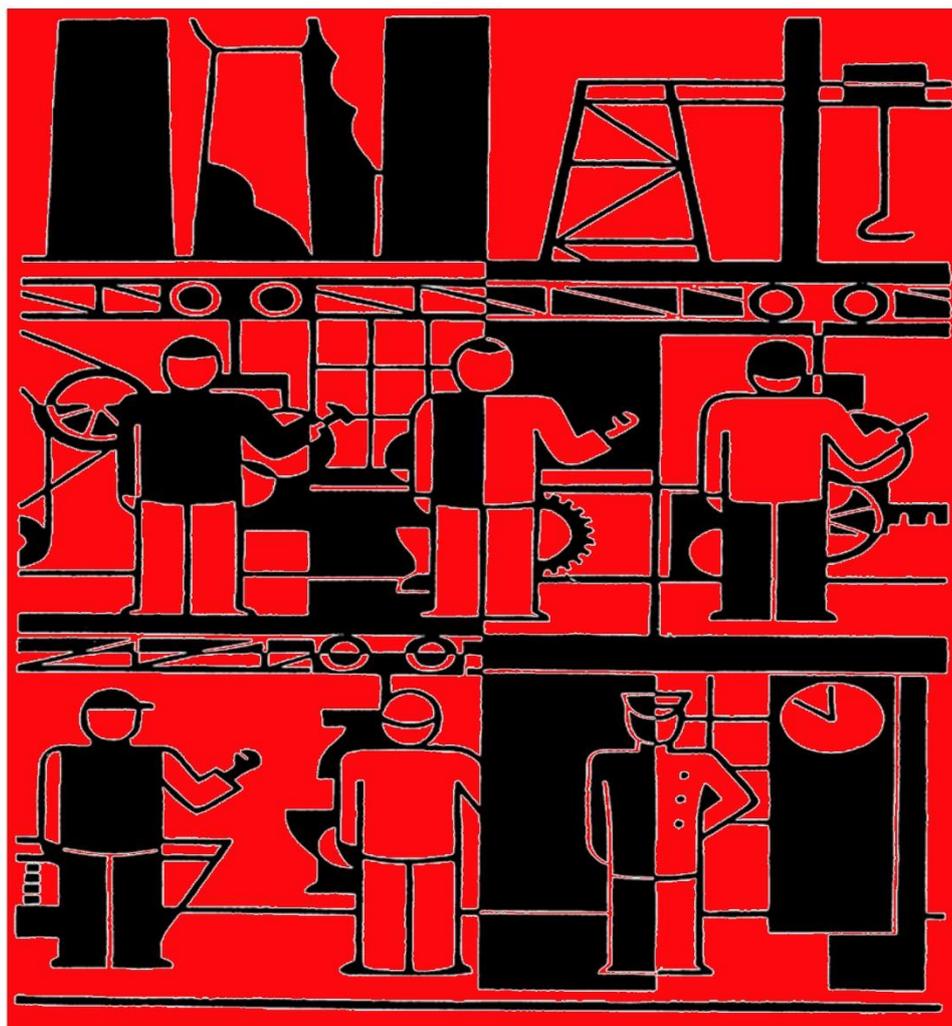


INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

THE HIDDEN ABODES OF PRODUCTION

LABOUR, COMMODITIES, AND REPERTOIRES OF EVALUATIONS
IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES



UNIVERSITY OF ANTWERP

ANTWERP, 19 - 20 FEBRUARY 2015

THE HIDDEN ABODES OF PRODUCTION

LABOUR, COMMODITIES AND REPERTOIRES OF EVALUATION IN THE EUROPEAN EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

Indifference towards any specific kind of labour presupposes a very developed totality of real kinds of labour, of which no single one is any longer predominant. As a rule, the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete development, where one thing appears as common to many, to all. – Karl Marx

Research and debate on workers' alienation and estrangement during the industrial revolutions has in its heydays in the 1970s and 1980s predominantly focused on technological, organizational and managerial transformations. From a Marxist point of view, the loss of control over the means of production and the division of labour remained the fulcrum around which alienation could be explained in a setting of disciplinary practises and deskilling processes. Harry Braverman drew on his long experiences as a factory worker to explain the long-term tendency of homogenisation of labour in the execution of industrial production. His work *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974) caused heated debates among labour historians, political economists and sociologists. Subsequently, discussions during the 'cultural turn' have helped to appreciate the importance and relative autonomy of perceptions of and discourses on labour - whether from outside or from the workers themselves. E.P. Thompson brought the workers' agency in the production process to light, and emphasized the importance of extra-economic elements in the transformation of concrete labour into labour power - i.e., moral conventions, social status, community ties. Nonetheless, theoretical debates on alienation and commodity fetishism notwithstanding, historians have refrained from examining the practical and at the same time imagined and discursive connections which artisans and workers forged with raw material and the products of their labour. How did the relationship of artisans and workers with their materials and products change during periods of economic transformation?

The organisers of this conference intend to enter that terra incognita by studying the importance of cultural practices and repertoires of evaluation in material processes of production and the construction of product value. To that end, labour will be related to every day practices on the shop floor, political discourses on labour skills and product values, the changing conditions of the workplace, and changing relations, practices and sources of power.

This conference attempts to adopt a comparative angle between European regions. Doing so, this angle can promote further de-limitations of heterodox, integrative approaches:

- a. the perception of labour skills and the assessment and construction of product values;
- b. the repertoires of evaluation concerning the relation between labour and the exchangeable commodity;
- c. different forms of alienation and microphysical relations of power and conventions in the putting-out networks, manufactures and factories during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries;
- d. continuities and changes in the political discourse on labour processes and institutional reforms.

PRACTICALITIES

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

General arrangements:

- A. There are no registration fees for this conference.
- B. Hotel reservations including breakfast will be made and paid in advance for all participants. Please mail your preferred check-in and check-out date before **11/15/2014**. Choices are between 2 nights (Thursday night and Friday night, 19/20 February) or 3 nights (from Wednesday night to Friday night, 18/19/20 February). Therewith we will mail the name and address of the hotel.
- C. Transportation expenses will not be reimbursed for participants. Key note lecturers and co-hosting participants have been exempted from this arrangement: please mail your plane and/or train tickets as soon as possible. Reimbursement happens when the conference organisers are in receipt of your documents. All participants are responsible for making their transportation arrangements.
- D. Lunches, reception, and evening dinner are by the courtesy of the organising institutions.

Travel advice:

- A. U.S. citizens traveling for business can apply to enter Belgium without a visa. Your passport must be valid for at least three months beyond your intended date of departure from Belgium. Visa and Mastercard are the most commonly used credit cards. Only the Euro currency has been accepted as the means for cash payments.
- B. Please inquire from which Belgian airport your airline holding company operates. Brussels National Airport is located in Zaventem nearby Brussels. Brussels South Airport is in fact located in Charleroi, a city 65 kilometres south from Brussels. When planning your itinerary from Brussels National Airport to Antwerp, travelling by train is recommended (the railway station is situated below the airport). Each hour the National Railway Company of Belgium provides you three intercity connections between Brussels National Airport railway station to Antwerp Central railway station (5.40 a.m. to 11.40 p.m.). Duration: 30 minutes. Brussels South Airport does not have a railway station. You are obliged to use a shuttle bus to Brussels Central railway station before taking the train to Antwerp Central railway station. Duration of shuttle bus: one hour. Train duration: 45 minutes. It is not advisable to hail a taxicab for intercity purposes due to high fares and rates. Within the city perimeter the average fare will be approximately 15 to 20 euro (20 to 25 dollar).
- C. February is a cold winter month. Do not forget to include winter clothing inside your luggage.

CONFERENCE GUESTS

General arrangements:

- A. There are no registration fees for this conference. Guests attending the conference must register before **02/15/2015** by e-mail to jelle.versieren@uantwerpen.be
- B. Lunches and reception are by the courtesy of the organising institutions.

University of Antwerp, Department of History - The Centre for Urban History, City Campus, Grote Kauwenberg 18, 2000 Antwerp, Belgium, www.uantwerpen.be/en/rg/csg

Thursday, February 19 (City Campus, Hof van Liere)

12.00-14.00 Welcoming lunch and registration (participants and guests)

14.00-14.15 Opening Speech: **Bert De Munck** (University of Antwerp)

14.15-15.15 **Key note lecture: Richard Biernacki** (UC San Diego)

Labor Practices in the Abode of Production as Repertoires for Intercourse

15.15-16.00 **Leonard Rosenband** (Utah State University)

Always Industrious: A Shopfloor Perspective on Early Modern European Paperworkers

16.00-16.30 Afternoon break

16.30-17.15 **Thomas Max Safley** (University of Pennsylvania)

Mercury and Miners between Markets and Monopoly: The Political Economy of Strategic Metal Production in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

17.15-19.00 Evening Reception (participants and guests)

Friday, February 20 (City Campus, Hof van Liere)

10.00-10.30 Welcoming coffee

10.30-11.15 **Ad Knotter** (Maastricht University)

Trade Unionism, Labour Organization, and Labour Markets: Comparisons between the Belgian and American Flat Glass Industry and the Amsterdam Diamond Industry in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

11.15-12.00 **Sabine Rudischhauser** (Zentrum Marc Bloch/Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Collective Bargaining as Repertoires of Product Evaluation. Changing Perceptions of Labour in Systems of Flexible Production in France and Germany

12.00-13.30 Lunch (participants and guests)

13.30-14.15 **Jelle Versieren** (University of Antwerp)

Capitalism between Formal and Real Subsumption: Repertoires of Labour, Accountancy, Technology, and Wage Formations in the Dutch Ceramic and Glass Industry (1840-1900)

14.15-15.00 **Christos Andrianopoulos** (University Paris Ouest Nanterre la Défense)

Realising the Social Character of Labour: Labour, Work, and Production according to Louis Blanc's Organisation of Labour

15.00-15.30 Afternoon break

15.30-16.15 **Alexander Van Ransbeeck** (Ghent University)

Sharing the Burden: Unfree Plantation Workers and Collective Action in the Kabare Territory (Belgian Congo, 1920-1940)

16.15-16.30 Closing Speech: **Philippe Minard** (Institutions et Dynamiques Historiques de l'Economie et de la Société, Université Paris 8/CNRS, et CRH-EHESS)

18.30- Conference Dinner (participants)

Guests attending the conference must register before 02/15/2015 by sending a mail to jelle.versieren@uantwerpen.be

Organised by:

Bert De Munck, Centre for Urban History, University of Antwerp, Centre for Urban History

Philippe Minard, Institutions et Dynamiques Historiques de l'Economie et de la Société, Université Paris 8/CNRS, et CRH-EHESS

Jelle Versieren, Centre for Urban History, University of Antwerp, Centre for Urban History

Abstracts

Richard Biernacki (UC San Diego)

Labor Practices in the Abode of Production as Repertoires for Intercourse

What is the purpose of retrieving histories of practice from the hidden abode of production? As we know, the young Marx crowned production as key for social theory, but this was not to privilege economic or material elements. More profoundly, the labor activity encapsulated and configured the means by which individuals related to each other in a social whole. For historical researchers this insight supplies an overarching imperative of research. Differences in labor practice anchor correspondingly varying norms for human worth and the faces by which people act as members of a polity. My talk will show how contrasting methods in Germany versus Britain for imagining how labor value is incorporated into products created correspondingly different work practices in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In each of these two cultural regions there were uncannily distinctive methods for treating labor as an exchangeable commodity, methods that surprisingly spanned both manual and intellectual labor. They sustained correspondingly different methods for aligning the personality and character of the worker with the product that circulated in the public sphere. Ultimately this relation between worker and product also aligned the means by which the personality of the producer could be incorporated into the political community.

Leonard Rosenband (Utah State University)

Always Industrious: A Shopfloor Perspective on Early Modern European Paperworkers

Much of the recent debate in early modern European labor and economic history has centered on Jan de Vries's concept of the industrious revolution. Briefly, he claimed that workers during the period 1650-1800 chose to work longer hours, often at greater intensity, in order to consume manufactured goods. Moreover, plebeian families increasingly pursued new employments beyond the household to pay for these objects. As a result, men, women, and children spent ever more hours in waged labor. A virtuous circle took shape, in which rising popular and middle-class demand generated the profits that eased the turn to capital-intensive mechanization.

My work on the history of French and English papermaking raises fundamental challenges to this model. First, paperworkers already labored exhausting hours at the outset of de Vries's period of newfound industriousness. Furthermore, these hours framed precise daily output quotas, incentives for overtime labor, and payments to the workers when conditions prevented the making of paper. In fact, European-wide standards, carefully negotiated between masters and men, left little room for fresh industriousness by the journeymen. These quotas reassured entrepreneurs in search of regular productivity and

workers fearful of exploitation that the familiar day's work remained the order of the day in their trade. And they also reflected the nature of the delicate product itself: masters and workers alike knew that they had to speed up and take their time to turn out quality paper at the expected rate.

Second, the values articulated and defended by the paperworkers rested on their control of the labor market. In order to maintain the worth of their skills, they labored diligently to keep them scarce. Consequently, across Europe, journeymen paperworkers shared elaborate customs that protected their wages as well as their familial and ritual concerns. As tramping men vulnerable to everything from scarcity of rags to droughts that stilled millwheels, the paperworkers had developed regional and even national associations to defend their sense of the bon ordre of their trade. They were not immune to the seductions of new manufactured goods, but they had always fought aggressively to expand their earnings and customs and prevent their bosses from devaluing their work. In doing so, they accepted limited technological change (so long as it did not undermine the value of their skills) and readily made new sorts of paper. But their expectations about productivity and their actual output changed little during de Vries's era of industrious revolution.

Third, women and children had always toiled for wages and food in paper mills. De Vries's claims about newly waged female and adolescent workers did not apply to hand papermaking. Indeed, the great problem with de Vries's vision of an industrious revolution is that it considers the daily, lived experience of production through the lens of wage levels and the goods itemized in probate records. But in papermaking, as in every craft, it is also essential to explore the specific terms of both the work itself and the distinctive features of the product. On the eve of large-scale mechanization, enduring shopfloor realities, skills, and quotas prevented a burst of industriousness beyond the trade's familiar standards. De Vries's virtuous circle remained incomplete. With the demand for paper rising rapidly, the manufacturers' attention turned first to enlarged mills and small technological shifts, and finally, to the development of a papermaking machine.

Thomas Max Safley (University of Pennsylvania)

Mercury and Miners between Markets and Monopoly: The Political Economy of Strategic Metal Production in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

Using business accounts as well as state records my paper would reflect on the changing relationship between market conditions and labor relations during the period of study. Mercury mines are, indeed, a "hidden abode of production." Long neglected as an industrial commodity, mercury enters the sixteenth century as a boutique metal, useful in various smithing and assaying processes as well as the production of luxury pigments. Over the ensuing 150 years it develops into a strategic commodity in several industries, including mirror production and, above all, silver refining. With the introduction of the amalgamation process at mid-century, mercury becomes the key to the production of

monetary silver, a gauge for the growth of the European and global economies, if you will. These developments have an immediate impact on the valuation of labor, relations of power and the conditions of production across Europe and in South America. Hence "Mercury and Miners between Markets and Monopoly" will contribute a discussion of the dynamic relationship between commodity values and labor conditions.

Ad Knotter (Maastricht University)

Trade Unionism, Labour Organization, and Labour Markets: Comparisons between the Belgian and American Flat Glass Industry and the Amsterdam Diamond Industry in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

While research into the development of trade unionism, labour markets and the labour process have become mainstream in social history, the relationship between these developments is still subject of debate. In this paper I show how they mutually influenced each other by comparing developments in the American and Belgian flat glass industry, and the Amsterdam diamond industry. Systems of subcontracting as a form of labour organization in these industries were decisive for the emergence of craft unions in the nineteenth century, who were able to establish labour market control for a (large) elite of workers. Technological and institutional developments caused the demise of subcontracting, a crisis of established craft unions, a rearrangement of labour relations, and the emergence of industrial unions in the twentieth century. The comparison will show that developments were similar, but had a different time frame in all three cases. This is the more interesting as there were many relationships between the American and Belgian flat glass industries, primarily because of migration of Belgian flat glass workers to the US.

Sabine Rudischhauser (Zentrum Marc Bloch/Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Collective Bargaining as Repertoires of Product Evaluation. Changing Perceptions of Labour in Systems of Flexible Production in France and Germany

At the end of the nineteenth-century, social scientists and social reformers in France and Germany, following the doctrine elaborated by the Webbs, perceived labour in putting-out systems as an archaic form of (self-) exploitation, to be superseded by wage labour in modern factories, and by collective bargaining on labour conditions and wages. At the same time, skilled workers in putting-out systems manufacturing high value products for international markets, like the cutlery makers of Solingen, the linen weavers of Cholet and the cambric weavers of the Cambresis, fought to defend a specific system of collective bargaining, negotiating not only the price of the product, but also the quality required, determining which product deserved to bear the trade mark. Production in these three industrial districts was regulated by the same type of collective agreement and the

same forms of control, hidden or incomprehensible to most outsiders, whether officials from trade union federations, politicians or scholars. Based on the analysis of the agreements themselves, of the proceedings of negotiating bodies, of jurisprudence and the contemporary literature on collective bargaining, my contribution will show how these system of collective bargaining worked, and how these agreements on products, quality and prices were disqualified as mere tariffs and excluded from legal construction of industrial relations. The contribution will also consider the effects of outsiders' perceptions of labour on the economic transformation of systems of flexible production, changes in power relations and bargaining systems.

Jelle Versieren (University of Antwerp)

Capitalism between Formal and Real Subsumption: Repertoires of Labour, Accountancy, Technology, and Wage Formations in the Dutch Ceramic and Glass Industry (1840-1900)

This paper, meant as a preliminary and conjectural dissection of the production and labour processes in the ceramics industry – in lesser extent the glass tableware industry, focuses on two international renowned Maastricht based firms: the Petrus Regout firm (1834-1899), later renamed as the Sphinx factory (1899–2009), and Société Céramique (1863–1958), formally known as Clermont en Chainaye (1851–1863).

Compared to the economic transformations of Great Britain, Belgium, and the northern French regions, the Dutch advent of capitalism as a dominant mode of production dallied for decades until the decisive turning point of the 1890s. Between the abolishment of the corporative regime of guild regulations and the rise of modern industry, small-scale workshops - spatially scattered and dispersed throughout the country - and rentier activities of the financial and trade sectors - pertaining in the western old marketplace cities and metropolitan areas - generated a modest growth rate. As in pre-modern times, the hinterland of these cities was directly appurtenant to the general fluctuations of urban demand

Maastricht, erstwhile a semi-peripheral medium-sized town in the underdeveloped south-eastern part of the country, could perhaps be designated as the precursory example of modern industry. Together with significant technological changes in the metallurgic industries in the southern provinces of Gelderland and Brabant, the establishment of two ceramic firms in Maastricht resulted in a precipitous shift in the sectorial configuration of the national economy. With good reason economic historians called this city the birthplace of Dutch capitalism.

The short presentation on Marx's concepts of formal and real subsumption has the purpose to be a device of elucidation of a sample of my ongoing research. Marx's concepts of formal and real subsumption are frequently used to explain the social and technical changes of the labour and production process in the European transitions toward capitalism. Most social and economic historiographers apply his conceptual apparatus to ground their narrative of a linear break-down of handicraft production and

the feudal customary conceptions of property and the rise of capitalist relations of production by merchant capital and/or the rural bourgeoisie and commerce-oriented landed aristocracy. Within this framework, the structural occurrence of formal subsumption of labour under capital is the result of pre-existent social presuppositions within a commercialised late-feudal society. Formal subsumption is a moment of transformation leading towards an actual expanding capitalist mode of production; a transitional historical phenomenon produced by a general set of social contradictions which led to bourgeois social formations and the industrial factory system.

Marx's elucidations of formal subsumption both divides and connects conceptual and historical lines of reasoning. From an historical ex-post point of view, formal subsumption is the first step of the concrete production process towards a dominant and universalised capitalist mode of production and the transformation of labour as labour power – real subsumption. When considering the dialectic of capital as an actuality - a fully developed abstract totality grounded in the mediated concreteness of social processes - formal subsumption appears to be necessity which former contingency can be derived from. But without this capitalist dialectic actuality, the result of a negation of a negation, formal subsumption is solely one of the many parts of a pre-modern society. It cannot function as a posited presupposition of the dialectic totality to come. In historical terms, formal subsumption is a historical phenomenon of a commercialized pre-modern society. Furthermore, labour performance characterized by formal subsumption can still take place within modern factory walls as articulated with real subsumption processes.

My focus will be firmly on the relationship between economic personhood, his concrete labour process, and the product of labour. I will empirically test the impact of product characteristics and the technicalities of the labour process onto the conception of labour and the processes of subsumption. In so doing, I will analyse the role of changing product forms and their cultural and economic values, although set against other possible causal factors, such as the changing competitive environment and relative prices, changing labour relations and supplies of workforce, the introduction of new technologies, new managerial styles and techniques, and altering bookkeeping techniques.

Christos Andrianopoulos (University Paris Ouest Nanterre la Défense)

Realising the Social Character of Labour: Labour, Work, and Production according to Louis Blanc's' Organisation of Labour

The character of labour work has been a large issue among the utopian socialists and radical republicans during the mid-nineteenth century. The opinions variate from the bourgeois perception of a simple step of the production process to the worker's slogan 'Live working or die fighting'.

Despite the fact that the material and partly the theoretical bases of the solution of the workers misère can be detected already in the beginning of the decade of 1830, the

lack of a solid theory combining workers' experience and economical solutions is clear both in the world of the ateliers and the progressive bourgeoisie. Louis Blanc's masterpiece, 'The organisation of labour', offered a perfect opportunity for a multilevel synthesis : theoretical (combining Saint-simonian principles and concrete worker's demands), political (combining radical solutions and republican perspective) and historical (as it combines –perhaps temporarily – the libertarian traditions of the French revolution and the underground violent claims of the workers mouvement).

From this theoretical experiment emerges a new way to apprehend politics and social phenomena. 'The organisation of labour' becomes a largely debated idea generation during 1840 a profound transformation of the very concept of labour, which in many ways reminds us the early (and even the mature) Marx. According to the defenders of the organisation of labour, labour is a social good which belongs to workers as a divine gift. The misery of the working class is due to the deprivation of the means of production. From the early 1840's, 'the organisation of labour' becomes more and more attractive to handicraft workers, as it raises constantly the question of work conditions offering at the same time the opportunity for reflections about its future during the eve of the revolution of 1848.

However, the 'organisation of labour' is not a solid theoretical framework, the multitude of the republicans' pamphlets published and circulated during that period, reveals an intense theoretical ferment about the question of labour. The variety of connotations of the enfranchisement (emancipation) of labour is in fact quite large: a progressive way out of the economic crisis, the fraternal unification of society and even a republican path for the 'worker's republic'. Whatever its original meaning, 'labour' became the quintessential of the political consensus. Hereinafter, dealing with the 'social issue' is inextricably linked with a profound reflection about the use of labour and a critique of the anarchy of the liberal productivity.

In this paper will be examined the terms used to describe labour in the social discourse, the propositions for its 'emancipation', together with the relations between labour and production. The analysis shall further deepen into the concepts of workers' solidarity, critique of liberalism and original initiatives such as the ateliers sociaux. The main material shall consist of the republican press and pamphlets related to the 'organisation of labour' during the period 1840-1848.

Alexander Van Ransbeeck (Ghent University)

Sharing the Burden: Unfree Plantation Workers and Collective Action in the Kabare Territory (Belgian Congo, 1920-1940)

It was not until after the First World War that the first colonists arrived in the Kivu region in the Belgian Congo. Especially from the second half of the 1920s, the number of colonists grew in the Kabare Territory, which was part of the Kivu District and surrounded the city of Bukavu. Attracted by the fertile grounds, these colonists set up coffee plantations. But the Kabare Territory, more or less covering the region inhabited

by the Bashi, also had a high population density and, as a consequence, a potentially large labour reservoir.

In this paper I examine the creation of an unfree labour market in the Kabare Territory from 1920 until 1940 from a reinvigorated 'mode of production'-perspective (see Meillassoux, 1992 [1975]; Harvey, 2003). I discuss how the labour power of the local Bashi was commodified. Special attention will be given to extra-economic measures, as part of processes of primitive accumulation (see Marx, 1990 [1867]; Perelman, 2000; Harvey, 2003; Brass, 2010; Meillassoux, 1992 [1975]). I argue that primitive accumulation in the region gave rise to a transfer of labour power from a non-capitalist mode of production to the capitalist mode of production and its coffee plantations in the Kabare Territory. The labour force consisted of locally recruited, unfree, temporary wage labourers who migrated between modes of production.

Despite the collaboration between the colonists, the colonial administration and the Bashi elite, each of these actors had their own particular interests, and the plantation workers also defended theirs. Conflicting interests would further shape the labour market, the production process at the coffee plantations, and the reactions of the workers. In the period under investigation in this paper, plantation workers responded in several ways to their working conditions or to their employment in general. I investigate the reaction of the workers that was the most effective: collective action (see van der Linden, 2008; Bashizi, 1978) whereby workers replaced each other, using the same identity, making it impossible for the colonial government and the employers to control these workers. I make the case that workers responded by reducing their working hours because they saw wage labour as forced labour – i.e., as an extra tribute (in this case: a tribute in labour) for the chiefs who sent them to the plantations.

By way of conclusion I further analyse the consequences of this form of collective action for the labour market, and to what extent the replacement system had a class character and combined elements from both the non-capitalist and the capitalist mode of production.