

conflict is not between equals and can be resolved not through free agreement but only in accordance with the rules of justice established by the state.

The refusal to cooperate brings us to the last point considered by Pesante: cooperation, analysed especially through the apology for commercial society made by David Hume. This Scottish thinker, and other Enlightenment authors, idealized a society in which everyone enjoyed increasing wealth, for whatever purpose, not merely to survive. A general increase in welfare was possible without conflict only if per capita incomes rose. However, Hume did not explain how incomes could be redistributed, nor how workers could improve their living standards. Moreover, any continuous growth in prosperity could be sustained only through a favourable balance of trade, which would cause a growing imbalance in international economic relations among societies and the failure of international cooperation. The impossibility of reconciling these two questions has echoed throughout the centuries, right up to the discourses of today's neo-liberals. Although alternative approaches (such as that of the French economist Turgot, the ILO's Declaration of Philadelphia, or the *économie des conventions*) have criticized this reductionist and mercantile ideology, our developed society continues to be characterized by workers who are paid below subsistence levels and regarded more or less as servants. *Come servi* warns us about this critical point, and invites us to consider the origins of this idea.

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STANZIANI, ALESSANDRO. *Bondage. Labor and Rights in Eurasia from the Sixteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries*. [International Studies in Social History, Vol. 24.] Berghahn, New York [etc.] 2014. \$95.00; £60.00. doi:10.1017/S0020859014000492

In this wide-ranging book, Alessandro Stanziani reconsiders bound labor and its relation to free labor in modern "Eurasia". At the center of his study are Russia and Russian serfdom, but he offers comparisons with multiple countries and systems to Russia's east and west, including free labor in France and Great Britain, early forms of bondage (*kholopstvo*) in pre-serfdom Russia, slavery and the slave trade in central Asia, and slavery and indentured servitude in the Indian Ocean (especially the islands of Réunion and Mauritius). Along the way he puts forth numerous observations and interpretations, some of which are more persuasive than others.

The number and diversity of these observations and interpretations preclude a simple description of Stanziani's argument(s), but he is especially interested in debunking what he considers an overly rigid boundary between free and unfree labor. If Russian serfs had more freedom than often imagined – at times, he argues that they were not really serfs at all – "free labor" in Great Britain and France was not really free. The world of the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries was one that included various forms of dependency

rather than a binary division between freedom and unfreedom, and in this world “Russia looks like an extreme variant of the European model instead of its opposite” (p. 167). Indeed, the economic gap between Russia and western European countries “was not that important and did not widen until collectivization” (p. 138).

The devil, of course, is in the detail. Stanziani’s central point, that until the twentieth century labor almost everywhere operated under varying degrees of coercion, is useful although, except in his extreme formulation, less novel than he assumes. Although Stanziani sprinkles his study with assertions that he is rebutting “traditional views of historians” (p. 47) and revealing information “contrary to a widespread preconception” (p. 15), much of what he presents in fact conforms to common historical understanding. Certainly, few informed readers will be surprised to hear that labor in Britain and France operated under severe constraints in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, or that “coercion was not incompatible with market and capitalism” (p. 165). Nineteenth-century labor reformers (and for that matter defenders of slavery) routinely argued that the “free-labor system” – the nineteenth-century term for “capitalism” – was not really so free, and historians have devoted considerable attention to probing the operation and ideological underpinnings of this system in western Europe and the United States.

Stanziani’s argument that Russian serfs were not *totally* unfree is also legitimate – and less than revolutionary – when carefully qualified. As he stresses, privately-held serfs had some rights, held landed allotments, engaged in market-oriented agriculture, could sometimes escape their owners and become “state peasants”, and – “although the traditional views of historians suggests otherwise” (p. 47) – enjoyed real if limited self-government through the village commune. So far, so good, but Stanziani pushes much further, maintaining that serfdom barely existed – or did not exist all. Asserting incorrectly that “in the decades before the official abolition of serfdom, half of the peasantry changed its status and left the category of ‘private peasants’” (p. 6) – in fact, census data reveal that during the half-century preceding emancipation privately-held serfs decreased modestly as a proportion of the peasant population, from 57.4 per cent in 1811 to 47.2 per cent in 1858 – he minimizes the significance of the 1861 emancipation “because first, serfdom did not previously exist as such, and, second, legal constraints on peasant mobility and peasant labor did not disappear after 1861” (p. 6). Noting that Russian landowners and legal documents typically referred to “peasants” and “rural inhabitants” rather than “serfs” (p. 6), Stanziani stresses the flexibility of the so-called “second serfdom” – a few sentences later he suggests that he has “called into question” its existence – and asks rhetorically whether the elusive “boundary between second serfdom and free labor” justifies our understanding of either as an “ideal type of economic and social system” (pp. 140–141).

Stanziani pushes his case to its ultimate – and I think unsustainable – extreme, by suggesting that on a continuum of labor systems, Russian serfdom was much closer to “free labor” than to slavery. Stressing the flexibility of serfdom and the supposed rigidity of slavery, he proclaims that “Russian serfdom can hardly be compared to American slavery” (p. 175). (Full disclosure: I am the author of a book comparing Russian serfdom and American slavery.) Aside from the misunderstanding of “comparison” that this statement suggests – objects do not need to be identical in order to be compared, and in arguing for their essential difference Stanziani is himself comparing Russian serfdom and American slavery – it reflects an unfamiliarity with American slavery, which displayed many (although not all) of the elements of flexibility that he recognizes in serfdom.

New-World slaves, like Russian serfs, enjoyed various legal rights, including (in much of Latin America) the right to marry and the ability to buy their freedom, and in the United States every Southern state provided slaves with some legal protection during the antebellum years. (As in Russia, such laws were not always rigorously enforced, but that is a different matter.) Slaves had their “own” property and engaged in various kinds of market-oriented activity, the study of which has recently become something of a cottage industry. Like noble landowners in Russia, American slave-owners typically used a variety of euphemisms to refer to their human property rather than calling them “slaves” – euphemisms that included “negroes” (and its cruder variant, “niggers”), “servants”, and “people” (as in “my people”). The United States Constitution, which provided essential safeguards for slavery, did not mention the term or refer to “slaves”, using instead such circumlocutions as “all other persons”, and persons “held to service or labor”.

The point is not, of course, that American slavery was the same as Russian serfdom; it wasn't. But both slavery and serfdom were flexible forms of labor that can legitimately be regarded as “unfree” because – even though “free labor” was not absolutely free and bound labor was not absolutely unfree – the slaves and serfs lived under far greater constraints than did “free” laborers. Like slaves, Russian serfs could be bought and sold (with or without land), and their unfree status was hereditary. In short, in claiming that Russian serfs were not really serfs at all while presenting a dated, stereotypical picture of American slavery, Stanziani exaggerates the proximity of the serfs' status to that of free laborers and exaggerates the distance between the serfs' status and that of slaves.

This central argument aside, Stanziani's book is filled with interesting – and sometimes provocative – insights, observations, and interpretations, only a few of which can be mentioned here. He traces Jeremy Bentham's “Panopticon” prison project to the experience of Jeremy and his brother Samuel in managing the large Belorussian estate of Prince Grigorii Potemkin in the 1780s. He surveys a historiographical debate over whether the *kholopy* whom Peter I merged with the serf population in the early eighteenth century should or should not be termed “slaves” and concludes that since most of them had some legal rights – albeit “far fewer than their masters” (p. 88) – they should not; true “chattel slavery was mostly imposed on non-Russians” (p. 89), as Russian control expanded in central Asia (where Russians were also enslaved by various non-Russian peoples). He debunks the notion of Russian economic “backwardness”, both during and after serfdom, and points to new research indicating “better living conditions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than previously thought” (p. 211). (In fact, this research is not all that new: most of Stanziani's citations on this topic are of works published in the 1980s.) He stresses the long persistence of western Europe's “old regime” of quasi-coerced labor, variously dating its end as coming “between 1870 and 1914” (p. 204) and as “a consequence of World War One” (p. 168). And he concludes that although indentured laborers received harsh treatment in the Indian Ocean islands, they “did have rights” that differentiated them from slaves, and “the differences became more pronounced over time” (pp. 185, 191).

In sum, this is an imaginative, quirky, provocative, and broad-ranging book. Based on extensive reading of primary and secondary sources, it puts forth arguments that range from questionable to persuasive and from obvious to imaginative. Its fresh comparative framework is commendable, if at times confusingly diffuse, and although I think that in minimizing the distinction between “free” and “unfree” labor Stanziani pushes his case too far, his central argument is based on an interesting reformulation of the widely

recognized ubiquity of labor's dependent and exploited condition. This book will give readers a lot to think about and debate.

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COATES, TIMOTHY J. *Convict Labor in the Portuguese Empire, 1740–1932. Redefining the Empire with Forced Labor and New Imperialism.* [European Expansion and Indigenous Response, Vol. 13.] Brill, Leiden [etc.] 2014. xxvi, 205 pp. Ill. € 99.00; \$128.00. doi:10.1017/S0020859014000509

The mass of literature produced in the last few years on penal transportation in the British Empire – and to a certain extent also in the French and Dutch empires – has not been paralleled by research and publications on convict transportation in the Iberian empires. As far as the Spanish Empire is concerned, Ruth Pike's 1978 article and 1983 monograph¹ remain the most relevant (albeit in many ways incomplete) surveys of this topic, with numerous other publications containing just scattered information on specific geographical areas. In the case of the literature on the Portuguese Empire, the penal exiled (*degradados*) are usually mentioned only in passing and are often completely ignored in studies on crime and punishment, migration, and colonization. This state of the art has created a double distortion: on the one hand, in a manner similar to what happened with the Atlantic slave trade in relation to slavery as a whole, convict experiences in the British (and to some extent the French) empire have become the standard for convict transportation and convict labour as such; on the other hand, experts in the Spanish and Portuguese empires have largely felt justified in ignoring the topic, and have either affirmed the complete exceptionality of those empires in relation to the issue or postulated the marginality of this historical phenomenon as a whole.

There are two fundamental exceptions to this rule as far as the Portuguese empire is concerned, however, both stemming from the decades-long research of Timothy J. Coates. Before co-authoring with Geraldo Pieroni a volume (in Portuguese) on *Castro Marim*, an exile destination in Portugal, he first dedicated an extended study to penal exile and dowries as methods of colonization.² Now we have another monograph under review which picks up chronologically from where that study stopped, i.e. the mid-eighteenth century. Their nature and goals, however, are considerably different. The most recent

1. Ruth Pike, "Penal Servitude in the Spanish Empire: Presidio Labor in the Eighteenth Century", *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 58 (1978), pp. 21–40, and *idem*, *Penal Servitude in Early Modern Spain* (Madison, WI, 1983).

2. Geraldo Pieroni and Timothy J. Coates, *Castro Marim: da vila do couto à vila do sal* (Lisbon, 2002); Timothy J. Coates, *Convicts and Orphans: Forced and State-Sponsored Colonizers in the Portuguese Empire, 1550–1755* (Stanford, CA, 2001).