Work/labour

JASMINE FOLZ, *University of Manchester*
RACHEL SMITH, *University of Aberdeen*

Most of our lives are spent working, as we frequently engage in purposeful activity to build and maintain our physical and social worlds. The anthropology of work and labour provides a comparative perspective on how people make a living within their natural and social environments, while bringing into focus how people everywhere are interconnected and impacted through global historical processes. Its history and theoretical purchase have been shaped by theoretical shifts within the discipline and by wider political-economic transformations. This overview traces these shifts and begins by discussing how early ethnographic fieldwork helped to overturn Eurocentric assumptions about work. The anthropology of work and labour helped criticize theories of social evolution, but in the process, it often excluded the impacts of colonialism and capitalism on people’s lives. It also developed the idea of the division of labour to understand and critique how different forms of labour are allocated and valorised. From the mid-twentieth century, anthropologists increasingly developed a critical perspective on capitalism, its alternatives, and its consequences. A major contribution of the anthropology of work and labour is that it elucidated perspectives and experiences of people in the peripheries and margins of capitalism. Research into work in industrial centres has clarified the ways in which industrial processes have played out in different regions and political-economic contexts as well as how power is accrued and maintained by elites and professionals. The entry concludes by highlighting key anthropological contributions to understandings of work and labour during the contemporary era, often referred to as ‘late capitalism’.

Introduction

What is considered ‘work’ or not work (play, leisure) varies culturally and historically, and may not be separable as a discrete domain vis-à-vis domestic life, ritual, and religion (Applebaum 1992; Wallmann 1979; Gamst 1995). If a corresponding term for ‘work’ is identifiable, it may carve out a different sphere of human activity from that denoted in English, or be accorded different kinds of value(s) (e.g. Povinelli 1993; Strathern 1982). While definitions of work differ historically and cross-culturally, everywhere activities that could be described as work or labour are frequent and socially necessary domains of human[1] activity. Consequently, attention to work and labour is important and useful for comparative purposes, and for thinking through how people are interconnected across the globe (Narotzky 2018).

In the English language, the terms ‘labour’ and ‘work’ are often interchangeable, but they also carry different connotations. ‘Work’ tends to cover a more diverse range of purposeful activities including gainful employment, voluntary and community service, crafts and creative activities, domestic and subsistence tasks. ‘Labour’, by contrast, more often describes physical toil, performed out of necessity, coercion, or domination (Gamst 1995; Wallman 1979, 1). It can be argued that anthropology reflects the same divergent

 ISSN 2398-516X

tendencies in the differential valorisation of work and labour. While anthropology of work has often encompassed a wide variety of ways in which people transform social and natural environments and the meanings and values they accord to these activities, the term 'labour' has more often been used by anthropologists influenced by the writings of Karl Marx who interrogate work through the lens of labour exploitation and class struggle.

The anthropology of work and labour as an organised subdiscipline can be traced from the late 1970s, with themed publications (e.g. Burawoy 1979a; Nash and Fernandez Kelly 1983; Wallman 1979), and the founding of the Society for the Anthropology of Work in 1980, which publishes the *Anthropology of Work Review*. Interest in work and labour waned through the 1990s and early 2000s, as part of a 'postmodern turn' in anthropology which distanced itself from Marxian concepts such as labour, class, and capitalism. However, there has been a resurgence in recent years. In 2018, the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) 'Anthropology of Labour Network' was established, and since then there has been a proliferation of publications on work and labour (e.g. Graeber 2018; Harvey and Krohn-Hansen 2018; Kasmir and Gill 2022; Lazar 2023).

This overview approaches the anthropology of work and labour by tracing how it has responded to shifting political and economic contexts and disciplinary concerns. The entry first examines how anthropologists have situated work within a comparative study of different cultures and societies. It then discusses how the division of labour is a useful comparative frame to understand how different forms of work are allocated and valorised differently across sociocultural contexts. Subsequent sections discuss how ethnographic studies have elucidated the expansion of capitalism, its uneven effects, and on-going transformations. These sections highlight that the anthropology of work can reveal the often-neglected lived experiences of people on the frontiers and margins of capitalism. The entry then explores how industrialisation gave rise to profound global shifts in forms of work and labour relations, but also wrought vast socioeconomic consequences. It concludes with a discussion of renewed interest in the on-going transformations, meanings, and values of work in contemporary life in the context of late capitalism.

Foundational approaches

Early anthropology tended to focus on questions of work and livelihood in what is often termed 'preindustrial' or 'non-market' societies. In the nineteenth century, anthropologists and ethnologists such as Lewis Henry Morgan and Herbert Spencer propounded theories of social evolution. They often focussed on technological developments as a way of classifying societies into stages and ranking them from a 'primitive' original state through to 'civilised' (read: white, European) societies. The emphasis was less on work as a social process and more on technological and material differences as evidence of social evolution.

 ISSN 2398-516X

The early twentieth century saw a shift away from this evolutionary emphasis on material technology, as well as conjectures about the origins of man, to a focus on empirical field research. Franz Boas developed the theory of Historical Particularism[2] as a critique of social evolution theories. Bronislaw Malinowski (1925) also derided the emphasis on material culture of nineteenth-century ethnologists. Contrary to their assumptions he showed that labour in small-scale societies (deemed 'primitive labour' at the time) was neither unorganized nor lacking in sophistication. Malinowski argued instead that work should be understood as part of an integrated social system, regulated by gender, kinship, and ritual norms and roles. He was deeply interested in the question, 'what motivates people to undergo often arduous unpleasant periods of labour?' (1925, 927); a question he inherited from a long-standing German intellectual tradition (Hann 2021; Spittler 2008; Smith 2024). This interest would culminate in his two volume book *Coral Gardens and their magic* ([1935] 1965), which provided a detailed account of early 20th century Trobriand agricultural methods. The book continues to be influential, illustrating that even seemingly simple forms of agriculture do not follow automatically from peoples' ecological conditions. Instead, it highlights that people's work is deeply influenced by local politics and customs, as well as understandings of magic and kinship. Malinowski's student, Audrey Richards, was also a key early figure in the anthropology of work, publishing two books on the subject. She initially theorised that 'biological instincts', especially hunger, were key drivers for work (1932; see 1939, viii). However, she would later overturn her ideas and argue that custom and institutions shape incentives to work, which in turn influence diet and appetite (1939).

Even when questions of work were not the main focus of ethnographies, they often described in great detail how a given society organised its social and material resources to meet its needs. This is true for 'functionalist' and 'structural-functionalist' works, i.e. works which ask how individuals and social institutions allow people to meet their needs, including how they maintain social cohesion. For instance, Edward Evans-Pritchard provided a detailed account of cattle-rearing practices among the Nuer in Sudan during the 1930s. He suggested that the Nuer's social and political system at the time could only be understood in relation to their prevailing mode of livelihood, and relationship with their environment (1940, 4). The Nuer, Evans-Pritchard argued, depended on cattle for many of life's necessities, and their love of cattle and desire to acquire them shaped not just their work, but also their relations with neighbouring peoples, their ritual lives, and their understandings of personhood.

The early twentieth century saw a theoretical shift from evolutionary to more comparative and relativist anthropological analyses. Yet, a lingering underlying assumption that societies could be ordered according to their predominant mode of livelihood persisted. It often implied a transition from hunter-gather or foraging societies, to farming and agriculture, and finally a 'modern' industrial society, based on waged employment. Proponents of cultural ecology and neo-evolutionary theories of culture in mid-century American anthropology offered materialist explanations for cultural change (e.g. Steward 1955; White 1943). They emphasised how labour and technology are applied to exploit a given environment. While

 ISSN 2398-516X

neither of these theories survived the test of time intact, their materialism significantly influenced later generations of anthropologists who relied more explicitly on the work of Marx. Following Marx, these studies held that economic, material, and technological relations could determine how work was organized, and classified societies accordingly, for example into being pre-capitalist, feudal, capitalist or communist (Bruun and Wahlberg 2022).

The debates which animated early anthropological theorising about work and labour are on-going, and anthropologists continue to dispel the common assumption that modes of subsistence and division of labour can be ordered into progressive temporal stages. For instance, the proposition that technological developments led to less time spent on production would be challenged by the much-debated argument that hunter-gatherers were in fact more 'time affluent' than people of modern industrial societies (Sahlins' ([1972] 1976; Bird-David 1982; Kaplan 2000). Anthropologists have also argued that there may be no universal trajectory from farm-based or otherwise 'traditional' livelihoods into a seemingly natural endpoint of salaried wage labour. They came to this conclusion by documenting the rise and importance of 'informal' and highly precarious jobs around the world over the past decades (Ferguson and Li 2018). In working with archaeologists, anthropologists have also shown that human freedom and creativity may be the governing features of socio-cultural change, rather than access to land and calories (e.g. Graeber and Wengrow 2021). Recent publications continue to emphasise anthropology's potential for highlighting and critiquing the frequently Eurocentric and teleological narratives of progress and development.

While anthropology has successfully challenged many grand but often stereotypical narratives, such as the assumption that hunter gatherers are locked into a primordial 'struggle for existence', anthropologist David Graeber and archaeologist David Wengrow (2021, 136-7) warn us that we must take care not to present a romanticised visions of small scale societies instead. Doing so would equally risk obscuring the wide variety of social structures and livelihoods that human groups such as different foraging societies have chosen. Graeber and Wengrow also suggest that the grand narratives shaped by social evolution theories often serve to present social inequality as natural, or as an inevitable consequence of the transition from foraging to agriculture. They counter that such theories were actually developed as a conservative response to Indigenous critiques of European 'civilisation' and inequality (2021, 5, 61).

Division of labour

The concept of 'division of labour' is salient across economics, sociology, and anthropology. It is also central to debates around egalitarianism and the origins of social inequalities. In anthropology, important discussions around the division of labour include whether there is a 'naturalness' to gender roles, how social cohesion is achieved and if conflict can be avoided, and whether capitalism builds on or supplants prior economic formations, such as processes of racialisation and class formation.

 ISSN 2398-516X

Recurring features of the division of labour include that different tasks are primarily done by one gender, and that women often do work that can be more easily combined with childcare. This idea initially appeared to anthropologists to be one of several cross-cultural universals (e.g. Murdock and Provost 1973; Whyte 1978). However, early analyses of gendered divisions of labour have been criticised for overgeneralising and naturalising social stereotypes (e.g. Anderson et al 2023; Estioko-Griffin and Griffin 1981; Slocum 1975). Moreover, feminist anthropologists have pointed out how important women's domestic work has been to the economy, but how little public value it has been given historically (Ortiz 1994). The gendered division of labour should therefore be treated not so much as a technical allocation but as a form of social and political organisation, which ascribes differing power, prestige, and cultural appropriateness to tasks and products. Arguably, this is also true of the specialisation and allocation of roles according to criteria other than gender, including age, religious or social status, ethnicity, or caste (Wallman 1979, 14-5; e.g. Firth 1939; Parry 1980).

In the early twentieth century, many anthropologists tended to see 'tribal' or 'peasant' societies as relatively homogenous, and the limited division of labour as allocation of complementary roles that contributed towards social cohesion. This resonated with the emphasis by sociologist Emile Durkheim, that a division of labour was conducive to social solidarity. By contrast, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, anthropologists increasingly employed Marxian analyses that emphasised inequality and conflict between those that control the means of production and those that perform the bulk of the labour. A number of analyses have suggested that where capitalist relations of production are not dominant, there is less separation between production and reproduction and between the use-value of goods and their exchange-value, and therefore also less alienation among workers (Taussig 1977; Wallman 1979). For example, among Aymara speaking peasants studied in the Andean Highlands of Bolivia in the 1970s, festive work parties known as *chuqu* were important ways of organizing agricultural work. Such parties complete with delicious meals, drink and music minimized alienation. Instead, they enabled different households to help each other, and to affirm personhood and the power of community relations (Harris 2007).

However, some anthropologists have also applied Marxian analyses to the gendered division of labour in non-capitalist contexts. Several of them argued that around the world, women tend to do the bulk of productive labour, but men appropriate much of their product for their own profit (e.g. Josephides 1985; Meillassoux 1981). Others cautioned against imposing Marxian frameworks and categories on all societies to analyse gender relations as if they were class based (e.g. Sillitoe 1985). For example, anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1988, 140) suggested that Marxian (and liberal) analyses were based on Eurocentric 'proprietorial' understandings of labour, assuming that labour could be owned and alienated like a commodity. Such assumptions, Strathern argued, did not apply to the Melanesian understandings of work and gender relations that she was familiar with. In Mount Hagen, the Western Highlands province of Papua New Guinea, artifacts of manufacture did not conceal human relations, as Marx had argued. Instead, they

 ISSN 2398-516X

made relations visible, thereby limiting the usefulness of Marxian interpretations in contexts where capitalism is not dominant.

In the same period, feminist anthropologists revisited questions of the gendered division of labour and women's social status under capitalism, frustrated that much prevailing theory was premised on the male, waged industrial worker (Brodkin 1998; Leacock 1986). Some studies focused on how the division of labour changed, especially with respect to gender roles, when rural societies became engaged in commodity production or labour migration (e.g. Guyer 1980; Strathern 1982). While anthropologists often highlighted the role of women's work in the domain of reproduction, some have pointed to how this separation between production and reproduction can be compounded under capitalism, with women especially taking on unwaged domestic labour. But since the 1980s, more studies have focused on how women have been drawn into the workforce, often to perform highly gendered and feminised forms of labour, such as in garment and electronics factories (e.g. Ong 1987; Lynch 2019), tea-picking (e.g. Chatterjee 2001; Jegathesan 2019), and 'pink-collar' office work (Freeman 2000). Often, such studies have found that women's work is systematically devalued in the process.

Under capitalism, production regimes are based on, exploit, and exacerbate forms of social inequalities and differences, not just of gender, but also of race, age, ethnicity, citizenship status, class, as well as differences between people living in the capitalist core compared to those in its periphery (Kasmir and Gill 2022, Mullings 1986). This has long been recognised by anthropologists, who have been interested in how low-status migrants can be treated as surplus populations or cheap, disposable labour reserves (e.g. Richards 1939, 23; Barber and Lem 2018; Meillassoux 1972). With increasing globalisation, such transformations became understood in a world historical context as a shifting 'international division of labour'. Within it, young women in developing countries play a fundamental role (Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983). They are the labour force that drives the integration of global production, consumption and waste disposal processes, as they often constitute the lowest paid segment of those countries that pay the lowest wages.

More recently, anthropologists have highlighted the emergence of a global 'division of reproductive labour', in which care work, including childcare and nursing, and domestic labour are increasingly disproportionately carried out by racialised or migrant women (Parreñas 2012; e.g. Amrith 2010; Barber and Bryan 2012; Gutierrez Garza 2019). The delegation of feminised care and domestic work can be understood within the context of wider socioeconomic shifts. Given that more middle-class women have entered full-time employment, they require cheap labour to take on gendered household and caring work. For Nicole Constable (2009), the rise in migrant care and domestic work is part of a wider 'commodification of intimacy' under globalised capitalism. This draws a relationship between, the commodification of domestic work, and the burgeoning demand for other forms of typically feminised, and transnational labour including sex work and surrogacy.

Frontiers and margins of capitalism

Especially after World War II, it became increasingly difficult for anthropologists to justify studies which focused mostly on 'tribal' and 'traditional' rural societies, treating them as discrete and isolated from wider global political and economic forces. On the other hand, anthropologists' historic interest in peripheral and marginalised peoples have improved our understanding of forms of work and labour that prevail outside of metropolitan and industrialised centres of capital. They have shown how uneven global processes of extraction, dispossession, and exploitation really are. In particular, anthropology has contributed much to understanding capitalism from the perspective of the 'frontier'. It has attended to the displacement and dispossession of local people, often Indigenous people, 'peasants' or smallholders, as they get caught up in the process of capitalism's drive for expansion and accumulation through the appropriation of resources, land, and labour.

The increasing incorporation of many 'tribal' and 'peasant' societies into commodity production and labour regimes required anthropologists to take the impacts of wider political economy into account. While Malinowski's ethnographies obscured the impact of labour migration and commodity production in the Trobriands, his students including Audrey Richards (1939) and Isaac Schapera (1947) foregrounded such impacts in their studies of rural African societies, sharing findings with colonial administrators. Thus, Richards documented how intermittent job opportunities in mines affected Bemba family dynamics in 1930s Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia. Whenever young men took up mining jobs, their fathers-in-law tended to assume more dominant roles in the lives of their married daughters and grandchildren. At the same time, those who remained behind and did not work in the mine had to share a greater amount of agricultural work among one another (Richards 1939, 134). In the 1950s, the more critical 'Manchester School of Social Anthropology' shifted the focus from concerns of breakdown in tradition to new urban and class identity formation in African towns and mining sites, particularly in the Central African Copperbelt. They documented how European ways of life were soon considered prestigious and desirable by local populations (Mitchell and Epstein 1959). However, anthropologists, including Mitchell and Epstein were later critiqued for underplaying the degree to which colonialism imposed white domination and violence on Africans, not just economically, but also politically and culturally (Magubane 1971).

From the mid-twentieth century, and especially the 1970s, the expansion of capitalism into areas previously deemed tribal, subsistence, and peasant economies led to a new interest in how different modes of production intersect. The 1968 protests which included civil rights and anti-war movements, as well as anti-colonial and peasant political movements and revolutions more broadly, incited critical perspectives on colonialism and imperialism (Cooper 1984; Rio and Bertelsen 2018). French structural Marxists pioneered inquiries into how colonial labour regimes thrived when linking with kinship-based modes of production, obtaining cheap labour without incurring the costs of social reproduction (e.g. Meillassoux 1972). Other anthropologists revisited the 'agrarian question': i.e. what happens to farming and peasant economies with

 ISSN 2398-516X

the expansion of capitalism on land and labour frontiers, including the extent to which they are proletarianised, and how they resist these transformations. This period also saw much cross-fertilisation of ideas across disciplines including with History and Subaltern Studies, especially around questions of resistance and class formation (e.g. Hobsbawm 1959; Guha [1983] 1999; Scott 1976). Some applied a world historical lens to modes of production, examining how labour regimes in capitalism's core and periphery are historically linked (Mintz 1978; Wolf 1982). This also allowed them to theorise about the role of slavery in the development of global capitalism. Mintz (1978: 95) for example, studied slavery in the Caribbean historically to show that thinking about work purely in terms of 'modes of production' does not capture its everyday meanings. It also obscures the multiple forms of resistance that slaves employed, and downplays the connections between different forms of labour in any given setting.

This period saw greater interest in previously neglected questions of slavery and unfree labour more generally, including a variety of bonded, forced, and trafficked labour (see Kopytoff 1982). Recent discussions of slavery and unfree labour have highlighted continuities and consequences in the twenty-first century including racialisation and racial capitalism (Pierre 2020; Ralph and Singhal 2019), and the ongoing prevalence of plantation regimes and bonded labour (Besky 2014; Chatterjee 2001; Jegathesan 2019; Li 2017). However, some have argued that we should not see unfree labour as a state of exception. Instead we may want to note how contemporary capitalism continues to depend on varieties of dehumanised, undercompensated, and coerced labour (Calvão 2016). This includes not only modern slavery, people trafficking (Howard and Forin 2019) and child labour (Berlan 2013), but also state-mandated labour migration programmes (Li 2017, Smith 2021), and even wage labour in its ideal form (Graeber 2006).

One reflection of anthropology's historic interest in 'othered' and marginalised peoples has been that a significant portion of its research has been about 'dirty work', that is, work considered physically or socially polluting and stigmatising. Commonly, this includes work associated with death (Parry 1980), waste (Butt 2023; Millar 2018), and sex (Day 2007; Kelly 2008; Montgomery 2001; Shah 2014). This research problematizes ideas of exploitation and agency by attending to the complexities of how such work operates in various levels of legality, social stratification, commodification, and notions of respectability.

Various forms of production and labour regimes continue to exist, especially in the Global South, where so-called 'free' capitalist wage labour regimes are not the norm. Waged, let alone formalised, employment may be a widespread aspiration, but it remains out of reach for most people (Ferguson and Li 2018; e.g. Kauppinen 2021). Keith Hart (1973) proposed the influential concept of the 'informal sector' to describe self-organised work by the urban 'sub-proletariat' in Ghana, as an alternative or supplement to state-bureaucratised wage labour. Thinking of labour as being either formal or informal allows us to realize how scarce regular and non-precarious forms of work really are.

Anthropology's long history of studying people on the peripheries of capitalism emerged in part from a division of labour between anthropology and sociology, with anthropology focusing on 'traditional' societies, leaving questions of bureaucracy and 'professionals' to sociologists. Laura Nader (1972) advised anthropologists interested in how power operates to turn their gaze towards those whose work it is to accrue and wield power. This call to 'study up' tellingly entailed new practical and ethical issues, often putting anthropologists in a position of weakness vis-à-vis their interlocutors. Recent decades have seen a burgeoning anthropological interest in elites and white-collar workers, which will be discussed in more detail in the final section.

Industrial labour

Industrial labour is defined as work performed with technology and production processes that emerged in Europe in the eighteenth century fuelled by colonial expansion. Industrialisation is associated with social changes and geographic shifts from rural regions to urban centres. It has resulted in vast and uneven socioeconomic change, environmental consequences, and led to the rise of management as a discipline. Anthropological attention to industrialisation highlights how workers at global and local levels have shaped and been shaped by state and market forces.

Early management studies shaped how anthropologists approached industrial organisations throughout the twentieth century (Harding 1955). Elton Mayo's Human Relations theory stands out here (Holzberg and Giovanni 1981; Burawoy 1979a). Mayo studied worker productivity at the Hawthorne plant of the Chicago-based Western Electric company in 1927. Influenced by functionalist thinking, Mayo's approach assumed that workers had an inherent need for emotional connection. It thereby emphasised psychological approaches to worker motivation. This had been neglected by Taylorist scientific management, which used 'time and motion' studies to rationalise tasks assigned to individuals as if they were machines. Later anthropologists would criticise Mayo and his followers for assuming harmony in the industrial workplace (Burawoy 1979a). On the one hand, this lack of attention to conflict mirrored the interest of structural-functionalist work in the creation of social cohesion. On the other hand, it may have partially reflected the political economic conditions in American and European industrial centres. From the interwar and postwar period until the 1970s, increased productivity through scientific management techniques and mass production was matched by rising wages and better incentives and conditions for workers. This arrangement, sometimes referred to as 'Fordism', was a phenomenon not much discussed by anthropologists at the time, although it was analysed by Antonio Gramsci as a form of corporate hegemony (Harvey 1989, 126).

From the 1970s, more scholars focussed on the conflict of interest between the managerial class and

 ISSN 2398-516X

workers: how industrial modes of production disciplined and exploited workers, and the extent to which they acquiesced or resisted. Michael Burawoy's (1979b) ethnography among Chicago factory workers showed how labourers may consent to their exploitation, impeding collective organisation and action. Within the ever-moving spheres of capital expansion and accumulation, anthropologists have revealed a multitude of ways people accommodate and resist industrialization processes. For instance, Aihwa Ong (1987) described how managerial discipline and control was subverted and resisted by Malay factory women. The women Ong studied were caught between often-conflicting demands of factory work and traditional gendered expectations and were under surveillance at work and in their communities. They resisted in subtle and dramatic ways, including becoming possessed by spirits in 'hysterical' episodes whilst at work, causing disruption to the capitalist logics of the factory.

While modernisation theories assumed that the relinquishing of tradition and the emulation of a Western individualism was a necessary prerequisite for industrialisation, most anthropologists argued against this ethnocentric teleology. By and large they held that it was best to analyse the historically and culturally specific conditions that accommodate different paths to industrialism (Holzberg and Giovannini 1981, 336-9). Contemporary analyses of industrial work continue to be enriched by attention to themes and insights that gained prominence in early ethnographies of 'tribal' and 'peasant' societies, such as kinship, religion, and gift exchange (Carrier 1992; Martin et al. 2021). Ethnographic writing shows how rituals, sacrifices, and other religious and magical practices can be seen as key to the success of an industrial endeavour, helping people make sense of danger and suffering (e.g. Bear 2018, Ong 1987; Taussig 1977). For instance, June Nash (1979) provided ethnographic insights into the lives of Bolivian tin miners during the 1970s, whose exploitation and dependency underpinned Latin American industrialization. Her study showed that in spite of suffering from great physical and economic hardship, miners were not alienated from their cultural roots, and had not lost their sense of self-worth as part of their work. That is because they made sense of their work by drawing on a mix of ideologies and cultural resources, including socialism and communism as well as Andean and Christian beliefs in deities operating above and below ground.

How industrialisation changes or is folded into local identity categories varies. In his research on a bicycle factory in West Bengal, Morton Klass (1996) found that despite management assuming that workers were a homogenous class, the latter used their caste identity to organise themselves and their labour. However, based upon thirty years of fieldwork in the steel town of Bhilai, Jonathan Parry (2020) argues that even in a hierarchically complex society like post-Independence India, class analysis—in this case between securely and insecurely employed labourers—is the most analytically salient way to understand differing life paths and chances. Other anthropologists have looked at how ethnic, religious, and racial tensions are stoked and mitigated in industrial settings (Sanchez 2016; Yelvington 1995). They have also provided significant insights into how processes of non-capitalist industrialisation, as well as the subsequent transition to post-socialism, were experienced in Eastern and Central Europe (e.g. Morris 2016; Rajković 2018). China's

remarkably rapid industrialisation process since 1978 has also been explored through ethnography, with a focus on the role of labour control and flexible supply chains in the context of the distinctive Chinese state-driven modernisation programme and transnational processes (e.g. Ong and Nonini 2003; Rofel 1999; Rofel and Yanagisako 2019).

Transformations of work under late capitalism

The past forty years have witnessed immense changes in work and the labour process, marked by flexibilisation, outsourcing, increasing use of information technologies, self-branding, and the severing of obligations between employers and employees. These shifts are related but not reducible to neoliberalism. This period has been termed 'late capitalism', to frame changes in both work and theoretical concerns. It has been a pivotal period for the anthropology of work and labour. Much of the research produced under and about late capitalism has clear echoes of earlier themes of how work is organised, including the growth of market logics and global inequality. However, it highlights how neoliberal policies, globalisation, and financialisation processes have increased precarity on a global scale, even encroaching on traditionally secure classes of work and workers. Working in precarious times has, in turn, led many to use the frames of ethics and affect to both analyse and interrogate the push towards self-cultivation and emotional management in the workplace. It has also led authors to question (neo)liberal assumptions regarding the necessity and value of work more generally.

Neoliberal policies and financialisation processes implemented in the 1980s ended a Fordist pact between labour, industry, and government in the Global North, in which rapidly rising corporate profits went hand in hand with rising living standards for most people in high-income countries (Harvey 1989). Increased computational capacity and accelerated neoliberal policies shifted the anthropological gaze towards how outsourcing and globalisation were being implemented and experienced unevenly between and within the Global North and South. Ethnographies of the Global South investigated how workers at various points along global value chains experienced intensified exploitative relationships with multinational organisations that needed raw materials and labour to implement the technologies of globalisation (e.g. Ong 1987; Ferguson 1999; Freeman 2000). Meanwhile, anthropologists of work in the Global North were exploring the aftermath of deindustrialisation (Doukas 2003; Mollona 2005; Nash 1989) and the growth of the high-tech industry. The latter facilitated globalisation and offered new but unevenly distributed opportunities to IT workers (Amrute 2016; Folz 2008; Hakken 2000; Xiang 2007).

Following the 2008 financial crisis, many anthropologists became interested in how such transformations were experienced in terms of rising uncertainty and precarity. The shift to more insecure, short-term work has occurred in conjunction with new technologies including artificial intelligence (AI) and platform-based work. Several recent studies have highlighted how the technologies may be new but are not as 'smart' as they may appear and in fact are dependent upon precarious workers engaged in unstable piece-rate work

(Irani 2015; Gershon 2017; Gray and Suri 2019). Studies of gig workers shed light on the contextual nature of why workers resist or welcome the flexibility associated with precarious work. For example, a recent study of Argentinian taxi drivers fighting Uber's destabilising encroachment (del Nido 2021) contrasts with that of Thai motorcycle taxi drivers who prefer the freedom offered by precarious, dangerous work over the constraints of factory jobs (Sopranzetti 2017). Precarity is increasingly a concern among professionals, including academics. Some anthropologists have turned their gaze inward to the labour process of producing academics and the marketisation of education, demonstrating how precarity can foster exploitative knowledge production (Gershon 2018; Platzer and Allison 2018).

More anthropologists answered Nader's (1972) call to 'study up' with an increased interest in white-collar professionals. Since the 2000s, ethnographies have explored the working lives of investment bankers and traders (Ho 2009; Zaloom 2006), bureaucrats (Mathur 2016), and the 'consultants' who fill the gaps created by late capitalist organisational structures that are no longer premised on in-house expertise (Chong 2018; Stein 2017). In much of the world, attaining white-collar and professional employment is highly aspirational, with families mobilising resources and contacts in the hope of attaining economic security, social status, and upward mobility (e.g. Kauppinen 2021).

One fertile area of inquiry in recent decades has been where questions of labour intersect with the burgeoning interest in ethics and self-cultivation, affect, and hope. Anthropologists have shown how people incorporate work into their ethical and aspirational life-projects and cultivating their sense of self (e.g. Kauppinen 2021; Zaloom 2006). This can be seen as the continuation of established scholarly interest in motivations for and meanings of work, as exemplified in the work of Malinowski and his students. But a focus on labour can also offer a critical purchase on these themes, showing how ethical, emotional, and relational capacities can be harnessed to extend and legitimate neoliberal restructuring and flexible accumulation. Scholars have noted that neoliberalism encourages the formation of 'entrepreneurial selves' using personal development techniques and self-discipline (Freeman 2015; Mackovicky 2016). For example, the 'personal branding' industry exemplifies how individualisation and self-management are mobilised in response to an increasingly impersonal labour process (Gershon 2016).

Work often demands 'affective' or 'emotional' labour, in which often gendered capacities for care, affective and emotional management become commercialised and harnessed for profit (Hochschild 1983; Zaloom 2006). Workers as diverse as Mexican NGO staff and Indonesian steelworkers turn out to be moved by affect, and are constituted as neoliberal subjects in the process (Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009). Meanwhile, governments have increasingly abdicated the provision of public services to the private and the third sector, commanding affective labour in the form of voluntary work. For example, the Italian state sought to mobilise public feelings and post-Fordist desires for social belonging toward eliciting unremunerated voluntary work in the social service sector (Muehlebach 2011). Of course, feelings of exploitation and personal investment in work are not mutually exclusive. Instead a more nuanced understanding of feelings

in the neoliberal context may be required, as people who yearn for meaning and connection can sometimes even find it in the midst of exploitative circumstances (Freeman 2020).

On the other hand, some have responded to the end of the Fordist pact, increasing precarity, and jobless growth by questioning assumptions about the value and necessity of work under late capitalism. Graeber (2018) famously argues that a significant portion of jobs done in the Global North, particularly white collar jobs that have proliferated in recent decades, are essentially pointless and contribute little to society. He sees the valorisation of such work as rooted in Protestant and capitalist ethics, which value work and suffering for its own sake. Combined with a neoclassical idea that pay is compensation for the disutility of work, this has resulted in the most socially valuable forms of work, such as nurses, teachers, and cleaners, often being the least remunerated. Meanwhile, 'proper jobs' promised to the Global South as a telos of economic development have failed to materialise (Ferguson 2015; Li 2018). Several scholars have thus proposed universal basic income as an alternative to a politics of premising economic citizenship and social incorporation on wage labour (Ferguson 2015; Li 2018). However, other ethnographic accounts show that there is a popular tendency across a variety of sociocultural contexts to predicate ideas of 'deservingness' on participation in labour (e.g. Fouksman 2020; Hann 2018). This suggests that the presence of a work ethic cannot be reduced to Protestant or (neo)liberal ideologies. Indeed, in some contexts, labour is seen as fundamental to the achievement of full, independent, adult personhood (Jiménez 2003; Martin et al. 2021).

Many of these issues associated with late capitalism were exacerbated by the covid-19 pandemic, which revealed the limitations inherent to flexible supply chains and labour arrangements and upended the lives of workers and consumers globally. The pandemic further disrupted assumptions about the necessity and valorisation of work by raising the question of what kinds of work and workers are 'essential' (Collins 2023). The simultaneous valorisation of and disregard for socially essential workers also brings into stark relief processes of flexibilisation, precarity, and individualized risk. The precariously employed were made more precarious as they were thrust into dangerous circumstances by stay at home and return to work orders (Garimella et al. 2021; Iskander 2020; Rath and Das Gupta 2022). It is important to note, however, that for workers accustomed to near-constant crises of one kind or another, such as small-scale miners in Ghana, the pandemic has been experienced as just one of many interruptions to their livelihood (Pijpers and Luning 2021). The pandemic also exposed the fragilities and limits of the state and late capitalism's reliance on civil society and the third sector (Lachowicz and Donaghey 2022). That so many people were moved to contribute additional care and reproductive labour, often without being remunerated, further highlights neoliberal logics, which elicit and exploit individualised ethical, emotional, and relational propensities, as well as capacities for self-discipline.

Conclusion

The anthropology of work and labour reveals the concreteness of how people make a living in the context of

their immediate natural and social environments. It elucidates diverse perspectives on work from within and beyond capitalism. In particular, ethnographies show how social roles and identities everywhere are made meaningful through the labour process, and how they are valued differently through time and space. This entry has charted how anthropologists increasingly wrestled with the transformations wrought by colonialism and capitalist expansion often left out of earlier theoretical frameworks. However, insights drawn from the holistic frameworks of early ethnographic studies in small-scale societies continue to enrich contemporary accounts of work. Ethnographies conducted in the heart of industrial and commercial centres can capture the integration of production and social reproduction, and the perpetuation of kin-like, ritual, and gift-like social relations and practices where one might assume either alienation or self-maximisation. Ethnographic methods also reveal the contradictions in how paid and unpaid work can simultaneously elicit experiences and feelings of exploitation, alienation, discipline, and tedium, as well as forms of emotional and relational attachments, meaning, fulfilment, and creative expression.

To some extent the anthropology of work and labour maps onto broader theoretical developments in anthropology, as it can be divided into evolutionary, functionalist, Marxian, feminist, and ethical approaches. Yet, it also reveals how these theoretical 'turns' themselves reflect and respond to broader political economic transformations. The anthropology of work and labour is particularly susceptible to such societal shifts, as it focuses on how people everywhere are interconnected, and how modes of livelihood are themselves the outcome of global historical processes. An anthropological understanding of work and labour therefore sharpens our understanding of emerging questions surrounding the future of work. It teaches us how we may respond to rapid technological transformations, political and economic uncertainties, conflicts and resource competition, as well as pandemics and climate change.

References

Amrith, Megha. 2010. "'They think we are just caregivers': The ambivalence of care in the lives of Filipino medical workers in Singapore." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 11, nos. 3-4: 410–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2010.511631

Amrute, Sareeta. 2016. *Encoding race, encoding class: Indian IT workers in Berlin*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Anderson, Abigail, Sophia Chilczuk, Kaylie Nelson, Roxanne Ruther and Cara Wall-Scheffler. 2023. "The myth of man the hunter: Women's contribution to the hunt across ethnographic contexts." *PLoS ONE* 18, no. 6: e0287101. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0287101

Applebaum, Herbert A. 1992. *The concept of work*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Barber, Pauline Gardiner and Catherine Bryan. 2012. "Value plus plus: Housewifization and history in

Philippine care migration." In *Migration in the 21st century: Political economy and ethnography*, edited by Pauline Gardiner Barber and Winnie Lem, 215–35. New York: Taylor & Francis Group.

Barber, Pauline Gardiner and Winnie Lem, eds. 2018. *Migration, temporality, and capitalism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bear, Laura. 2018. "The vitality of labour and its ghosts." *Terrain: Anthropologie & sciences humaines,* 69. https://doi.org/10.4000/terrain.16728

Beldo, Les. 2017. "Metabolic labor: Broiler chickens and the exploitation of vitality." *Environmental Humanities* 9, no. 1: 108–28. https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3829154

Berlan, Amanda. 2013. "Social sustainability in agriculture: An anthropological perspective on child labour in cocoa production in Ghana." *The Journal of Development Studies 49*, no. 8: 1088–100. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2013.780041

Besky, Sarah. 2014. *The Darjeeling distinction: Labor and justice on fair-trade tea plantations in India*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Besky, Sarah and Alex Blanchette, eds. 2019. *How nature works: Rethinking labor on a troubled planet*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Bird-David, Nurit et al. 1982. "Beyond 'the original affluent society': A culturalist reformulation." *Current Anthropology* 33, no. 1: 25–47.

Blanchette, Alex. 2020. *Porkopolis: American animality, standardized life, and the factory farm*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Brodkin, Karen. 1998. "Women, work, and Karl Marx." *Anthropology of Work Review* 18, no. 4: 6–9. https://doi.org/10.1525/awr.1998.18.4.6

Bruun, Maja Hojer and Ayo Wahlberg, 2022. "The anthropology of technology: The formation of a field." In *The Palgrave handbook of the anthropology of technology*, edited by Maja Hojer Bruun et al., 1–33. Singapore: Springer.

Burawoy, Michael. 1979a. "The anthropology of industrial work." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 8, no. 1: 231–66. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.08.100179.001311

———. 1979b. *Manufacturing consent: Changes in the labor process under monopoly capitalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Butt, Waqas H. 2023. *Life beyond waste: Work and infrastructure in urban Pakistan*. Stanford: Stanford

University Press.

Calvão, Fillipe. 2016. "Unfree labor." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45: 451–67. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102215-100307

Carrier, James G. 1992. "Emerging alienation in production: A Maussian history." *Man* 27, no. 3: 539–58. https://doi.org/10.2307/2803928

Chatterjee, Piya, 2001. *A time for tea: Women, labor, and post/colonial politics on an Indian plantation*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Chong, Kimberly. 2018. *Best practice: Management consulting and the ethics of financialization in China*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Collins, Jane. 2023. "Revaluing work after COVID-19." *Anthropology of Work Review* 44, no. 1: 25–37. https://doi.org/10.1111/awr.12247

Constable, Nicole. 2009. "The commodification of intimacy: Marriage, sex, and reproductive labor." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 38: 49–64. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.37.081407.085133

Cooper, Eugene. 1984. "Mode of production and anthropology of work." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 40, no. 2: 257–70. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3629575

Day, Sophie E. 2007. *On the game: Women and sex work*. London: Pluto.

Del Nido, Juan M. 2021. *Taxis vs Uber: Post-political reasoning among Argentines*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Doukas, Dimitra. 2003. *Worked over: The corporate sabotage of an American community.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Estioko-Griffin, Agnes and P. Bion Griffin. 1981. "Woman the hunter: The Agta." In *Woman the gatherer*, edited by Frances Dahlberg, 121–51. New Haven: Yale University Press

Evans-Pritchard, Edward E. 1940. *The Nuer: A description of the modes of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Ferguson, James. 1999. *Expectations of modernity: Myths and meanings of urban life on the Zambian copperbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press

———. 2015. *Give a man a fish: Reflections on the new politics of distribution*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Ferguson, James and Tanya Murray Li. 2018. “Beyond the ‘proper job’: Political-economic analysis after the century of labouring man.” *Working Paper 51*. Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, University of the Western Cape: Cape Town.

Fijn, Natasha. 2011. *Living with herds: Human-animal coexistence in Mongolia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Firth, Raymond. 1939. *Primitive Polynesian economy.* London: Routledge

Folz, Jasmine. 2008. “High-tech workers, management strategy, and globalization.” In *Management practices in high-tech environments*, edited by Dariusz Jemielniak and Jerzy Kociatkiewicz, 42–57. Hershey, Penn.: Idea Group.

Fouksman, Elizaveta. 2020. “The moral economy of work: Demanding jobs and deserving money in South Africa.” *Economy and Society* 49, no. 2: 287–311. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2019.1690276

Freeman, Carla. 2000. *High tech and high heels in the global economy: Women, work, and pink collar identities in the Caribbean*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

———. 2015. *Entrepreneurial selves: Neoliberal respectability and the making of a Caribbean middle class.* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

———. 2020. “Feeling neoliberal.” *Feminist Anthropology* 1, no. 1: 71–88. https://doi.org/10.1002/fea2.12010

Gamst, Frederick C. 1995. *Meanings of work: Considerations for the twenty-first century*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Garimella, Surekha, Shrutika Murthy, Lana Whittaker and Rachel Tolhurst. 2021. “Pandemic policy responses and embodied realities among ‘waste-pickers’ in India.” In *Viral loads: Anthropologies of urgency in the time of COVID-19*, edited by Lenore Manderson, Nancy J. Burke and Ayo Wahlberg, 201–21. London: UCL Press.

Gershon, Ilana. 2016. “‘I’m not a businessman, I’m a business, man’: Typing the neoliberal self into a branded existence.” *HAU* 6, no. 3: 223–46. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau6.3.017

———. 2017. *Down and out in the new economy: How people find (or don’t find) work today.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. 2018. “Pyramid scheme. #hautalk.” *Allegra Lab*. June. http://allegralaboratory.net/pyramid-scheme-hautalk. Accessed 30 March 2024.

Graeber, David. 2006. “Turning modes of production inside out: Or, why capitalism is a transformation of slavery.” *Critique of Anthropology* 26, no. 1: 61–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X060614

———. 2018. *Bullshit jobs: A theory*. London: Penguin.

Graeber, David, and David Wengrow. 2021. *The dawn of everything: A new history of humanity*. London: Penguin.

Gray, Mary L. and Siddarth Suri. 2019. *Ghost work: How to stop Silicon Valley from building a new global underclass*. Boston: Houghton Miffin Harcourt.

Guha, Ranajit. (1983) 1999. *Elementary aspects of peasant insurgency in colonial India*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Gutierrez Garza, Ana Paola. 2018. *Care for sale: An ethnography of Latin American domestic and sex workers in London*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Guyer, Jane I. 1980. “Food, cocoa, and the division of labour by sex in two West African societies.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, no. 3: 355–73. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500009397

Hakken, David. 2000. “Resocialing work? The future of the labor process.” *Anthropology of Work Review* 21, no. 1: 8–10. https://doi.org/10.1525/awr.2000.21.1.8

Hann, Chris. 2018. “Moral (ity and) economy: Work, workfare, and fairness in provincial Hungary.” *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie 59*, no. 2: 225–54. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000397561700056X

———, ed. 2021. *Work, society, and the ethical self*. Oxford: Berghahn.

Harding, Charles F. 1955. “The social anthropology of American industry.” *American Anthropologist* 57, no. 6: 1218–31. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1955.57.6.02a00120

Harris, Olivia. 2007. “What makes people work?” In *Questions of anthropology*, edited by Rita Astuti, Charles Stafford, and Jonathan Parry, 137–66. Oxford: Berghahn.

Hart, Keith. 1973. “Informal income opportunities and urban employment in Ghana.” *The Journal of Modern Africa Studies* 11, no. 1: 61–89. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X00008089

Harvey, David. 1989. *The condition of postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Harvey, Penny and Christine Krohn-Hansen. 2018. “Introduction: Dislocating labour: Anthropological reconfigurations.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 24, no. S1: 10–28. https://www.jstor.org/stable/45183931

Ho, Karen. 2009. *Liquidated: An ethnography of Wall Street*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Hobsbawm, Eric J. 1959. *Primitive rebels: Studies in archaic forms of social movement in the 19th and 20th centuries*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1983. *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Holzberg, Carol S. and Maureen J. Giovannini. 1981. "Anthropology and industry: Reappraisal and new directions." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 10, no. 1: 317–60. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2155720

Howard, Neil and Roberto Forin. 2019. "Migrant workers, 'modern slavery' and the politics of representation in Italian tomato production." *Economy and Society* 48, no. 4: 579–601. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2019.1672426

Hurn, Samantha. 2017. "Animals as producers, consumers and consumed: The complexities of trans-species sustenance in a multi-faith community." *Ethnos 82*, no. 2: 213–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2015.1107611

Ingold, Tim. 1983. "The architect and the bee: Reflections on the work of animals and men." *Man* 18, no. 1: 1–20. https://doi.org/10.2307/2801762

Irani, Lilly. 2015. "The cultural work of microwork." *New Media & Society* 17, no. 5: 720–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813511926

Iskander, Natsha. 2020. "Qatar, the coronavirus, and cordons sanitaires: Migrant workers and the use of public health measures to define the nation." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 34, no. 4: 561–77. https://doi.org/10.1111/maq.12625

Jegathesan, Mythri. 2019. *Tea and solidarity: Tamil women and work in postwar Sri Lanka*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Jiménez, Alberto Corsin. 2003. "Working out personhood: Notes on 'labour' and its anthropology." *Anthropology Today* 19, no. 5: 14–7. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.00217

Josephides, Lisette. 1985. *The production of inequality: Gender and exchange among the Kewa*. London: Tavistock.

Kaplan, David. 2000. "The darker side of the 'original affluent society.'" *Journal of Anthropological Research 56*, no. 3: 301–24. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3631086

Kasmir, Sharryn and Lesley Gill, eds. 2022. *The Routledge handbook of the anthropology of labor*. London:

Routledge.

Kauppinen, Anna-Riikka. 2021. “More than money: Work as self-realization in Accra’s private media.” In *Work, society, and the ethical self,* edited by Chris Hann, 108–31. Oxford: Berghahn.

Kelly, Patty. 2008. *Lydia's open door: Inside Mexico's most modern brothel*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Klass, Morton. 1996. *From field to factory: Community structure and industrialization in West Bengal*. Lanham: University Press of America.

Kopytoff, Igor. 1982. “Slavery.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11, no. 1: 207–30. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.11.100182.001231

Kraft, Thomas S., et al. 2021. “The energetics of uniquely human subsistence strategies.” *Science* 37: 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abf0130

Lachowicz, Katya and Jim Donaghey. 2022. “Mutual aid versus volunteerism: Autonomous PPE production in the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.” *Capital & Class 46*, no. 3, 427–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/03098168211057686

Lazar, Sian. 2023. *How we struggle: A political anthropology of labour.* London: Pluto Press

Leacock, Eleanor, ed. 1986. *Women's work: Development and the division of labor by gende*r. London: Bloomsbury.

Li, Tanya Murray. 2017. “The price of un/freedom: Indonesia's colonial and contemporary plantation labor regimes.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History 59*, no. 2: 245–76. http://hdl.handle.net/1807/77807

Lynch, Caitrin. 2019. *Juki girls, good girls: Gender and cultural politics in Sri Lanka's global garment industry*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Makovicky, Nicolette. 2016. *Neoliberalism, personhood, and postsocialism*. London: Routledge.

Magubane, Bernard. 1971. “A critical look at indices used in the study of social change in colonial Africa.” *Current Anthropology* 12, nos. 4/5: 419–45. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2740927

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1925. “Primitive labour.” *Nature* 116: 926–30. https://doi.org/10.1038/116926a0

———. (1935) 1965. *Coral gardens and their magic, volume 1: Soil-tilling and agricultural rites in the Trobriand Islands.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Martin, Keir, Ståle Wig and Sylvia Yanagisako. 2021. “Battlegrounds of dependence: Reconfiguring labor,

kinship and relational obligation." *Focaal* 2021, no. 90: 1–10. https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2021.900101

Marx, Karl. (1867) 1992. *Capital, volume 1*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin Books.

Mathur, Nayanika. 2016. *Paper tiger: Law, bureaucracy, and the developmental state in Himalayan India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McGee, R. Jon and Richard L. Warms, eds. 2000. *Anthropological theory: An introduction*. Mountain View: Mayfield.

Meillassoux, Claude. 1972. "From reproduction to production: A Marxist approach to economic anthropology." *Economy & Society* 1, no. 1: 93–105. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147200000005

———. 1981. *Maidens, meal and money: Capitalism and the domestic community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Millar, Kathleen M. 2018. *Reclaiming the discarded: Life and labor on Rio's garbage dump*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Mintz, Sidney W. 1978. "Was the plantation slave a proletarian?" *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 2, no. 1: 81–98. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40240791

Mitchell, J. Clyde and Arnold L. Epstein. 1959. "Occupational prestige and social status among urban Africans in Northern Rhodesia." *Africa* 29, no. 1: 22–40. https://doi.org/10.2307/1157497

Mollona, Massimiliano. 2005. "Factory, family and neighbourhood: The political economy of informal labour in Sheffield." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11, no. 3: 527–48. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2005.00249

Montgomery, Heather. 2001. *Modern Babylon?: Prostituting children in Thailand*. Oxford: Berghahn.

Morgan, Lewis Henry. 1868. *The American beaver and his works*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott.

Morris Jeremy. 2016. *Everyday post-socialism: Working-class communities in the Russian margins*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Muehlebach, Andrea. 2011. "On affective labor in post-fordist Italy." *Cultural Anthropology* 26: 59-82. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01080.x

Mullings, Leith. 1986. "Uneven development: Class, race and gender in the United States before 1900." In *Women's work*, edited by Eleanor Leacock, 41–57. London: Bloomsbury.

Murdock, George P. and Caterina Provost. 1973. "Factors in the division of labor by sex: A cross cultural

analysis." *Ethnology* XII, no. 2: 203–25. https://doi.org/10.2307/3773347

Nader, Laura. 1972. "Up the anthropologist: Perspectives gained from studying up." In *Reinventing anthropology*, edited by Dell H. Hymes, 284–311. New York: Vintage.

Narotzky, Susana. 2018. "Rethinking the concept of labour." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 24, no. S1: 29–43. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.12797

Nash, June C. 1979. *We eat the mines and the mines eat us*. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. 1989. *From Tank Town to high tech: The clash of community and industrial cycles*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Nash, June C. and Maria P. Fernandez-Kelly, eds. 1983. *Women, men, and the international division of labor*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Ong, Aihwa. 1987. *Spirits of resistance and capitalist discipline*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Ong, Aihwa and Donald Nonini, eds. 2003. *Ungrounded empires: The cultural politics of modern Chinese transnationalism*. London: Routledge.

Ortiz, Sutti. 1994. "Work, the division of labour, and co-operation." In *Companion encyclopedia of anthropology,* edited by Tim Ingold, 891–910. London: Routledge.

Parreñas, Rhacel S. 2012. "The reproductive labour of migrant workers." *Global Networks* 12, no. 2: 269–75. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0374.2012.00351.x

Parry, Jonathan. 1980. "Ghosts, greed and sin: The occupational identity of the Benares funeral priests." *Man* 15, no. 1: 88–111. https://doi.org/10.2307/2802004

———. 2020. *Classes of labour: Work and life in a central Indian steel town*. London: Routledge.

Pierre, Jemima. 2020. "Slavery, anthropological knowledge, and the racialization of Africans." *Current Anthropology* 61, no. S22: S220–31. https://doi.org/10.1086/709844

Pijpers, Robert J., and Sabine Luning. 2021. "'We have so many challenges': Small-scale mining, Covid-19 and constant interruptions in West Africa." *Anthropology Today* 37, no. 2: 10–4. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.12641

Platzer, David and Anne Allison. 2018. "Academic precarity in American anthropology." Member Voices, *Fieldsights: Theorizing the Contemporary*. February 12. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/academic-precarity-in-american-anthropology

Povinelli, Elizabeth A. 1993. *Labor's lot: The power, history, and culture of Aboriginal action*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rajković, Ivan. 2018. "For an anthropology of the demoralized: State pay, mock-labour, and unfreedom in a Serbian firm." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 24, no. 1: 47–70. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.12751

Ralph, Michael and Maya Singhal. 2019. "Racial capitalism." *Theory and Society* 48: 851–81. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-019-09367-z

Rath, Richard C. and Monisha Das Gupta. 2022. "Dying to work: O'ahu hotel workers' efforts at well-being in the face of autoimmune capitalism." *Anthropology of Work Review* 43, no. 2: 80–94. https://doi.org/10.1111/awr.12243

Richard, Analiese M. and Daromir Rudnyckyj. 2009. "Economies of affect." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 1: 57–77. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2008.01530.x

Richards, Audrey. 1932. *Hunger and work in a savage tribe*. London: Routledge.

———. 1939. *Land, labour and diet in Northern Rhodesia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rio, Knut M. and Bjørn E. Bertelsen. 2018. "Anthropology and 1968: Openings and closures." *Anthropology Today* 34, no. 2: 9–13. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.12419

Rofel, Lisa. 1999. *Other modernities: Gendered yearnings in China after socialism*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Rofel, Lisa and Sylvia J. Yanagisako. 2019. *Fabricating transnational capitalism: A collaborative ethnography of Italian-Chinese global fashion*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Sahlins, Marshall. (1972) 1976. *Stone age economics*. 2nd ed. London: Tavistock.

Sanchez, Andrew. 2016. "Profane relations: The irony of offensive jokes in India." *History and Anthropology* 27, no. 3: 296–312. https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2016.1147439

Schapera, Isaac. 1947. *Migrant labour and tribal life: A study of conditions in the Bechuanaland Protectorate.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Scott, James C. 1977. *The moral economy of the peasant: Rebellion and subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Shah, Svati P. 2014. *Street corner secrets: Sex, work, and migration in the city of Mumbai*. Durham: Duke

University Press.

Sillitoe, Paul. 1985. “Divide and no one rules: The implications of sexual divisions of labour in the Papua New Guinea Highlands.” *Man* 20, no. 3: 494–522. https://doi.org/10.2307/2802443

Slocum, Sally. 1975. “Woman the gatherer: Male bias in anthropology.” In *Toward an anthropology of women*, edited by Rayna Reiter, 36–50. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Smith, Rachel. E. 2021. “The meaning of ‘free’ work: Service as a gift, and labor as a commodity for Ni-Vanuatu labor migrants.” In *Work, society, and the ethical self*, edited by Chris Hann, 108–31. Oxford: Berghahn.

———. 2024. “Compulsion to work? Malinowski and the labour question.” In *One hundred years of Argonauts: Malinowski, ethnography and economic anthropology*, edited by Chris Hann and Deborah James, 97–116. Oxford: Berghahn.

Sopranzetti, Claudio. 2017. “Framed by freedom: Emancipation and oppression in post-Fordist Thailand.” *Cultural Anthropology* 32, no. 1: 68–92. https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.1.07

Spittler, Gerd. 2008. *Founders of the anthropology of work: German social scientists of the 19th and early 20th Centuries and the first ethnographers*. Berlin: Lit Verlag.

Stein, Felix. 2017. *Work, sleep, repeat: The abstract labour of German management consultants*. London: Bloomsbury.

Steward, Julian. 1955. *Theory of culture change: The methodology of multilinear evolution*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Strathern, Andrew. 1982. “The division of labor and processes of social change in Mount Hagen.” *American Ethnologist* 9, no. 2: 307–19. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1982.9.2.02a00060

Strathern, Marilyn. 1988. *The gender of the gift*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Taussig, Michael. 1977. “The genesis of capitalism amongst a South American peasantry: Devil's labor and the baptism of money.” *Comparative studies in society and history* 19, no. 2: 130–55. https://doi:10.1017/S0010417500008586

Wallman, Sandra, ed. 1979. *Social anthropology of work*. London: Academic Press.

White, Leslie A. 1943. “Energy and the evolution of culture.” *American Anthropologist* 43: 335–56. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1943.45.3.02a00010

Whyte, Martin K. 1978. “Cross-cultural codes dealing with the relative status of women.” *Ethnology* XVII,

no. 2: 211–37. https://doi.org/10.2307/3773145

Wolf, Eric R. 1982. *Europe and the people without history*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Xiang, Biao. 2007. *Global "body shopping": An Indian labor system in the information technology industry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Yelvington, Kevin. 1995. *Producing power: Ethnicity, gender, and class in a Caribbean workplace*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Zaloom, Caitlin. 2006. *Out of the pits: Traders and technology from Chicago to London*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Note on contributors

Jasmine Folz is a Research Associate in the Human Computer Systems group at the University of Manchester. Her research deals with the political, economic, and social aspects of high-tech workers generally and the Free and Open Source Software community in particular. She has conducted fieldwork in the United States and India.

Dr. Jasmine Folz, Department of Computer Science, Kilburn Building, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, United Kingdom. jasmine.folz@manchester.ac.uk

Rachel E. Smith is a Lecturer in Anthropology at University of Aberdeen. Her doctoral research focused on the local perspectives on work, development, and social change in a rural Vanuatu community with a high degree of engagement in New Zealand's seasonal labour mobility programme. More recently, she has looked at the production and export of kava, a crop traditionally grown and consumed across the Pacific.

Dr. Rachel Smith, Department of Anthropology, Edward Wright Building, Aberdeen AB24 3RX, United Kingdom. rachel.smith1@abdn.ac.uk

---

[1] The degree to which work and labour is uniquely human has been long contested. Marx defined labour as distinctly human because although a bee may construct a hive that puts a human architect to shame, only the human architect can imagine the end product and thus their work is borne of conscious purpose (1992, 284). By contrast, Lewis Henry Morgan (1868, viii) saw in a beaver's dam communicative labours that were "suggestive of human industry". Timothy Ingold (1983) rejects Marx's distinction between animal instinct and human work, arguing that if humans are both objectively part of the physical world and subjective agents, so too are at least some nonhuman animals, whose labour must be acknowledged as such. Others argue that what makes humans unique is not that they work but that their ability to expend and harness more energy than other animals allows more time for leisure necessary for developing our unique sociocultural lives (Kraft et al. 2021). Certainly, many anthropologists have focussed on human-animal relationships as central to discussions of livelihood (e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1940; Fijn 2011; Blanchette 2020) and recent anthropological interest in multispecies relations has some revisiting Marx to ask, can (nonhuman) animals, and 'nature' more generally, be exploited? (e.g., Beldo 2017; Besky and Blanchette 2019; Hurn 2017).

[2] Historical particularism is the first American school of anthropological theory. Founded by Boas and popularised by his many students, it was developed in reaction to what Boas found to be an uncritical use of social evolutionary frameworks popular in the late 19th century. Historical particularism was premised on the belief that cultural differences and similarities had to be understood within the contexts of unique environmental, psychological, and historical conditions. It introduced the concept of cultural relativism, and the four field approach that combines cultural anthropology with archaeology, linguistics and physical

anthropology and that still predominates in many American anthropology departments (McGee & Warms 2000: 131).

 ISSN 2398-516X