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Introduction: Moving Workers in History

This book explores how workers moved and were moved, why they moved, and how they were kept from moving. In particular, it examines the junction of mobility and coercion, thereby merging insights from two very different but in many ways mutually supportive currents of study and epistemological renewal. On the one hand, global history has broadened the scope of studying labour spatially and temporally as well as creating new methodological incentives by eschewing the binary distinctions previous generations of scholars tended to make between free and unfree labour, productive and unproductive labour, or wage labour and unpaid labour – to name only some of the most common examples.¹ Historians of work have thus increasingly begun to emphasise the interrelational nature of labour regimes in their various guises throughout history and around the globe. On the other hand, the expanding field of mobility studies has been paying more and more attention to questions of labour in connection with mobility, since work is one of the prime motivators for people to move and be moved. In this line of research, human movement emerges as a social process enmeshed in myriad relations of power and control.²

This volume aims to combine the influence of these two historiographical currents by investigating them through the lens of coercion³ as an analytical tool to improve our understanding of the complex and interconnected processes of labour and mobility in different historical contexts. With contributions spanning Europe and North America, *Moving Workers* combines fresh perspectives on the entanglements of human labour and human movement. It shows that all struggles relating to the mobility of workers or its restriction have the potential to reveal complex configurations of hierarchies, dependencies, and diverging conceptions of work and labour relations that continuously make and remake our world.

1 Andreas Eckert, “Why all the Fuss about Global Labour History?” in *Global Histories of Work*, ed. Andreas Eckert (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 3–22.

2 Fiona-Katharina Seiger, Christiane Timmerman, Noel B. Salazar, and Johan Wets, *Migration at Work: Aspirations, Imaginaries and Structures of Mobility* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020).

3 Johan Heinsen and Juliane Schiel, “Through the Lens of Coercion: For a Shift of Perspective in Labour and Social History,” in *Labour and Coercion: Doing Social History after the Global Turn*, ed. Johan Heinsen and Juliane Schiel (forthcoming).

In this introduction, we will map out the relevant theoretical and historiographical framework for the volume and discuss the key analytical concepts shaping the empirical studies included therein. These concepts – mobility, immobility, labour, and coercion – form the threads that bind the chapters together and illustrate the value of studying human labour and human movement as entangled processes of hierarchical social relations.

Mobility

Human history is marked by an intrinsic quest for mobility. Moving around enables people to foster ties extending across geographies to advance their cause. Persons who can move are often regarded as “pillars of community”, as historian Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor has argued, because less mobile people can benefit from their broadened horizons and the advantages they bring.⁴ Mobility is also directly linked to access to public space, which in turn forms an important component of citizenship. Conversely, attempts to restrict people’s mobility commonly translate into social exclusion and segregation. A case in point is the fact that one of the largest and most consequential fights for desegregation, the twentieth-century U.S. Civil Rights Movement, gained significant traction by bringing public transportation into focus.⁵

The historical clashes surrounding mobility, its advantages and restriction that are discussed in this book reveal the extraordinary social relevance of commanding one’s own movement, as well as the obvious desire to do so. They also show that authorities’ understanding of mobility often differs from that of the people they hope to control. Yet governments and employers invariably need to define mobility in order to be able to oversee it. The difficulty of this endeavour resonates throughout history and to this day, exemplified by the fact that scholars continue to grapple with the many dimensions the notion of mobility encompasses.

Placing his finger on this exact problem, Noel Salazar asked “What’s in a name?” in a recent theoretical contribution to mobility studies. This simple but pertinent question illustrates that the term “mobility” has become an effective catchword crisscrossing various streams of literature far beyond the original field

⁴ Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor, *Colored Travelers: Mobility and the Fight for Citizenship before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 2.

⁵ Pryor, *Colored Travelers*, 2. For the historical trajectory of the struggle to access public transportation in the United States, see Elizabeth Belanger, “Working-Class Mobility and Streetcar Politics in Reconstruction-Era St. Louis,” *GeoHumanities* 8, 1 (2022): 122–139.

of social science in which it was born.⁶ Mobility is now considered a condition, a method, a paradigm; it has even surged as far as becoming a “turn” – the *mobility turn*. As Mimi Sheller and John Urry, to whom this turn is commonly credited, summarise plainly: “All the world seems to be on the move.”⁷ But Salazar’s question makes it clear that we have still not firmly established what mobility actually is. Is it a mere expression of the imagination that the world is continuously in flux?⁸ Or is it, more inclusively, a complex assemblage of movement, ideologies, and experience, as Tim Creswell has suggested?⁹

Fifty years ago, the pioneering writings of Henri Lefebvre introduced the notion of “rhythmanalysis”, a concept that accounts for the simultaneous spatial and temporal dimensions of human movements taking place at the expenditure of energy.¹⁰ In other words, rhythm occurs through time in a space, which Lefebvre defined as a social relation, thereby laying the groundwork for a theoretical approach to the relationship between movement and stasis. Following his inceptions, we hold that mobility is not only a physical matter of moving entities; it is also imbued in the social relations that precede and follow it.

Far from the apologetic understanding of free movement of glamorous elites by globalisation theories, this prismatic approach underlines the ambiguity of freedom of movement. We build on this to emphasise that mobility is designed, channelled, governed, tracked, controlled, and surveilled in varying ways – and also that it is unequal, since it is hierarchised through lines of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, nationality, age, caste, and dis/ability, among others.¹¹ This necessary attention to the *conditions* of movement within situations of inequality leads us to explore in greater

6 Noel B. Salazar, “Mobility: What’s in a Name?,” in *Mobility in Culture: Conceptual Frameworks and Approaches*, ed. Nancy Duxbury and Dea Vidović (Zagreb: Kultura Nova Foundation, 2022), 20–37.

7 Mimi Sheller and John Urry, “The New Mobilities Paradigm,” *Environment and Planning A*, 38, 2 (2006): 207–226, here 207. A series of studies on the concept of mobility appeared during the early 2000s before the development of the “New Mobilities Paradigm” by Sheller and Urry in 2006 vastly increased the pace of the mobility turn. Sheller and Urry co-founded the Centre for Mobilities Research (CeMoRe) at Lancaster University in 2003 and established the journal *Mobilities* together with Kevin Hannam in 2006. See also John Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2000) and John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

8 Noel B. Salazar and Alan Smart, “Anthropological Takes on (Im)Mobility,” *Global Studies in Culture and Power* 18, 6 (2011): 1–9, here 1.

9 Tim Creswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (London: Routledge, 2006), 3.

10 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

11 Claudia Bernardi, “Capture, Coexistence and (Im)mobility of Labour Forms through the Borders,” in *Research Handbook on the Global Political Economy of Work*, ed. Maurizio Atzeni,

depth the power relationships that legitimise or prevent the mobility of people – the ongoing dynamics that Nina Glick Schiller and Noel Salazar have termed “regimes of mobility”.¹²

And in fact, the concept of mobility provides us with concrete tools to do so since it comprises much more than physical motion: It is only through “people, objects, words, and other embodied forms” that mobility obtains meaning.¹³ This means that mobility is *related* to movement across a given space but does not *equal* it; rather, it encompasses the relation between entities on the move as well as the ability to choose whether to move at all. Stordeur Pryor has conceptualised this ability as a “currency” that creates “economic, political, and social possibilities”.¹⁴ With regard to human movements, mobility also contains a subjective dimension of moving safely, without restriction, and in self-determined fashion. People who have power over their own mobility can thus also decide *not* to move – and conversely, *being* moved without consent or against one’s own desires means that movement also holds coercive aspects. In this vein, it ceases to be a mere connector between two points and emerges as an analytical category for exploring social relations.¹⁵ The specific view onto coercion that this approach enables is an ideal tool for studying workers who moved and were moved throughout history.

Labour and coercion

The fruitful field of migration history has long been making significant contributions to our understanding of the role of labour in the spatial movement of people over short and long distances, along with the related systems of control.¹⁶ This interconnectedness of labour and migration history reflects the importance of labour for the analysis of profound changes in migration patterns and policies

Alessandra Mezzadri, Dario Azzellini, Phoebe Moore, and Ursula Apitzsch (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023).

¹² Nina Glick Schiller and Noel B. Salazar, “Regimes of Mobility Across the Globe,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39, 2 (2013): 183–200.

¹³ Noel B. Salazar, “Theorizing Mobility through Concepts and Figures,” *Tempo Social* 30, 2 (2018): 154.

¹⁴ Pryor, *Colored Travelers*, 2.

¹⁵ See Kevin Hannam et al., “Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings,” *Mobilities* 1, 1 (2006): 1–22.

¹⁶ Jan Lucassen, *Migrant Labour in Europe 1600–1900* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, *Globalising Migration History* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

across time and space.¹⁷ Mobility scholars, who are usually concerned with a broad variety of moving elements such as ideas, objects, and culture, have recently also applied significantly more attention to the topic of labour – and especially to the entanglement of work and racialisation in present and/or very recent times.¹⁸

Similar to mobility scholars who scrutinise social processes conditioning movement, researchers of global labour history also typically approach processes as analytical tools rather than fixed categories. This intersection is precisely where the authors in this book position themselves. The emergence of global labour history in the late 1990s was in fact a reaction to protracted debates about the analytical essentialisation of different labour regimes that allowed for straightforward categorisation and comparisons between, for instance, wage labour and slavery. With a view to directing attention towards labour relations outside of “free wage labour” and beyond the Western hemisphere, several historians have recently argued for the use of coercion as a useful concept to overcome the limitations of taxonomies and their epistemological constraints.¹⁹ The fact that no academic approach has hitherto succeeded in drawing a clear line between “free” and “unfree” labour underlines the existence of coercive elements in virtually all labour relations, past and present. These links between coercion and labour are “not only crucial to our understanding of historical societies, but also speak to ongoing developments in the contemporary global economy.”²⁰

17 See Jan Lucassen, *The Story of Work: A New History of Humankind* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2021).

18 Cristiana Bastos, Andre Novoa, and Noel B. Salazar, “Mobile Labour: An Introduction,” *Mobilities* 16, 2 (2021): 155–163.

19 Christian G. De Vito, Juliane Schiel, and Matthias van Rossum, “From Bondage to Precariousness? New Perspectives on Labor and Social History,” *Journal of Social History* 54, 2 (2020): 644–662. On the lengthy scholarly debate on free and unfree labour and the concept of coercion, see Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden, eds., *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997); Jairus Banaji, *Theory as History: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Marcel van der Linden and Magaly Rodríguez García, eds., *On Coerced Labor: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Tom Brass, “(Re-) Defining Labour Coercion?,” *Critical Sociology* 44, 4–5 (2018): 793–803. Key works on global labour history include Jan Lucassen, *Global Labour History: A State of the Art* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006); Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Andreas Eckert, ed., *Global Histories of Work* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016); Anamaríja Batista, Viola Franziska Müller and Corinna Peres (eds.), *Coercion and Wage Labour: Exploring Work Relations through History and Art* (London: UCL Press, 2023).

20 Social History Portal, European Labour History Network (ELHN), working group “Labour and Coercion”, “Mission”, URL: <https://socialhistoryportal.org/elhn/wg-coercion>, accessed 6 April 2022.

Historian Andreas Eckert has defined the historiographical contribution of global labour historians as being “infused with both specificity and comparison, which sees shared entanglements as bi- or multi-directional rather than unidirectional.”²¹ Applying this perspective to the mobility of workers, this book joins a vibrant scholarship focusing on the role of coercion in affecting human movement across the globe. It explores the linkages with labour exploitation writ large as well as with the spatiality of coercive labour regimes and their interconnectedness to regimes of im/mobility, stressing the need to historicise these connections.²²

This being said, a precise definition of the concept of coercion is at the very heart of ongoing academic discussions. Some scholars have advocated for an essentialist understanding, which implies an analytically defined labour relation that can be measured in terms of “degrees of coercion” and consequently produces an understanding of a “spectrum” of labour coercion.²³ Others have emphasised constant engagement and entanglement as being essential to understanding the practice of coercion in different historical contexts.²⁴ This approach is in response to the recent appeal by historians Christian de Vito, Juliane Schiel, and Matthias van Rossum for an empirical analysis of labour coercion based on studying the “modalities of domination and dependence, allowing for a more articulated conceptualization of social formations across time and space.”²⁵ They promote a technique that begins with the study of individual sites, institutions,

21 Andreas Eckert, “Why All the Fuss about Global Labour History?”, 7.

22 See for example Clare Anderson, “Global Mobilities,” in *World Histories from Below: Disruption and Dissent, 1750 to the Present*, ed. Antoinette Burton and Tony Ballantyne (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 169–195; Johan Heinsen, Martin Bak Jørgensen, and Martin Ottovay Jørgensen, eds., *Coercive Geographies: Historicizing Mobility, Labor and Confinement* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

23 Important contributions have come, for example, from Alessandro Stanziani, who approaches coercion as the opposite of freedom of labour, while emphasising that both forms are historically coexistent and have been “defined and practiced in reference to each other”, as well as from Marcel van der Linden, who has argued for the use of an analytical taxonomy focusing on three “moments” of coercion that define the nature and form of coercive labour relations, namely the moments of entry, extraction, and exit. Alessandro Stanziani, “Introduction: Labour, Coercion, and Economic Growth in Eurasia, Seventeenth – Early Twentieth Centuries,” in *Labour, Coercion, and Economic Growth in Eurasia, 17th–20th Centuries*, ed. Alessandro Stanziani (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1–26, here 1; Marcel van der Linden, “Dissecting Coerced Labor,” in Van der Linden and García, eds., *On Coerced Labor*, 293–322.

24 Vilhelm Vilhelmsson, “Contested Households: Lodgers, Labour, and the Law in Rural Iceland in the Early 19th Century,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2023.2197916>; Johan Heinsen, “Runaway Heuristics: A Micro-Spatial Study of Immobilizing Chains, C. 1790,” *Annals of the Fondazione Luigi Einaudi* 56,1 (2022): 37–60.

25 De Vito, Schiel and van Rossum, “From Bondage to Precariousness,” 649.

experiences, and trajectories and insists on a complexity implying both spatial and temporal entanglements and historical specificity.

Immobility

The focus on processes necessitates thorough examination of the actual practices of social agents and includes negotiation, conflict, and resistance as essential components of coercion. Workers are not passive recipients of their subjugation; they are actors who dynamically participate in the social worlds they live and work in, contributing to (re)producing and altering those worlds in one way or another. Assuming the perspective of workers automatically brings into focus the dimension of *immobility*. Over the past few decades, a growing body of scholarship has emerged that discusses workers' mobility as a reaction to their imposed immobilisation. The most obvious examples are the many runaways from countless slaveries throughout history, but the notion equally applies to military deserters, escaping serfs and indentured servants, and ultimately all types and groups of workers confronted with experiences of confinement.²⁶ Their escapes are to be understood as a highly visible outcome of the mobility of coerced workers that even the most oppressive labour regimes produce.

Immobility is not always desired by employers and detested by workers, however. When relocation laid the foundation for labour relations based on coercion, forced mobilisation sometimes became the target of workers' resentment and resistance. Only one example of this are European convicts who were shipped to overseas colonies as labourers under dire conditions of privation and disease, stripped of their social environments and family ties.²⁷ In these cases, people aspired to stay at home while the forces of the labour regime attempted to uproot

²⁶ Matthias van Rossum and Jeannette Kamp, eds., *Desertion in the Early Modern World: A Comparative History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Viola Franziska Müller, *Escape to the City: Fugitive Slaves in the Antebellum Urban South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), chapter 2; Forrest D. Colburn, ed., *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1989); Abbott Emerson Smith, *Colonists in Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labor in America, 1607–1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947); Marcus Rediker, Titas Chakraborty, and Matthias van Rossum, eds., *A Global History of Runaways: Workers, Mobility, and Capitalism, 1600–1850* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

²⁷ Johan Heinsen, "Escaping St. Thomas: Class Relations and Convict Strategies in the Danish West Indies, 1672–1687," in Rediker, Chakraborty, and van Rossum, eds., *A Global History of Runaways*, 40–57.

and displace them. These considerations and the contributions in this book illustrate how the concept of immobility needs to be integrated into the analytical toolkit used by scholars of mobility and labour – not as a binary opposite of “free mobility” but instead as a key component of human movement. They also place the conjoined aspects of mobility and immobility at the very centre of work as one of the characteristic – or perhaps even fundamentally defining – activities of human existence.²⁸ Virtually everywhere there are workers, it seems, there are others who try to control their mobility.

Many scholars in the field are aware of this Janus-faced nature of mobility and immobility. Indeed, the very foundation of the mobilities paradigm includes the simultaneous question of the “politics of (im)mobilities” as focused on the contingent relations between movements.²⁹ Yet while the theoretical literature on mobility is extensive, the notion of immobility remains both understudied and undertheorised. Sociologist Kerilyn Schewel has argued that there is an inherent “mobility bias” in social theory, as movement tends to be associated with human agency and social change while immobility is (wrongly) associated with sedentariness, complacency, and stasis. She proposes instead that immobility should be approached as a complex and dynamic process, defining it as “spatial continuity [. . .] over a period of time” that is relative and contextual rather than absolute.³⁰ The recent pandemic caused by COVID-19 and characterised by lockdowns, isolation, and countless people being “stuck” in distant places has brought this issue to the fore among mobility scholars, with some even suggesting the advent of an “immobility turn”.³¹

Moving Workers thus approaches immobility in the same way as mobility – namely by showing that it is contingent on contextual relations as well. While mobility is understood as the ability to move, immobility should be seen as a (spatial) continuity dependent on social processes and inherently connected to historically contextual power relations. By contrast, mobilisation implies an interference from the outside – for example a (spatial) movement instigated by someone else. Similarly, immobilisation is considered a (spatial) restriction imposed by other historical actors that may also result in confinement. It is the historical interplay

²⁸ James Suzman, *Work: A History of How We Spend Our Time* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020); Jan Lucassen, *The Story of Work*.

²⁹ Peter Adey, “If Mobility Is Everything then It Is Nothing: Towards a Relational Politics of (Im)mobilities,” *Mobilities* 1, 1 (2006): 75–94.

³⁰ Kerilyn Schewel, “Understanding Immobility: Moving Beyond the Mobility Bias in Migration Studies,” *International Migration Review* 54, 2 (2020): 328–355, here 329.

³¹ David Cairns, Thais França, Daniel Malet Calvo, and Leonardo de Azevedo, “An Immobility Turn? The Covid-19 Pandemic, Mobility Capital and International Students in Portugal,” *Mobilities* 16, 6 (2021): 874–887.

of these different configurations of workers' movements that this book aims to highlight and examine. Or, as Noel Salazar aptly phrased it, it aims to explore "the very processes that produce movement and global connections [and which] also promote stasis, exclusion and disconnection."³² The contributions in this collection narrate stories that are exemplary of such processes while focusing on the entanglement between coercion and im/mobility as a major nexus.

Chapter synopsis

The chapters in this book, which span the period from the sixteenth century to the present day and cover a variety of regions across the European continent and North America, engage with a broad range of workers' experiences. They are situated at the crossroads of divergent paths of investigation and different scholarly traditions. While the majority of the authors are trained historians, *Moving Workers* also includes anthropological studies as well as chapters that draw heavily on methods of the social sciences. Striving to apply the tools and insights of global labour history to Western histories, they avoid theoretical models imbued with methodological nationalism.³³ Instead, the contributors start from the ground, looking at groups of labourers and asking what im/mobility meant to them in their specific place and time – and how it came into being. They explore the construction and workings of coercion, investigating how all these elements informed, related to, and interacted with each other.

In the opening chapter, Gabriele Marcon leads us into the world of highly mobile workers – or so it appears at first sight: Germans who migrated to the mines of sixteenth-century Tuscany. By asking whether they were "inveigled or invited", Marcon immediately places his focus on experiences of coercion and their inextricable links to mobility and immobility. He analyses debt, employment contracts, and wage payments as mechanisms of coercion, both during recruitment and once the men and women had arrived at their new worksites, while simultaneously exploring the autonomous dimensions within the very same labour relations. The Grand Duke of Tuscany and his mining officials imposed differing degrees of im/mobility on labourers in order to allocate them to the various mines throughout the territory according to their numbers and skillsets. This policy produced stark distinctions among the German migrants as well as between

³² Salazar, "Mobility: What's in a Name?", 24.

³³ Marcel van der Linden and Jan Lucassen, *Prolegomena for a Global Labour History* (Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History, 1999), 7.

them and the largely unskilled local workforce – and all of these people reacted to the coercion and restrictions imposed on their mobility with diverse strategies.

In striking contrast to chapter one, the second contribution by Johan Heinsen sets out from a context of extreme immobilisation: convict labour. The early modern Danish state created a penal system – which they referred to as “slavery” – designed to simultaneously meet the two needs of punishing intransigents and creating a disposable workforce for various forms of hard labour. As Heinsen shows, this system was prone to frequent and repeated escape attempts, many of which were successful. The imprisoned workers’ fierce resistance led to reforms and institutional change which, over a long period of time, shifted the priority from productivity through coerced labour to an increased emphasis on the isolation of convicts from society, their secure incarceration, and eventually rehabilitation as the primary aim of the prison system. Heinsen thus reveals concrete connections between the historical development of the prison system in Denmark and the conflicts surrounding the im/mobility of convicts as coerced workers for the state, thereby questioning the relevance of Enlightenment schemes to explain “progress” in the prison system.

Forced mobilisation by a distant actor is the core theme of the third chapter by Magnus Ressel, who analyses the transatlantic slave trade as a brutally forced mass migration enabled by the techniques of accounting. Through the use of account books, a late-eighteenth-century Belgian slaving enterprise abstracted human beings to the extent that potential investors came to perceive them as mere commodities alongside other enthusiastically described products with the utopian allure of vast global riches. Carefully examining the so-called business “prospectus” of this enterprise, Ressel traces how the accountant consciously turned people into numbers to disguise their high mortality rates as a sober and anticipated part of a business reality.

Around the same time, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, limited access to land and property rendered the vast majority of Iceland’s working poor susceptible to coercion, as Vilhelm Vilhelmson and Emil Gunnlaugsson discuss in the subsequent chapter. In order to make workers available where they were needed at the right time, the authorities aimed to regulate their movements by means of passports. This undertaking was highly dynamic, as it was organised around seasonal and regional labour demands and affected servants, fishermen, and common labourers alike. The passport system ultimately failed, as the authors stress by turning their perspective to the workers. This was in part because workers employed various evasive tactics – including what the authors call “subversive mobility” – to resist the restrictions imposed by the coercive labour regime and its passport system in an attempt to regulate mobility and bring about periodic immobilisation.

Turning to a domestic context, the fifth chapter by Müge Özbek follows girls and young women from rural areas into Istanbul, where they worked in the households of wealthier families in the late Ottoman Empire. Analysing forms of control over these domestics' mobility, Özbek identifies the legacies of (abolished) legal slavery, lack of access to their own wages, and physical pressure that immobilised them at their worksite by keeping them confined in the house. Challenging prevalent conceptions, Özbek also points to the complicity of family members with employers in producing highly exploited domestic workers against the backdrop of patriarchal claims to their persons and labour. This turned fathers, mothers, and husbands into agents of labour coercion. When such women did venture to leave their place in the household against all odds, society attached the mark of vice and prostitution to them, and the police intervened accordingly. The stories described by Özbek as well as by Vilhelmsson and Gunnlaugsson demonstrate that contesting mobility restrictions equates to a contestation of a top-down construction of society, providing insights into the extent of power domestic servants and common labourers were able to exercise.

Aigi Rahi-Tamm flips the picture once again in chapter six. Highlighting the desire *not* to move, she delves into the experiences of landowning Estonian peasants. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Soviet central government envisioned these *kulaks* transitioning to working on collective farms; those attempting to resist this collectivisation were deported to labour camps in Siberia. Rahi-Tamm scrutinises their struggles as workers and survivors in both locations, underlining the constant back-and-forth between forced mobilisation and immobilisation – both as punishment and as a labour supply measure. When the displaced persons were eventually allowed to return to Estonia in the late 1950s, their stigma of being *kulaks* and deportees translated into local hostilities that prevented them from reclaiming their former farms, forcing them to seek out new occupations and homes. With special consideration for gender and age, this chapter explores the very meaning of work in a society of upheaval.

In chapter seven, Claudia Bernardi analyses the movement of Mexican agricultural workers in the mid-twentieth century. Rather than merely focusing on their work as *braceros* (participants in the bilateral so-called “Bracero Programme”) after their arrival in the United States, she draws a comprehensive picture of these individuals' labour mobility as a process beginning with their departure from home and extending through their stay at recruitment centres all the way to their lives at the work sites. Discussing control over labour, indebtedness, and coercion, Bernardi demonstrates how various actors were involved not only in valorising Mexican workers' mobility. In fact, their immobilisation was equally capitalised on by persons like recruiters, local service providers, and border officials. This chapter emphatically shows how mobility and immobilisation

not only coexisted but in fact constituted one another, intertwined within the same labour mobility regime that the author presents as a means of coercion as well as of valorisation of workers' im/mobility and waiting times.

Transnational mobility is likewise the topic of Angelina Kussy's chapter eight, in which she discusses Romanian peasants and their gradual move as a social group towards becoming care workers in Spain. Kussy identifies the dispossession of peasants by the Communist regime in the twentieth century as a form of coercion that undermined their social reproductive regime and rendered them dependent on wage work. The consequence in Romania was mobilisation into various industries, which established the historical conditions for the current labour mobility regime. Connecting two historical transitions, Kussy draws on biographical interviews to explore the experiences of immobilisation and illegalisation of the granddaughter generation in present-day Spain. Through the remittances these women send back home to Romania, they assume their place within an emerging mobile global care class whose members use their wages to aid those staying behind. It is a process instigated by neoliberal reforms and facilitated by the open borders in Europe.

Finally, the afterword by philosopher Thomas Nail expands the historical timeframe back to the Palaeolithic, tracing how human movement in various civilisations and cultures fostered exchange and innovation. Nail's work revolves around the philosophy of motion and mobility, with the mobile human as the central figure shaping societies through history. In his reflections, he visualises human movement by evoking the image of fractal patterns, connecting a series of cultural sequences of motion to other patterns occurring in nature. He presents mobility as the freedom to move, and he understands coercion as an outcome of "being stuck", a force that is applied to move people back to their assigned place within a static pattern. Nail's contribution deepens our understanding of mobility from an interdisciplinary perspective while adding to the vibrant debate on human motion and strengthening the connection between labour history and mobility studies. Resonating with the thrust of this book, his kinetic approach to history extends beyond static categories and stresses the study of processes. This enables us to see, as Nail aptly puts it, the "false contrast" of mobility and immobility.

Moving Workers engages with many different actors who have either contributed to the establishment of or resisted the coercions inherent in different forms of labour im/mobilisation: political formations, institutions, entrepreneurs, control agencies and officials, trade unions, social movements, workers, employers, and recruiters. With a special focus on workers' social practices, this book positions the experiences of working men and women centre stage.

Collectively, the chapters guide us toward several observations on labour coercion and im/mobility: Mobility and immobility as well as mobilisation and immobilisation must be seen as part and parcel of the same labour regimes, and they exist in reciprocal relationships. Coercion can be an engine, manifesting as (a combination of) immobility, forced movement, or immobilisation. Because it is difficult to draw a clear line between work and mobility, workers' attitudes toward their respective im/mobilisations cannot be understood without linking their experiences to those of labour coercion, and vice versa. By paying close attention to their actions, we recognise that workers' continuous insistence on mobility – and the fact that throughout history, they often moved despite restrictions and inherent criminalisation – must be understood as a clear assertion of their perceived rights.

This view provides a window to how workers see the worlds they inhabit. As Thomas Nail reminds us in his afterword, the Greek word *theoria* means to journey to neighbouring villages and listen to their stories. With *Moving Workers*, we have attempted to embark on the equivalent of such a journey by engaging with different disciplines and listening to their perspectives. Our aim is to eschew traditional boundaries of investigation for the sake of entangling and fusing different analytical concepts and approaches so as to achieve a more nuanced and contextualised understanding of labour and mobility throughout history.

