens and subjects, at a time when capital and labor were becoming increasingly mobile, created the very tensions that led to the simultaneous existence of both nationalist and international identities within labor movements. The growth of consolidated states in Europe and the US, their increasing provision of mass education, social welfare, and public services made the state an important force in popular life.[24] In organizing the masses to elect socialists and labor leaders, the labor movement played a powerful role in bringing workers into national politics. The nationalist orientation of labor electoralism and political claim-making was unavoidable in a world where borders counted.

At the same time, before 1914, it sometimes seemed as if military force was used more often against the country's own workers than against foreign threats. Military requisitions reached into workers' homes and conscripted their children. Expenditures on foreign conquests and chauvinist military rivalries diverted money from socialist-sponsored projects for social reform. Also, nationalist movements invariably marked out the labor movement as one of their chief enemies. Before 1914, the construction of a socialist international provided an important counter institution for labor movements excluded from national political power. After World War I, labor movements looked to such organizations as the League of Nations, the International Labour Organization, the Communist International, and the United Nations as forums for international solidarity and collective action.

Labor internationalism, its character and its strength, has always been profoundly shaped by the salience of state borders and international organizations. The nightmare of interwar nationalism and the triumph of the Russian Revolution, the post-World-War-II division of Europe between American and Soviet spheres, and the formation of the contemporary EU all influenced class identities in many ways, not least

24. Marcel van der Linden, "The National Integration of the European Working Classes (1871–1914): Exploring the Causal Configuration", *International Review of Social History*, 33 (1988), pp. 285–311.

insofar as they have influenced the character of borders. The contrast between the internationalism of 1910 and 1970 is remarkable. In 1910, in the European world of consolidated states, internationalists always took great care to criticize their own nation first and most harshly, before criticizing another nation. In 1970, in a world dominated by American and Soviet superpowers, anti-Americanism and/or anti-Sovietism dominated the rhetoric of the most committed labor internationalists.[25] Labor internationalism took on new meanings in a world of superpowers than it had possessed in a world of independent states. The relationship between class identities and state systems should be an important element on the agenda of transnational labor history.

Transnational labor history must be ready and willing to follow processes across borders wherever they lead. Yet ignoring borders is dangerous. Processes were sometimes transformed by border crossings and different types of borders altered processes in different ways. The analysis and study of borders must be a vital part of transnational labor history.

STRUCTURED COMPARISONS

If processes and borders are vital elements of transnational labor history, then structured comparisons can be an invaluable tool in analyzing the ways in which borders and processes exert influence and interact. Recently, there has been a revival of interest in comparative historical analysis, within the social sciences, that has promoted renewed interest in structured comparisons, comparisons that include variation within carefully controlled contexts.

A classic example of a structured historical comparison is that employed by Ann Shola Orloff and Theda Skocpol in their study of English and American social policy. Interested in explaining the development of English social policy between 1900 and 1911, they decided to compare England with the US for reasons of both variation and context. The US did not develop welfare policies in this period, and the similarities in English and American political culture was so great that they could rule out many familiar cultural explanations that would have emerged, had they compared England with the continent. In fact, they also took a number of

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25. Anthony Carew *et al.* (eds), *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions* (Bern, 2000); Denis MacShane, *International Labour and the Origins of the Cold War* (Oxford, 1992); Bob Reinalda (ed.), *The International Transportworkers, 1914–1945: The Edo Fimmen Era* (Amsterdam, 1997); and Victor Silverman, *Imagining Internationalism in American and British Labor, 1939–1949* (Urbana, IL, 2000). On US government-sponsored international labor solidarity, see, Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life. Jay Lovestone: Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster* (New York, 1999), and Yevette Richards, *Maida Springer: Pan-Africanist and International Labor leader* (Pittsburgh, PA, 2000).

further steps to deepen the contextual similarities. Much of their comparison focused on England and Massachusetts, a US state with an industrial economy similar to England's, and they chose a period of comparison in the US – the years between 1880–1920 – when some US social reformers were actually pushing for social-policy reforms similar to those of England. Their carefully controlled comparison gave great plausibility to their conclusions, which emphasized the comparative weakness of the US state, and many US reformers' fears, after their experience with Civil War pensions, that US social policies were too prone to corruption and favoritism to risk a dramatic expansion of social services.[26]

As the case of Orloff and Skocpol demonstrates, carefully controlled comparisons often involve more than straightforward comparisons between two nations. During the present revival of comparative historical studies, James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer report that "researchers are increasingly exploring federal states or departments within a single country, supranational territories or organizations that encompass multiple nation states and informal sub-national territories defined by various features such as type of agricultural system or degree of state penetration".[27] Because of the dynamic character of processes and the transnational nature of borders, transnational labor historians will often be required to craft unusual comparisons, combining variation with contextualization. If state policies, or the strategies of national organizations, are the desired objects of study, then interstate comparisons may be the preferred method, but for many of the objects that most concern labor historians, states are not the natural unit of comparison.

In some instances, students of processes and borders may turn to structured comparisons based on temporally successive case studies. A great strength of Jeff Cowie's *Capital Moves* is his decision to follow an RCA plant as it moves from Camden, New Jersey, to Bloomington, Indiana, to Memphis, Tennessee, and then to Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.[28] Essentially, Cowie makes four separate comparisons, one for each move of his plant. As the RCA plant moved, it finally entered the purview of transnational labor history, but Cowie shows that capital's movement to Mexico was mainly the outgrowth of a very old process to find cheap, nonunionized labor already at work within US borders.

26. Ann Sholar Orloff and Theda Skocpol, "Why Not Equal Protection? Explaining the Politics of Public Social Spending in Britain, 1900–1911, and the United States, 1880–1920", *American Sociological Review*, 49 (1984), pp. 726–750.
27. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, "Comparative Historical Analysis: Achievements and Agendas", in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (eds), *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 3–41, 14. See also, Charles C. Ragin and Howard S. Becker (eds), *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry* (Cambridge, 1992).
28. Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's 70-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, NY, 1999).

Similarly, recent work that involves the tracking of the production processes, beginning with the extraction of raw materials and ending with the sale of the finished commodity – commodity chains – may offer new and important ways to structure historical comparisons. Commodity-chain analysts examine and compare production and distribution links and patterns of capital investment along the chain to understand why capital may be vulnerable to attack by labor movements at one link in the chain, and by pressure from social movements at another, and why different kinds of commodity chains yield different points of vulnerability.[29] Comparisons that focus on connections between links also seem extra-ordinarily valuable. Modern production processes, such as just-in-time production, have tightened linkages within the production chain in ways that can favor labor action. Andrew Herod has shown that, in 1998, a single strike at two GM parts plants in Flint, Michigan had dramatic results in shutting down GM production lines on several continents.[30] Although only in its inception, commodity-chain analysis may provide a new and important tool for making structured comparisons in transnational labor history.

PROCESSES, BORDERS, STRUCTURED COMPARISONS, AND GLOBALIZATION

Together, processes, borders, and structured comparisons can also contribute importantly to provide a historical perspective on the current globalization debate. Labor historians have been rightly skeptical of elitist conceptions of globalization that see transportation and communication revolutions as the dominant characteristic of the modern age. The worldwide web, the internet, the satellite dish, the cellphone, and the jet plane have yet to carry out a worldwide revolution in the daily lives of workers. Working-class access to these new technologies remains limited. At a time when increasing number of workers are finding computer and internet-related jobs, most workers lack private access to such devices.

The internet is a case in point. In most countries, internet access remains a class privilege. While internet usage among US workers and minorities is growing rapidly, only 12.7 per cent of households with incomes under $15,000 have internet access, 46 per cent of whites have access, but only 24

29. Marcel van der Linden, "Global Labor History and 'the Modern World-System': Thoughts at the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Fernand Braudel Center", *International Review of Social History*, 46 (2001), pp. 423–459; and Gary Gereffi and Miguel Korzeniewicz (eds), *Commodity Chains and Global Capitalism* (Westport, CT, 1994).
30. Andrew Herod, "Geographies of Labor Internationalism", *Social Science History*, 27 (2003), pp. 501–524. See also *idem*, *Labor Geographies: Workers and the Landscape of Capitalism* (New York, 2001), and *idem* (ed.), *Organizing the Landscape: Geographical Perspectives on Labor Unions* (Minneapolis, MN, 1998).

per cent of African Americans and Hispanics. In the prosperous EU, internet access and usage remain largely confined to the upper and middle classes; 24 per cent of adults were internet users in the UK, 15 per cent in Germany, 13 per cent in France, 8 per cent in Spain and 7 per cent in Italy. Outside the industrialized world, internet usage declines rapidly and becomes an affair of elites. In Chile, where internet access was an issue in the 1999 election, researchers found that 90 per cent of all computers were in the homes of the wealthiest 20 per cent of the population. While one-third of the population of Taiwan uses the internet, the figure is under 7 per cent for the Russian population, 5 per cent for the Brazilian, and 2 per cent for the Chinese.[31]

But even in the very exceptional cases, where relatively poor working-class populations have gained access to the internet, such access has not necessarily acted to undermine popular culture, family connections, or territorial identity. Among the highest working-class users of the internet have been Caribbean and Pacific nations with large emigrant populations. For these people, the internet is cheaper than phones, and more immediate than letter writing. A recent study of internet usage among Trinidadians questions some key assumptions of globalization theorists. In their study, Daniel Miller and Donald Slater note that "Trinidadians – particularly those living away – invest much energy in trying to make online life as Trinidadian as they can make it, to see the Internet as a place to perform Trini-ness."[32] The young woman from Trinidad, working in London, whose island mother uses the internet to check the London weather every morning, and then e-mails her daughter to make sure she is properly dressed, probably sees the internet as very much a continuation of the routines of daily life. For all its new capacities, in important ways, the internet enables users to extend the reach of existing ties and to maintain established relations over a greater distance.

Conceptions of globalization that emphasize worldwide market expansion and accelerating worldwide economic growth produced by the revolution in information technology require comparative perspective and a willingness to follow processes across borders. The transformative economic role of the new information-based economy has been exaggerated. In the post-World-War-II world, high labor productivity has been a major motor of American economic growth. For all its marvelous inventions, the technological revolution has been unable to reverse the slowing rate of productivity growth of the last two decades; in fact, productivity has generally lagged in computer-using industries.[33] While accelerated technological change in computers and communications has

31. "A Web that Looks Like the World", *Business Week*, 22 March 1999; John Dix, "Facts and Figures about our Wired Nation", *Network World*, 4 December 2000.
32. Daniel Miller and Don Slater, *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* (Oxford, 2000), p. 58.
33. Angus Maddison, *The World Economy: A Millennial Approach* (Paris, 2001), pp. 135–138.

contributed importantly to dramatic expansion within this important sector, some studies suggest that spillovers from information to other industries has been far less than anticipated.

Without denying or seeking to minimize the worldwide market expansion of the last fifty years, we know that there have been global losers as well as winners, and that large regions of the world have fallen far behind in the current communications' revolution and wave of market expansion. With much of the world becoming more tightly linked by communications lines, these nations with only tenuous connections to the internet and shrinking ties to world markets are becoming "delinked".[34] Much of the increase in world trade has really taken place among the already industrialized nations of North America and western and central Europe. Outside Europe and North America, much of the growth in the world economy since 1950 has occurred in fifteen Asian countries, so called "resurgent Asia". The most dramatic change has been in China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. Since 1950 the Asian share of world gross domestic product has doubled.[35]

But at the same time, very large regions of the world have been dominated by nationalizing, regionalizing, and localizing trends. The breakup of the Soviet Empire and the collapse of COMECOM trade arrangements led to a sharp deterioration of the Russian economy. East and Southeast Asian economies such as those of Afghanistan, Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, North Korea, and Vietnam are not part of resurgent Asia. In the 1980s, the debt crisis took a terrible toll in Latin America, and growth in the 1990s has been disappointing, about 0.3 per cent per capita for the entire period 1980–1999. Africa with 13 per cent of the world population and only 3 per cent of the world's GDP is the worst case. Three-quarters of Africa's population belongs to a group of nations where per capita income peaked in 1980. By 1998 it had fallen one-quarter. To understand territorial differences in participation in the world economy (and in internet access) and the productivity trends among workers, we must gain a more long-term perspective – we must turn to history, and we must structure our historical studies so as to capture differences that are produced by trading and electronic networks that run across nations but do not coincide with national boundaries.[36]

In fact, it is history, comparative transnational history, that is missing from many contemporary accounts of globalization. Without investigation, too many sociologists and political scientists simply assume that revolutions in communication and transportation, rapid market expansion, and extensive crossborder contacts are a unique feature of the late

34. Frederick Cooper, "What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective", *African Affairs*, 100 (2001), pp. 189–213.
35. Maddison, *The World Economy*, pp. 142–149, 129.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 149–167.

twentieth-century modern world. Large-scale, territorially far-reaching processes are nothing new. From the departure of *homo sapiens* from Africa several hundred thousand years ago to the spread of farming across the Eurasian plain some ten to six thousand years ago, transcontinental contacts have been crucial for the human population of our globe. What is relatively new is not transnational processes, but rather modern states' claim to self-sufficiency, integrity, and independence within an all-encompassing state system.

Since the seventeenth century, the insistence of states in Europe, and in a growing portion of the world, on their self-reliance and inner direction in a world of states has created a sense of the transnational as anomalous. Labeling the "global" as uniquely contemporary has allowed many scholars to dust off a tattered modernization theory and repackage it as "globalization". If historians must reject globalization theorists' claims that revolutions in transportation and communication, altered conceptions of territoriality, and rapid market expansion are distinctive features of the present age, they should not adopt an equally ahistorical view that nothing has changed. Over the last decades, markets have expanded over much of the world, and electronic forms of communication have greatly facilitated human intercourse. Transnational labor historians do not deny changes in the frequency of border crossings in much of the world, but locate these changes in a larger perspective.

Insisting on the historicity of transnational labor processes involves structured comparison, identifying and comparing past eras of transportation and communication revolution and market expansion with the current period, indicating similarities and differences. Further, labor historians studying relationships between processes must also be prepared to look for counterprocesses. Indeed, the modern global economy exhibits many localizing, nationalizing, and regionalizing trends.

At a time when western and central Europeans are strengthening and enlarging the European Union, much of the territory of the old USSR has been broken up into independent states, often states with large and fearful national minorities. While some European workers and trade unions are orienting their protests towards Brussels and the EU, the vast majority of labor movements oppose their governments' negotiations with international institutions such as the World Bank or the IMF in the name of defending a threatened national sovereignty.[37] While the coastal regions of China are beginning to play an important role in international manufacturing and commerce, in large parts of Africa small farmers are avoiding predatory states by refusing to send commodities to market and turning

37. Sidney Tarrow, "Fishnets, Internets, and Catnets; Globalization and Transnational Collective Action", in Michael Hanagan, Leslie Page Moch, and Wayne te Brake (eds), *Challenging Authority: The Historical Study of Contentious Politics* (Minneapolis, MN, 1999), pp. 228–244.

towards agricultural self-sufficiency. The failure to consider relationships between processes, including processes working in opposite directions, contributes to the impression that transnational processes are unilinear and irreversible, and greatly encourages visions of a transnational juggernaut.

Using comparative analysis, historians need to remind their colleagues in the social sciences that dramatic expansions of transnational exchange are not new. Such assertions need not involve endorsing any of the wave theories or world systems analyses current in contemporary economic or sociological literature. Kondratief waves continue to intrigue historians and economists, but still lack plausible explanatory mechanisms. Despite their advocacy by scholars of the caliber of Jonathan Friedman and André Gunder Frank, cyclical theories of human interaction, that find regular waves of human activity over the last 5,000 years, remain poorly documented and immensely implausible.[38] Like globalization theory, such explanations seem more like efforts to escape from the contingencies and varied contexts of the past than serious attempts to understand its complexity. So far, single-factor explanations for the expansion of transnational processes over large periods within large regions of the world have not proved convincing.

Nor need transnational labor history search to attach itself to a new master narrative for labor history, based on general theories and timeless laws. Attempts to identify laws of development that obtain over continents and centuries may have proved fruitful in the past but today seem largely played out. Even impressive efforts analytically to identify global movements, such as world-system theory, have long suffered from over-generalization, a tendency to place disparate cases in a single abstract category (such as "the periphery"), and a Eurocentrism that has ignored enormous networks of economic activity in thirteenth-century central Asia and eighteenth-century China.[39] Still, world systems theorists' ability to innovate should not be underestimated. Beverly Silver's important new work on *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization since 1870* uses world systems theory flexibly and centers its attention on East Asia.[40]

Instead of committing our research to comparisons dictated by Kondratief, or other advocates of long-term cycles, it may be more fruitful to craft comparisons with specific questions in mind. If the effect

38. Jonathan Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Process* (London, 1994); André Gunder Frank and Barry Gills, *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand* (New York, 1996).

39. Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System AD 1250–1350* (New York, 1989); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ, 2000).

40. Beverly J. Silver, *The Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Gobalization since 1870* (Cambridge, 2003).

of communications and transportation revolutions on labor movements is what interests us, it might be useful to follow the example of Ewa Morawska and Wilfried Spohn and compare the era of modern transnational labor, from 1945 to today, with the period of the Second Industrial Revolution, from 1870 to 1913.[41]

Certainly the years of the Second Industrial Revolution, the era of cheap ocean travel, undersea cables, daily mass newspapers, and radio, underwent a dramatic transportation and communication revolution – what David Harvey has referred to as a period of "time–space compression".[42] Those areas of the globe most affected by this economic transformation were the transatlantic world centered on North America, western and central Europe, Brazil and Argentina, as well as the African and Asian possessions of the great colonial powers. In many ways, during the years of the Second Industrial Revolution, market expansion and the flow of capital to poorer areas of the world were dramatic; even in 1998 the ratio of foreign capital to GDP in low-income countries was only two-thirds of its 1914 level.[43] International organizations regulating trade and commerce, along with flourishing transatlantic social-reform movements, characterized the years of the Second Industrial Revolution.[44] Large regions of the Atlantic world, the northeastern and midwestern US, the eastern coast of South America, western and central Europe, south and southeast Asia, and south Africa were involved in a vast labor-market expansion. The wave of imperialism that culminated in the division of Africa in 1885 also witnessed an increase of transnational European and American expansion, although colonial regimes often closed off contact along old borders and with rival states.

As with globalization today, many in the era of the Second Industrial Revolution believed that internationalism, as globalization was then styled, represented an irreversible tide. From Herbert Spencer, to Sir Norman Angell, to Karl Kautsky, scholars of the era of the Second Industrial Revolution believed in the inexorable triumph of internationalism. But recent works by Daniel Rodgers, Leila Roup, and Carl Strikwerda remind us of the strong transnationalist forces in Europe that

41. Ewa Morawska and Wilfried Spohn, "Moving Europeans in the Globalizing World: Contemporary Migrations in a Historical Comparative Perspective (1955–1994 v. 1870–1914)", in Wang Gungwu (ed.), *Global History and Migrations* (Boulder, CO, 1997), pp. 23–62. See also Mark Wyman, *Round Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880–1930* (Ithaca, NY, 1993).
42. David Harvey, *The Condition of Post-Modernity* (Oxford, 1989).
43. See Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalization in Question*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1999); and Timothy J. Hatton and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *The Age of Mass Migration: Causes and Economic Impact* (Oxford, 1998).
44. Craig N. Murphy, *International Organization and Industrial Change: Global Governance since 1850* (New York, 1994).

were the basis for early twentieth-century optimism.[45] The early years of the Second Industrial Revolution, as today, witnessed dramatic conflicts between groups favoring nationalism and protectionism and forces favoring market expansion and transnational political institutions. Ironically, the unchecked, unregulated character of market expansion may well have contributed to the triumph of nationalism. Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson argue that loosely restricted labor migration and the expansion of free trade adversely affected the wages of less skilled workers and small business in much of western Europe and the US; the result was a popular backlash that helped to end internationalist dominance.[46]

By using structured comparisons, transnational labor history enlarges the terrain for considering modern problems and evaluating current trends. A geographically-bounded, historically-rooted concept of transnationalism can provide a more comprehensive view of labor's place in the modern world. In comparisons with past periods of heightened transnational activity, historians should also consider nationalizing, regionalizing, and localizing trends. Historians who compare the present transnationalizing wave with that of the last will surely be suspicious of the dead certainty of so many globalization theorists that they ride the wave of the future, especially in light of their failure to consider alternatives. We have seen this before.

CONCLUSION

Through the use of structured comparisons, transnational labor history can provide a valuable perspective on debates over globalization. It can encourage labor historians to follow research questions where they lead and not to terminate their research at the first customs barrier they encounter. Pursuing processes across borders, they enter the field of transnational labor history, a strange territory where borders and their characteristics can function in unexpected ways. Processes, borders, and structured comparisons may be useful tools for exploring the field of transnational labor history. In the end, though, they are only tools, and their value depends upon what they yield when skillfully employed.

45. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA 1998); Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ, 1997); Carl Strikwerda, "Reinterpreting the History of European Integration: Business, Labor, and Social Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Europe", in Jytte Klausen and Louise A. Tilly (eds), *European Integration in Social and Historical Perspective, 1850 to the Present* (Lanham, MD, 1997), pp. 51–70; and *idem*, "The Troubled Origins of European Economic Integration: International Iron and Steel and Labor Migration in the Era of World War I", *American Historical Review*, 103 (1998), pp. 1106–1142.
46. Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).