

Labour Conflicts in the Global South: An Introduction.

Against the background of the global economic crisis since 2007/2008 and increasing inequality across the world, we have experienced widespread, large-scale industrial action throughout the Global South, including in countries such as China, Brazil, India and South Africa, which had been hailed as the new growth engines of the global political economy as part of the so-called BRICS. With the exception of China and South Africa, recent protest research has focused on street demonstrations (such as in Brazil, Turkey, India, Hong Kong and South Korea), but labour conflicts have been neglected.

This special issue will systematically evaluate how new forms of labour mobilisation witnessed in the past ten years in the Global South responded to the predominance of the informality-precarity complex of industrial relations (Breman/van der Linden 2014) and what conclusions can be drawn for potentially successful strategies against exploitation in the future. Can we identify a convergence of new approaches across the Global South, or do we witness an ongoing fragmentation of actors, models and strategies? In short, the purpose of this special issue is twofold: (1) theoretically, it contributes to our conceptual understanding of novel forms of labour conflicts; (2) empirically, it covers current labour conflicts in the Global South around an informality-precarity complex. Importantly, this special issue focuses specifically on the challenge that new forms of worker organisations pose to conventional approaches to trade unions and industrial relations.

Mainstream political economy and industrial relations approaches tend to engage in a dualist framing of history across international studies. They identify distinct spheres such as ‘agents’ and ‘structures’, ‘politics’ and ‘economics’, or ‘states’ and ‘markets’ as separate

spheres in a relationship of *ontological exteriority* (Morton 2013: 139-43). Binary dichotomies such as formal/informal, precarious/non-precarious work and sectoral action/broader alliances, to name just a few, often end up reproducing a Western view that tends to obscure analysis rather than enlighten it. For example, the term informal labour exists as a negative definition of everything that does not fit into established industrial relations perspectives. In other words, the mainstream political economy and industrial relations literatures continuously separate out, in different ways, these binaries re-enforcing a Western centric view. By taking the separate appearance of the state and market as their starting-point of analysis, moreover, they fail to acknowledge the historical specificity of the current capitalist period. Hence, there is the need for a historical materialist moment, in which it is asked why it is that the state and market, the political and the economic appear as separate in the first place (Bieler and Morton 2018: 3-23). From a historical materialist perspective, it can then be comprehended that it is the specific ways in which the capitalist social relations of production are organised that makes the state and the economy appear as separate spheres. Based on wage labour and the private ownership of the means of production, the extraction of surplus labour is not directly politically enforced unlike in feudalism, because those who do not own the means of production are 'free' to sell their labour power (Wood 1995: 29, 34). Most workers are not forced to work for a particular employer. However, without owning one's own means of production, people are indirectly forced to look for paid employment. One is compelled to sell her or his labour power in order to reproduce oneself. Unless this historical specificity of our current period is understood, any conceptualization of resistance will fall short of grasping the concrete opportunities of, but also obstacles to, transforming capitalism.

This Introduction will proceed along the following lines. In the next section, we will first conceptualise the internal relations between structure and agency on the basis of a historical materialist approach. This will be useful in order for us to be able to conceptualise

the actions and strategies of workers before the background of a rapidly changing global capitalism. Historical materialist approaches are, however, often accused of reductionism by focusing on class at the expense of other social relations such as gender and race. The second section, therefore, will focus on how we can conceptualise the internal relations between class, gender and race. It is especially the way how paid employment and unwaged work are articulated, but also relations of violence and control in contexts of family structures, which exert a massive influence on the gender-specific manifestations of class. Moreover, we will equally address the internal relations between class and race and discuss to what extent capitalism from its very beginning had been 'racial' capitalism and how racialisation continues to underpin today's global political economy and is fragmenting the working class and, thereby, undermines its potential for resistance. While developing our understanding of agency and structure as well as the internal relations of class, gender and race, we will also discuss where appropriate how the dualist, binary constructions, which are frequently applied in the analysis of labour struggles in the Global South can be overcome.

Conceptualising agency within the structuring conditions of capitalism

The capitalist social relations of production generate the conditions for the effectivity of structure and agency. Because of the way capitalist production is organised around wage labour and the private ownership of the means of production, three structuring conditions can be identified. First, it is not only workers who compete with each other for employment, but equally companies are in constant competition with each other over market shares. Hence, there is an emphasis on competitiveness and the related pressure for further technological innovation in a relentless struggle for ever higher profit levels. As Marx noted, 'under free competition, the immanent laws of capitalist production confront the individual capitalist as a coercive force external to him' (Marx 1867/1990: 381). Nevertheless, what is logical for the individual

capitalist, is problematic for capital as a whole. The shrinking amount of variable capital, i.e. the need for less workers in production due to the use of more expensive and advanced machinery, leads to a higher organic composition of capital and a falling rate of profit in the long run. During periods of crises profit rates and therefore corporate investment declines, leading to a 'state of overaccumulation' (Harvey 1985: 132). It is this crisis tendency of capitalism, which can be identified as the second structuring condition of capitalism. Finally, in order to overcome crises, there is a structuring condition of constant outward expansion by capitalism, either in order to capture new markets or cheaper labour abroad or to re-commodify areas, which had been moved outside the capitalist market, such as currently health services in many industrialised countries (Bieler and Morton 2018: 38-41). Capitalist outward expansion is characterised by uneven and combined development.

The precise form in which this occurs, however, depends on popular struggles and political conflicts. The capitalist social relations of production also engender social forces as the key collective agents. As a result of private property and wage labour, two main classes oppose each other in capitalism, on the one hand the capitalist class, the owners of the means of production, and on the other hand, the working class, those who are indirectly forced to sell their labour power in order to survive (ibid, 37-8). However, importantly this does not suggest that these structural class positions will determine the lines of political conflict, since 'the capital-labour contradiction is never simple, but always specified by the historically concrete forms and circumstances in which it is exercised', in other words: 'the apparently simple contradiction is always overdetermined' (Althusser 1969: 106). Depending on the forms of capital within the overall process of surplus accumulation, we can distinguish between different circuits of financial, commercial and industrial capital (van der Pijl 1984: 4-20). Moreover, these can then be further divided into different fractions of capital, depending on the particular scale of production – e.g. national versus transnational capital and labour – or orientation of

production – e.g. producing predominantly for the domestic market or being internationally, export-oriented (Bieler 2000: 10-11; Bieler 2006: 32-5). The same goes for labour which can be looked at according to sectoral divisions, like service or industrial workers, or blue collar and white collar, which are often seen as competing factions of the working class with different interests.

Class struggle is at the heart of shifts within capitalism from one particular capitalist epoch to another. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the global political economy entered a crisis of overaccumulation, manifested in a declining rate of profit (Robinson 2014: 131). Economic growth was no longer strong enough to ensure both, capitalist super-profits and rising wages for workers. Unsurprisingly, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw increasing levels of industrial conflict across the Global North. In response, capital re-established and re-organised production across the global political economy through the search for a combination of various ‘fixes’ to the economic crisis. A technological fix, Beverly Silver argues, characterised by drastic innovation in production processes at the capital-intensive end in industrialised countries, was combined with a spatial fix, transferring labour intensive parts of manufacturing such as in the textile industry to locations with lower wages elsewhere in the global political economy (Silver 2003: 64-6). As John Smith makes clear, it is a form of global labour arbitrage, including the outsourcing of some parts of production to ‘China, Bangladesh, and other nations in the Global South’ (Smith 2016: 188), and maintaining high-end aspects of production in core countries which has allowed capital to continue reaping super profits since the major economic crisis of the 1970s (King 2021). Additionally, a financial fix, often referred to as financialisation, revived growth potentials in that the financial sector itself was transformed into an area of capitalist accumulation in its own right through the introduction of ever more new financial products and investment opportunities.

As a result of the transnationalisation of production, workers in different countries and

varying national contexts, both in the North and in the South, face a flexibilisation of working conditions and more precarious conditions which affect the health of workers, while wage differences between workers in the North and South continue to grow. Hence, a convergence on issues of insecurity and adverse effects on the health of workers is accompanied by a widening gap in incomes across the imperialist divide. Trade unions predominantly organised at the national level are no longer able to fulfil their basic task of keeping wages out of capitalist competition, if they ever have been. Second, the increasing transnationalisation of production has been combined with an increasing decentralisation and fragmentation of the production process itself through processes of outsourcing along the production chain. Thus, transnational production, under the direction of TNCs, is increasingly organised in global value chains (GVCs) (Robinson 2008: 27). These GVCs make it more difficult for trade unions to organise the workforce. It is one thing to organise transnational production workers within one company, it is even more difficult to organise workers along a GVC characterised by a multitude of employers. This re-organisation of the production process around GVCs as part of globalisation has led to an increasing casualisation and informalisation of the economy in which permanent, full-time employment contracts have to a large extent become a feature of the past. This is especially the case in developing countries, which had never been in a position to establish a large industrial sector with permanent and secure employment. Conceptualising the agency of resistance in times of globalisation, therefore, has to include a specific focus on informal/precarious workers.

In relation to informal labour, however, we have to be careful not to fall into a binary, dualist trap. A recent definition of informal labour stipulates that it ‘consists of work that, in distinction from other similar work, is not regulated or not linked to standard social insurance systems’ (Lee et al. 2020, 92). This definition is a purely negative definition, starting out from a norm that most authors today recognise as being the exception considering that ‘two billion

workers — representing 61.2 per cent of the world’s employed population — are in informal employment’ (ILO 2018). Implicitly, the concept of informal work captures everything which does not conform to the standard labour contract in Western Fordism, which has anyway been established as a concept only retroactively when this standard was starting to erode in the 1980s (see Mückenberger 1985). The idea that there exists a separate informal sector, differentiated from a formal sector, has been mostly discarded since there is also an informalization of formal labour underway, and in many cases formal and informal work relations exist in the same workplace. Moreover, there are also manifold examples in which one and the same job has formal and informal characteristics (Nowak 2019: 104-8). In other words, there are many grey areas or rather a spectrum between formality and informality (Lee et al. 2020, 93). Importantly, the lack of regulation by labour law is also a form of regulation, and in many cases labour law is intentionally conceptualised and designed in a way to create areas of informality. For example, in India most regulations of labour law only apply to companies with a certain amount of employees, excluding the bulk of workers from the realm of the law (Ahuja 2020; Dietrich Wielenga 2020). Second, informal work relations are in many cases the result of a non-implementation of labour law, i.e. of the selectivity of state apparatuses and other actors in the application of law. The definition provided by Lee et al. still clings to a legalist view and the illusions involved with the ideology of law as a neutral arbiter. Third, the idea that informal labour is not regulated is a significant misconception in the debate about informal labour. Barbara Harris-White (2013: 176-99) demonstrates in her ground breaking analysis how caste associations in India figure as corporatist actors that regulate what appears to be unregulated informal work, and Sarah Swider (2015), interestingly one of the co-authors in Lee et al. (2020), describes in detail how there are different forms of labour market access in informal construction work in China. Regulations for informal work are as manifold and detailed as they are for formal work, but often they are to a large extent not regulation by state bodies, or

collective agreements struck by trade unions. Thus, we are facing the challenge to analyse in more detail non-state forms of regulation, the selective application of labour law, and the creation of informality by labour law itself. In short, to look more closely at the alternative forms of regulation and labour market access that are involved in what we call informal labour today and which represents the bulk of contemporary labour relations might reveal more about social relations of work than we know today. It cannot suffice to define the majority of work relations on the globe via the absence of something that is characteristic of core countries' labour relations. Some of the forms of regulation of work involve household and family relations which have often been associated with what has been called reproductive labour or social reproduction.

Starting an analysis through a focus on the workplace, moreover, implies the danger that the main emphasis is placed on workers, narrowly defined, as a privileged agent of transformation and the workplace as the main location of struggle. Due to trade unions' prominent role in the political economies of advanced capitalist countries after World War II, scholarship on resistance, including historical materialist research, often reduced class struggle to conflicts at the workplace and to struggles between workers and employers or trade unions and employers' associations as the respective institutional expressions. Trade unions themselves started to adopt this narrow role and were not always progressive (Barker 2013: 52). Hence, as a first step to overcome the limitations of such a narrow approach we need to go beyond the notion of trade unions being the logical, automatic and only institutional expression of labour agency. As Maurizio Atzeni argues in his contribution to this special issue, this kind of 'trade union fetishism', concentrating on forms of worker representation shaped by experiences in core countries in the second half of the 20th century, overlooks instances of working people's self-organisation and fails to analyse capital-labour relations in economic sectors in which trade unions are weak. Trade unions' renewed strength in Argentina, for

example, 'has turned researchers' attention away from the multiple forms of working class action and organisation that co-exist across the formal and informal spaces in which workers' interests and their representation are formed' (Atzeni, this volume). This does not mean that trade unions no longer play an important role in the representation of workers' interests. But given the fact that in the two most populous countries in the world, India and China, there are either no independent trade unions – China – or only a tiny section of workers are organised in them – India – we have to broaden the scope in order to understand forms of workers' organisation beyond trade unions. In other countries of the Global South too, trade unions are in many cases only present within the public sector and special professions, and large groups of workers organise in other forms of associations. Hence, our analysis of resistance to capitalist exploitation needs to go beyond trade unions and include other forms of organisation.

However, we do not only need to broaden our analysis by going beyond trade unions as the institutional expression of workers' interests. We also need to go beyond the workplace, if we want to capture all forms of mobilisation against capitalist exploitation in other places and spaces. The rise of new social movements in the core economies in the 1970s was a response to the corporatist trade union movement and the social democratic and communist left that provided not much space for ecological and feminist concerns. The term new social movements implied that the labour movement was the 'old' social movement. Later on, the terminology changed so that there were trade unions on one side, and social movements on the other side – a very Eurocentric view since in the heyday of social movement research, the 1980s, emerging economies like Brazil, South Africa, South Korea and the Philippines saw large new labour movements that crossed the line between corporate trade unionism and community based social movements towards a social movement unionism. These remain until today ignored in most social movement research. Given the fact that most informal labour is regulated in non-public forms, we have to include these types and actors of regulation into

research on labour action in order to better understand who are adversaries or potential allies of workers (e.g. see for example, P. 2016). Thus, actors and spaces that have been regarded as central for ‘reproduction’ like religious communities, community groups and families might operate as actors in the regulation of informal labour relations.

This approach will also broaden the view towards how workers are organising, e.g. in which social spaces and on the basis of which actors. Fahmi Paminbang explores in this issue how community-based associations of app-based drivers mobilise, using a variety of organisational forms of which trade unions are the less significant one. In a similar fashion, Ludwig et al. look at various ways how informal workers in Africa organise, resulting in various hybrid forms between associations and trade unions. Michaela Douth highlights how neighbourhoods and homes served as the organising basis in the Cambodian strike and mass mobilisations of mostly female garment workers, against male-dominated trade unions. In the Cambodian example, it was the ‘spaces of reproduction’ that became the centre of political organisation. Further, Madhumita Dutta demonstrates how female garment workers in India fought simultaneously against male dominated unions and against capital, and how they combined workplace based trade union activity with organising in neighbourhoods focused on needs of social reproduction. All those examples demonstrate that a neat division into workplace organising and social movements is impossible, and that these projects of popular struggle cut across as what is often conceived as separate areas of production and reproduction.

Furthermore, rural-urban linkages play a crucial role for many workers, as highlighted by Douth for Cambodian garment workers and as well by Huang Yu and Ng Kenneth Tsz Fung in the case of migrant workers in China. Rural linkages often play an important role for aspects of social reproduction that most workers do not have access to in urban contexts, and rural experiences might provide additional motives for workers mobilisation. They do not necessarily hold workers back from engaging in labour conflict. A similarly ambivalent role is

played by the international dimension of labour mobilisation. Isil Erdinc demonstrates in this special issue how the boomerang effect of transnational activism is constrained by authoritarian politics at the national level, but might nonetheless work as an option in specific circumstances.

As Jörg Nowak argues in this volume, a focus on the social formation and the over-determination of class relations pushes us to go beyond the Eurocentric, often institutionalist industrial relations literature, facilitating an analysis of popular struggles beyond the compartmentalisation into economic and non-economic ones. When going beyond the capitalist workplace, we need to remember that work within the capitalist social formation cannot be reduced to wage labour, nor are workers the only or privileged agents of resistance. Pun Ngai shows in the case of China, how workers and left students formed an alliance within the social formation against exploitation of workers at Jasic Technology. In general, ‘it is very important to heed the feminist insistence that work is much more than what is done for wages. Much human labour is unpaid, including the unpaid domestic labour, largely carried out by women’ (Camfield 2002: 42). In the next section, we will discuss how the internal relations between class, gender and race can be conceptualised.

Class, gender and race in moments of struggle

In her powerful book *Caliban and the Witch* (1998/2014), Silvia Federici makes the important claim that the medieval witch-hunt across Europe constituted part of the processes of primitive accumulation, preparing the ground for the emergence of capitalism. While the enclosures put an end to people’s access to the commons, the witch-hunt resulted in the loss of women’s control over their bodies. ‘The witch-hunt deepened the divisions between women and men, teaching men to fear the power of women, and destroyed a universe of practices, beliefs, and social subjects whose existence was incompatible with the capitalist work discipline, thus redefining the main elements of social reproduction’ (Federici 1998/2014: 165). In other words,

the witch-hunt was an essential aspect of the establishment of the capitalist social relations of production. 'There is no doubt that in the 'transition from feudalism to capitalism' women suffered a unique process of social degradation that was fundamental to the accumulation of capital and has remained so ever since' (Federici 1998/2014: 75). The control of women and their bodies became a direct part of capitalist accumulation. 'The female body, the uterus, [was placed] at the service of population increase and the production and accumulation of labor-power' (Federici 1998/2014: 181).

This is a highly original interpretation of the role of the witch-hunt in medieval Europe. It does not, however, take much notice of particular local or national specificities. Equally problematic, primitive accumulation in the form of the enclosures of the countryside and the commons is regarded as a uniform process throughout Europe. Nevertheless, while scholars such as Robert Brenner (1985) assert the importance of the emergence of agricultural capitalism in Britain in the 16th century as a result of the enclosures, he also illustrates how this was a rather specific development, very different from agricultural development in France or Eastern Europe. There is no doubt that the witch-hunt had been devastating for women across Europe, and deepened divisions between men and women. It has to be understood as a response to the crisis of feudalism from within feudalism. As Federici outlines, The Black Death of the mid-14th century had decimated population levels across Europe. As a result of the subsequent shortages of labour power, peasants became empowered. 'For a broad section of the western European peasantry, and for urban workers, the 15th century was a period of unprecedented power', writes Federici. 'Not only did the scarcity of labor give them the upper hand, but the spectacle of employers competing for their services strengthened their sense of self-value, and erased centuries of degradation and subservience' (Federici 1998/2014: 46-7). Emboldened by their new-found strength, the common people started to challenge the nobility's power. Heretic movements sprang up, indicating paths of development beyond feudalism. 'Throughout

Europe, vast communalistic social movements and rebellions against feudalism had offered the promise of a new egalitarian society built on social equality and cooperation' (Federici 1998/2014: 61). The foundations of the feudalist social relations of production were shaken to the core. Thus, while the witch hunt in most parts of Europe and elsewhere preceded full-blown capitalism, capitalism emerged into a pre-existing system of patriarchal relationships. In other words, from the very beginning patriarchy has been part and parcel of capitalist exploitation and over the course of history has also been re-shaped by it. Analyses of current labour struggles, as a result, need to explore how capitalist exploitation is internally related to patriarchal oppression.

Clearly, the reproduction of workers does not only depend on the payment of wages, but equally important on the waged and unwaged labour in the sphere of social reproduction. Workers need to earn a wage in order to buy the necessary goods for their survival, but they also need someone to cook meals, look after children, wash and mend clothes. While waged domestic workers and the commodification and socialization of formerly unwaged domestic labour by the service industry and public welfare have reduced the amount of unwaged labour somewhat, the total number of hours worked in unwaged labour far exceeds the amount of hours of waged labour in all societies worldwide. Between 60 and 80 per cent of this unwaged labour is done by women. Despite the large amount of hours worked in these domestic relations of production, they are subordinated to the capitalist mode of production since domestic relations of production are mostly dependent on financial inputs in order to yield results, and these domestic relations of production do not command their own economic basis which would allow them to reproduce themselves (Gimenez 1990). Hence, during the emergence of capitalism within prior patriarchal forms of oppression, waged labour was separated from domestic economies, leading to the separation of work life and private life (Barrett 1980). While industrial labour in early European capitalism was predominantly female labour, a

hierarchical articulation of male and female work remained a constant throughout: the larger participation of women in domestic unwaged work led to a lesser status within waged work, with women consistently filling the lower ranks in waged employment and earning less than men on the labour market.

In the recent years, a more explicitly Marxist Feminist debate has made a return under the heading of ‘social reproduction theory’. Susan Ferguson uses the term ‘social reproductive labour’: ‘While on a fundamental level, the goal of social reproductive labour is to support life, it is at the same time a means of ensuring that adequate supplies of labour power are available to support capital’ (2020: 111). This is an excellent characterisation of the double nature of this kind of work, being at the same the basis for human survival, but also assuming a degree of functionality for the reproduction of capital. The aim of social reproduction theory is towards an integrated understanding of how waged and unwaged work, and the gendered divisions of labour within both types of work are interdependent, with the emphasis that ‘we need to abandon (...) the framework of discrete spheres of production and reproduction’ (Bhattacharya 2018: 76).

Equally, we need to explore how capitalist exploitation is internally related to forms of oppression based on race. Historically, we need to understand the way how capitalism emerged in already existing relations of racial oppression; indeed, how racial oppression was part and parcel of the emergence of capitalism in the first place. In line with the separation of the economic and the political, colonialism is often separated from capitalism (Bhambra and Holmwood 2018: 576). From a historical materialist perspective too, a narrow focus on exploitation at the (capitalist) workplace can result in overlooking the racial implications of capitalist accumulation. Nevertheless, as capitalism emerged within a pre-existing system of patriarchy, so it emerged within a pre-existing system of racism and imperialism. We need to remember that capitalism as a social formation will always include non-capitalist relations of

production. As Marx argued, capitalism is characterised by the dominance of wage labour, but this goes along with the contemporary existence of other forms of oppression and domination (Marx 1884/1978: 554). Thus, historical capitalism is not some kind of abstract, pure form of social relations, and any definition of capitalism as an abstract mode of production risks to overlook the historical forms through which capitalism emerged. For example, British capitalism in the 18th century was not only characterised by wage labour and the production of commodities in Britain, but also dependent on enslaved workers in the production of, for example, cotton in the colonies. ‘In the late 18th century, income from colonial properties in the Americas was equal to approximately 50 per cent of British gross investment. Since much of this would have been reinvested in British industries, it provided a significant input into British industrialisation’ (Anievas and Nişancioğlu 2015: 164). In turn, labour of enslaved workers in the Americas was supplied through the Atlantic slave trade, in which Britain was heavily involved. ‘From 1783 to 1793 the slavers of Liverpool sold 300,000 slaves for 15 million, which went into the foundation of industrial enterprises’ (Ernest Mandel, quoted in Mies 1986/2014: 90). In other words, the full establishment of the capitalist mode of production in Britain was dependent on the slave trade as well as on enslaved workers. ‘The English Industrial Revolution would have been virtually impossible without cotton and the expropriation of populations and the land in Africa and the Americas with which the empire of cotton was built. The origin of the age of capital was thus intimately bound to a racialised system of accumulation’ (Foster and Clark 2018: 12). Capitalism has been from the very beginning racialised and needs to be understood as such.

In sum, the witch-hunt and its long-lasting legacy encountered other processes including changes in agricultural work, the profits from the enslavement of African and Indoamerican populations which enabled mining, cotton, sugar and spice production, and the establishment of manufactures. It was during the 17th and 18th centuries that these processes

converged in the slow establishment of capitalist relations of production in the interstices of feudalism, arising to dominance throughout the 19th century. Unsurprisingly, workers are highly fragmented and sectoral divisions identified earlier are accompanied with divisions according to race and gender, with racialised workers usually being overrepresented in lower paid and physically straining jobs. Public sector and service workers tend to be predominantly female. Especially gendered divisions among the workforce see much variation over time and geography. Fragmentations can be overcome in moments of class struggle, but they need to be understood as serious barriers to solidarity nonetheless.

Conclusion

The capitalist mode of production is based on wage labour, the private ownership or control of the means of production, imperialism, unwaged work, patriarchal gender relations and a state and legal system that guarantees the reproduction of these social relations. This particular set-up of how goods and livelihoods are produced is historically specific to capitalism. Importantly, capitalist social formations include in addition to capitalist relations of production other, non-capitalist relations of production. Considering that capitalism emerged within a prior existing system characterised by patriarchal and racial hierarchies, capitalism is inevitably always gendered and racialised. ‘Race, gender and sexuality are not additional systems that just happen to coincide. Rather, they are concrete relations comprising a wider sociality, integral to the very existence and operation of capitalism and class’ (Ferguson et al 2016: 32). Thus, capitalism is structured through a class divide, but also a gendered division of labour in the waged and unwaged sphere, and through racist and imperialist divisions within and across countries.

Furthermore, we think that a dynamic understanding of the dualisms of formal and informal work as well as workplace struggles and social movements allows a fuller understanding of labour action in the Global South. These dualisms emerged originally in the

context of Eurocentric perspectives of society, reifying certain practices and social conditions that were prevalent in the societies in which scholars set up those concepts. While much empirical research provides this dynamic understanding already, the repeated use of those dualistic concepts as reflection of self-evident social realities clouds our analytical capabilities. In this light, we propose to work on new concepts that describe the same social realities but might provide more nuance and context appropriate knowledge in order not to get stuck in those conceptual deadlocks. Certainly, popular struggle is a concept that can be used to include both workplace and non-workplace struggles, making clear that the workplace should not be understood as separate from wider society. Contributions to this special issue about labour struggles in the Global South are aware of these wider dynamics of capitalist accumulation and equally recognise that workers' organisations in this wide variety of class struggles go beyond the rather narrow trade union form.

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