

Claudia Bernardi et al. (eds), *Moving Workers. Historical Perspectives on Labour, Coercion and Im/Mobilities* [Work in Global and Historical Perspective, Vol. 19.] (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023). 267 pp. ISBN 9783111136516.

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In the afterword of Bernardi et al. (2023), Thomas Nail ends the concluding paragraph with the following sentences: “I call the political figure of schismogenesis ‘the migrant’. Migrants in history are often called ‘nomads’, ‘barbarians’, ‘vagabonds’, or ‘workers’ depending on the larger pattern of social motion that names them. They are always figures who constitute and shape societies through their motion – but they are also typically defined as expendable exceptions by the dominant groups of those societies” (p. 234). Nail invites the reader to read the essays in the book *Moving Workers. Historical Perspectives on Labour, Coercion and Im/mobilities* as a critical guide when thinking about labor mobility in all sorts of contexts, from both historical and temporary lenses. In this review, I will take up Nail’s invitation and devote this book review to the journey I embarked on when reading this highly intellectual, intriguing work, which I recommend to everyone who is interested in human im/mobility that founds its existence in labor and coercion.

*Moving Workers* determines how the movement of workers in several historical and regional contexts looked, why it was created, by whom and for what purpose it remained a phenomenon that we still witness today. The insights of this book merge from two different approaches: the first supporting current study and the second the epistemological renewal through interdisciplinary approaches. Besides an introduction chapter, this volume consists of eight chapters with each its own contextual framework, contribution, and perspective on the entanglements of human labor and human movement, and finally a concluding afterword. The chapters in the volume span the entire period from the sixteenth century to the present day and cover a variety of regions across Europe and North America.

The editors of this volume devote the introduction chapter to a swift elaboration of the key concepts: (im)mobility, labor, and coercion. Here the editors rightfully point out that the concept of (im)mobility provides concrete tools to further understand more than just physical motion or the lack of such. This definition also means that immobility, meaning the movement of the ones not moving away from the community do

not play an unimportant role in examining mobility. As Pryor argues, less mobile people benefit from the ones migrating, which could even result in an unequal experience of the environment from which mobile people have migrated, and in which immobile people have remained. However, the editors explain, the interconnectedness of labor and coercion in the context of migration deepens our understanding of the movement of mobile people (despite distances) and the related systems of (unconscious) control by those left behind. In chapter one, such play between (im)mobility, labor, and coercion is further explained in the context of German miners in the sixteenth-century Tuscany.

Starting with an impressive analysis of letters between the Tyrolean silver assayer Hans Glöggel and the grand duke of Tuscany Cosimo I de' Medici (1519-1574), Gabriele Marcon devotes chapter one to the way economic strategies in Tuscany silver mines played out for both mobile employees and employers. Marcon contributes to the volume showing that early modern miners were both subject to and engaged with recruitment as a form of migration. Accordingly, coercion and profit-making strategies in the context of Tuscany silver mines were not always clearly separable categories.

In chapter two, Johan Heinsen continues the examination of labor through the context of early modern Danish prison systems, as well as their reform. Whereas both male and female prisoners were employed in prison, Heinsen demonstrates that only male prisoners could be sent to labor at naval and army facilities. Such labor was also known as "slavery". Forms of slavery took place in maximum-security prisons and even resulted in hunger strikes and rebellions (e.g., in 1817). Heinsen teaches that neither form of protest resulted in modern penitentiaries, due to the lack of purposeful architecture, surveillance, and constant emphasis on individual isolation, which would subsequently define institutional ambitions.

Chapter three is written by Magnus Ressel. Ressel focusses on accounting practices and transatlantic slave trade, offering a unique perspective from the business prospectus of an eighteenth-century European slave trader. Where most historians focus on the prospectus of those enslaved, Ressel offers a unique insight by focusing on several examples of the slave trader. He makes incredibly clear what and how the business prospectus through investment advertising dominated one of the largest and darkest periods of early modern times.

In chapter four, Vilhelm Vilhelmsson and Emil Gunnlaugsson contribute to the volume by addressing a series of reforms by the Danish

royal authorities to regulate labor in Iceland. One of those reforms was a written permit, resulting in what we will later call a 'passport', which could provide a masterless or landless person a sanctioned position. Through time, Vilhelmsson and Gunnlaugsson argue, a written permit provided freedom of movement while facilitating mobility, labor, and coercion, as it would be clear who the relevant authorities are.

Muge Ozbek provides the reader with an intriguing contribution in chapter five, through the demonstration of the way domestic workers in early twentieth-century Istanbul were kept dependent by their employers. Through the lens of police files under the Ottoman rule, the author illustrates how girls and young women from rural backgrounds were commodified in their capacity to labor. As live-in domestic workers in Istanbul households, they shed light on the important role gender-related power relations played in the way labor and coercion patterns and dynamics existed. Ozbek argues to incorporate the important window of crucial links between patriarchy, the control of (im) mobility, and labor coercion for a deeper understanding.

Furthermore, in chapter six Aigi Rahi-Tamm demonstrates how the mass deportation decision for Estonia, made in Moscow in 1949, leads to new national labor identity. The mass deportation in 1949 was carried out as a military operation by power structures, leaving individuals no choice but to migrate and remain segregated from society. Forced mobility (displacement) resulted in regulations for Estonian workers to work in specialized jobs which required more than physical labor. The economic situation in Estonia improved and resulted in a work culture characteristic to Estonian identity.

Claudia Bernardi devotes chapter seven to a historical analysis of a labor mobility regime created by the Bracero Program. By referring to the idea of "migration industry" in the North American (including the Mexican) context, Bernardi discusses the profitability of workers and the idea of "a factory of irregular labor migration". Bernardi argues that approaches regarding implementations in North America and Europe are limited, given the view on migration in industries is considered only for its ability to generate profits through a set of binational institutions and structures.

In the last chapter, chapter eight, Angelina Kussy argues that the collectivization of Romanian agriculture after World War II (1949-1962) could be considered as an overall modernization project of post-war communism. Through biographies of three generations of Romanian domestic workers living in Spain, Kussy demonstrates an

increased geographical mobility of younger generations who could have been accompanied by a simultaneous process of immobilization and labor exploitation. Different historical periods exhibit similar dynamics, shifting from one place to the other to allow further capital accumulation. The results are an important, yet unexpected, component in the study on labor, coercion, and (im) mobility, that is: political mechanisms and the way compulsion, mobilization, and social reproductive changes interact with processes that could promote controlling regimes even more.

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Leonard Blussé, *De Chinezenmoord. De kolonisatie van Batavia en het bloedbad van 1740* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 2023). 360 pp. ISBN 9789463821810.

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Historian John Wills has advanced a conceptual framework aimed at delineating the “long process of the Asian maritime facet of the modern world system”. He suggests employing the term “interactive emergence” instead of the conventional designation of “European expansion”. This alternative conceptualization appears to offer a more nuanced portrayal of the intricate interplay between European and Asian civilizations during the early modern era.<sup>3</sup>

In his examination of the evolving urban structures in Euro-Asian contexts, Wills identifies notable parallels between the cities of Manila and Batavia.<sup>4</sup> He underscores the necessity of delving into the multifaceted layers of socio-political and cultural dynamics that characterize each locale in order to comprehend the intricacies of Euro-Asian urban convergence fully.<sup>5</sup> In my view, the complexity inherent in these layered convergences forms the foundation upon which prosperity hinges, contingent upon the harmonization of global

3 John Wills, ‘Review: Maritime Asia, 1500-1800. The interactive emergence of European domination’, *The American Historical Review* 98:1(1993) 83-105 at 84-85, 99.

4 Ibid, p. 100; John Wills, ‘China’s father shores. Continuities and changes in the destination ports of China’s maritime trade, 1680-1690’. in: Roderich Ptak, Dietmar Rothermund (eds), *Emporia, commodities and entrepreneurs in Asian maritime trade, c. 1400-1700* (Wiesbaden 1991) 53-77 at 60.

5 Wills, ‘Review’, 104-105.