

SUGGESTIONS AND DEBATES

Migration and World History: Reaching a New Frontier^{*}

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Migration history has made some major leaps forward in the last fifteen years or so. An important contribution was Leslie Page Moch's *Moving Europeans*, published in 1992, in which she weaves the latest insights in migration history into the general social and economic history of western Europe.¹ Using Charles Tilly's typology of migration patterns and his ideas on the process of proletarianization since the sixteenth century, Moch skilfully integrates the experience of human mobility in the history of urbanization, labour relations, (proto)industrialization, demography, family history, and gender relations. Her state-of-the-art overview has been very influential, not least because it fundamentally criticizes the modernization paradigm of Wilbur Zelinsky and others, who assumed that only in the nineteenth century, as a result of industrialization and urbanization, migration became a significant phenomenon. Instead, she convincingly argues that migration was a structural aspect of human life. Since then many new studies have proved her point and refined her model.²

A second milestone was Dirk Hoerder's magnum opus, *Cultures in*

* This discussion dossier is the result of a "Meet the Author session" at the SSHA conference in Portland (Oregon), USA, 3–6 November 2005. The panelists were Adam McKeown, Leslie Page Moch, David Feldman, and Ulbe Bosma. For this publication we also asked contributions from Prabhu Mohapatra and Sucheta Mazumdar as specialists on India and China.

1. Leslie Page Moch, *Moving Europeans: Migration in Western Europe since 1650* (Bloomington, IN, 1992). In 2003 a second (paperback) edition appeared with a revised last chapter.

2. For an overview, see Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen (eds), *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives* (Berne [etc.], 1997, 2nd edn 1999, 3rd edn 2005). See also Klaus J. Bade, *Migration in European History* (Oxford, 2003), and Dirk Hoerder and Leslie Page Moch (eds), *European Migrants: Global and Local Perspectives* (Durham, NC, 1996). Important case studies are James H. Jackson, *Migration and Urbanization in the Ruhr Valley, 1821–1914* (Boston, MA, 1997); Steven Hochstadt, *Mobility and Modernity: Migration in Germany, 1820–1989* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1999) and Colin Pooley and Jean Turnbull, *Migration and Mobility in Britain since the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1998).

Contact, published in 2002, which offers a global overview of migration and cultural contacts in the last millennium.³ For the first time the vast knowledge of human migrations in all parts of the world was brought together in one volume, and what is more important, the book tries hard to get away from a Euro- or Atlanto-centric perspective, stressing the importance of human mobility and cultural exchanges in both the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. This book fits well in the dominant paradigm in the field of world history, which underlines the (semi)autonomous developments in various parts of the world, as well as the connections between them. Hoerder's work signifies a major turning point in our view of migration in human history. First of all, because only very few migration historians have dealt with the period before the sixteenth century,⁴ and secondly because the knowledge on other periods and parts of the world has largely been ignored by mainstream migration scholars.

Nevertheless, Hoerder does not fully exploit the possibilities that world history offers. This is largely explained by the Euro- and Atlanto-centric focus of the migration history field at large, which, notwithstanding recent attacks, still suffers from the modernization paradigm. This may have been rejected, but its influence on the choice of subjects and periods studied is still very strong. Even now, most mainstream migration historians restrict themselves to Europe and the United States, or study migration in other parts of the world as part of European expansion.⁵ As Hoerder had to rely heavily on the existing secondary literature, it is understandable that his overview is somewhat biased in this respect.⁶ A second factor which thwarted the broadening of the dominant Atlantic perspective is the segmented nature of the migration history field.⁷ Although scholars working on Asia, Africa, and Oceania have published extensively on migrations in their parts of the world, they often do not explicitly position their work within the paradigm of (historical) migration studies, but

3. Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham, NC, 2002).

4. Recently German and Austrian scholars have made considerable progress on the (early) Middle Ages: Verena Postel, *Die Ursprünge Europas. Migration und Integration im frühen Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 2004); Matthias Knaut and Dieter Quast, *Die Völkerwanderung. Europa zwischen Antike und Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 2005); and Walter Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung. Eroberung und Integration* (Stuttgart, 2005). For the Roman Empire, see D. Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers* (London, 2000).

5. P.C. Emmer and M. Mörner (eds), *European Expansion and Migration: Essays on the Intercontinental Migration from Africa, Asia, and Europe* (New York, 1992).

6. See Leo Lucassen, "Where To Go from Here? New Perspectives on Global Migration History", *International Review of Social History*, 29 (2004), pp. 505–510; and Patrick Manning, "Migration: A Millennium of Meso-Level Analysis", *International Review of Social History*, 29 (2004), pp. 500–504.

7. For a general critique on the scattered nature of historical migration studies, see Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, "Introduction", in *idem, Migration, Migration History, History*, pp. 1–38.

contribute to other scholarly debates, such as on slavery, labour relations, world systems, and imperialism. This lack of a coherent paradigm partly explains why this scholarship was not noticed by the migration history field and remained isolated.⁸

It is therefore not surprising that it was a student of world history and specialist on African migrations, Patrick Manning, who in his daring overview of 80,000 years of global migrations redressed this imbalance. In his recent book, *Migration in World History*,⁹ Manning not only used the latest insights in world history, but also that of sciences dealing with “deep time”, such as historical linguistics, paleo-archaeology and population genetics, to paint a broad picture of the spread of *homo sapiens* from Africa over the entire globe. For his chapter on the period 1700 to 1900, titled “Labor for industry and empire, 1700 to 1900”, he drew heavily on the work of Adam McKeown, who published a highly interesting and innovative article in the *Journal of World History* in 2004 on global migration systems in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

McKeown is a specialist in Chinese migrations, and as such – just like Manning – an outsider to the mainstream field of migration history. In his seminal article “Global Migration, 1846–1940”,¹⁰ he fundamentally criticizes the idea that the mass migration in the Atlantic during the nineteenth century was unique, both in volume and in nature, as argued by leading historians, such as Jeffrey Williamson and implicitly by many others.¹¹ Almost 60 million Europeans crossed the Atlantic in the period 1846–1940 to settle in the Americas (65 per cent in the United States) and, in contrast to African slaves earlier on and indentured Europeans until the beginning of the nineteenth century, they did this as free men.¹² Using existing statistical sources on migration in Asia in the same period,¹³

8. A good example is T.R. Gottschang and D. Lary, *Swallows and Settlers: The Great Migration from North China to Manchuria* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2000).

9. Patrick Manning, *Migration in World History* (New York [etc.], 2005). The book appeared in the series “Themes in World History”, edited by Peter N. Stearns.

10. Adam McKeown, “Global Migration, 1846–1940”, *Journal of World History*, 15 (2004), pp. 155–189. See also his dissertation, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900–1936* (Chicago, IL [etc.], 2001).

11. See especially Jeffrey G. Williamson and Timothy J. Hatton (eds), *International Migration 1850–1939: An Economic Survey* (Milan, 1994), and Kevin H. O’Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), pp. 119–166. Many studies have appeared on the Atlantic, most of which implicitly assume that this was a unique phenomenon. This literature is reviewed in McKeown, “Global Migration, 1846–1940”.

12. See also Walter Nugent, *Crossings: The Great Transatlantic Migrations, 1870–1914* (Bloomington, IN, 1992).

13. Such as Imre Ferenczi and Walter Willcox (eds), *International Migrations*, 2 vols (New York, 1929 and 1931); Donald Treadgold, *The Great Siberian Migration: Government and Peasant in Resettlement from Emancipation to the First World War* (Princeton, NJ, 1957); Gottschang and Lary, *Swallows and Settlers*; Kingsley Davis, *The Population of India and*

McKeown argues that the claim to uniqueness for the Atlantic cannot be upheld, as between the middle of the nineteenth century and the outbreak of World War II there were at least two other major systems (one in north Asia and one in south-east Asia), which attracted similar numbers of migrants (see Table 1).

Moreover, McKeown argues that these migrants moved for the same reasons and roughly in similar circumstances. Just like Europeans in the Atlantic economy, migrants in Asia reacted to economic stimuli and moved to areas where labour was in high demand. Contrary to mainstream assumptions, McKeown claims that the bulk of them, just like the Europeans who crossed the Atlantic to the Americas, were free (voluntary and self-bound) migrants and not coerced. Instead of force, government regulation and supervision, the bulk of the Asian migrants migrated through personal networks of family and friends, so McKeown claims. The problem with the existing literature is that only contract labour migration is counted, which numbers are then projected to Chinese and Indian migrations as a whole.¹⁴ In fact, however, he demonstrates that coerced migration only comprised a small minority of total movements within Asia.

McKeown therefore also rejects the assumption that Asians in general moved for different reasons than Europeans and rejects the idea, put forward by Hoerder, Emmer, and others, that Chinese migration was caused by a mix of political and ecological factors: state mismanagement, overpopulation, colonial penetration, natural disasters, and revolts.¹⁵ Furthermore, McKeown shows that the rhythm in the ups and downs of the migration to these three centres around the globe was remarkably similar, which leads him to conclude that all three were integrated in the same global economic economy (Figure 1).¹⁶ Finally, McKeown proposes not to take 1918 or 1924 as the end of the period of mass migration but 1940. Apart from the Americas, where major restriction acts were introduced,¹⁷ many other countries (France, the Netherlands) and parts

Pakistan (New York, 1951); Kernal Singh Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Some Aspects of their Immigration and Settlement (1786–1957)* (Cambridge, 1969); Nalini Ranjan Chakravarty, *The Indian Minority in Burma* (London, 1971); G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Ithaca, NY, 1957). Furthermore, McKeown used emigration data from Hong Kong and Chinese customs reports, statistics for the Dutch East Indies from 1900–1938 and for French Indochina from 1923–1940. For a complete survey of his sources see the appendix to his “Global Migration, 1846–1940”.

14. Most historians have argued that as far as Asians moved, they were coerced, especially as indentured (coolie) labourers: see, for example, Lydia Potts, *The World Labour Market: A History of Migration* (London, 1990), p. 70; and Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, pp. 366–367, 377, and 389; McKeown, “Global Migration, 1846–1940”, p. 170; Jan Breman, *Taming the Coolie Beast: Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in Southeast Asia* (Oxford, 1989).

15. McKeown, “Global Migration, 1846–1940”, p. 171.

16. Here he links up with Manning, *Migration in World History*.

17. See for a broad recent assessment, Aristide Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

Table 1. *Major long-distance migration flows, 1846–1940 (in millions)*

| Destination | Origins | Number | Auxiliary origins |
|--|-------------------------|--------|---|
| Americas | Europe | 55–58 | 2.5 from India, China, Japan and Africa |
| South-east Asia, Indian Ocean rim, South Pacific | India, southern China | 48–52 | 4 from Africa, Europe, north-east Asia, Middle East |
| Manchuria, Siberia, central Asia, Japan | North-east Asia, Russia | 46–51 | |

Source: McKeown, “Global Migration”, p. 156.

of the world (Asia, Latin America) did not restrict migration and in total continued to receive millions of migrants in the interwar period.¹⁸

McKeown’s article has far-reaching implications for our understanding of global migration history and therefore merits a fundamental debate. Not only does he fundamentally critique the dominant Euro- or Atlanto-centrism, and as such proposes an important correction to the recent synthesis of global migration history by Dirk Hoerder. He also contributes to the discussion on the process of globalization in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, here – following economic historians like O’Rourke and Williamson –¹⁹ understood as increasing economic convergence. Finally his article problematizes widely shared notions about free and unfree labour or migration, showing that it is wrong to link these to a “West and the rest” dichotomy.

Given these broad implications, it seemed appropriate to invite other migration scholars to take a close look at McKeown’s arguments. In the following, Leslie Page Moch, specialist on the migration history of western Europe and the role of connections between migration and household dynamics,²⁰ concentrates on the differences and similarities in household patterns in western Europe and China, and thus focuses on the relation between the family and migration. By drawing on recent research on the Chinese family, she moves to the micro and meso level of migration decisions and systems that are largely ignored in McKeown’s aggregated macro approach. Thus, Moch is able to approach the question of comparability of the Atlantic and Asians systems on a very different level and come up with new answers. Moreover, Moch highlights the importance of the family as an institution for understanding why some

18. For France see Leo Lucassen, *The Immigrant Threat: The Integration of Old and New Migrants in Western Europe since 1850* (Urbana, IL [etc.], 2005).

19. Kevin O’Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, “When Did Globalisation Begin?”, *European Review of Economic History*, 6 (2002), pp. 23–50.

20. Moch, *Moving Europeans*.

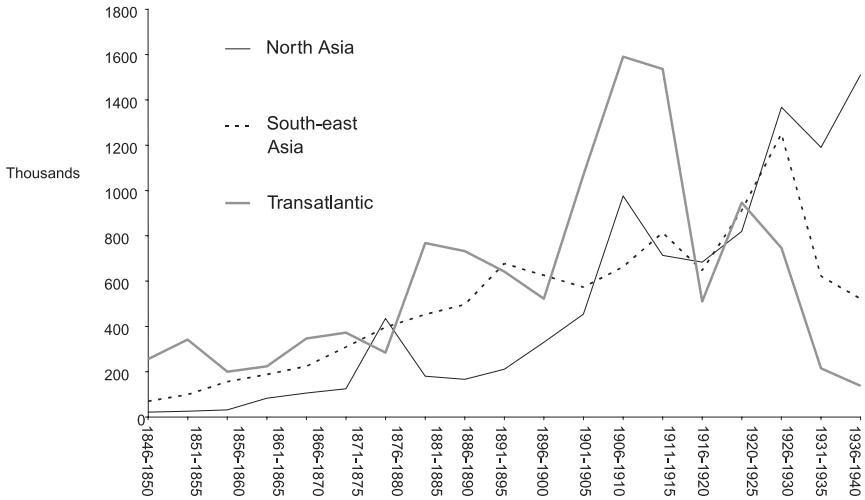


Figure 1. Regional trends in global migration, 1846–1940 (five-year averages)
 Source: McKeown, “Global Migration”, p. 165.

people move and others stay put. Putting the family centre stage enables her to trace broad gender patterns as well. Finally, Moch’s contribution is interesting because she links her questions explicitly to the debate in world history on “The Great Divergence”,²¹ and also to the demographic Eurasia project which compares demographic trends in Taiwan and Europe.

Next David Feldman, who has studied the institutional framework that deeply influenced internal migration in Great Britain, the Poor Laws and the law of settlement,²² suggests a research agenda in which internal and international migration are much more linked. His local approach is highly relevant for the much more global approach taken by McKeown, because he also stresses that, for the two Asian attraction poles, internal migrations were equally important as international ones. Feldman shows that local institutional arrangements can have far-reaching consequences for migration patterns in general, and as such his approach intersects with Moch, whose families operated within this larger formal institutional context.

21. Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ, 2000).

22. See, for example, David Feldman, “Was the Nineteenth Century a Golden Age for Immigrants? The Changing Articulation of National, Local and Voluntary Controls”, in Andreas Fahrmeir, Olivier Faron, and Patrick Weil (eds), *Migration Control in the North Atlantic World: The Evolution of State Practices in Europe and the United States from the French Revolution to the Inter-War Period* (New York [etc.], 2003), pp. 167–177; and *idem*, “Migrants, Immigrants and Welfare from the old Poor Law to the Welfare State”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 13 (2003), pp. 79–104.

Furthermore, Feldman illustrates that racist attitudes are not necessarily linked to migrants from far away, as his example of the Irish makes clear.²³ Scholarship on international migration and integration can therefore profit greatly from comparisons with internal processes as described by Feldman in nineteenth-century Great Britain.

As McKeown's claims depend largely on his interpretation of geographical mobility in and from India and China, three specialists in these fields have been invited to contribute as well. Prabhu Mohapatra takes a critical look at McKeown's characterization of the migration from India to south-east Asia.²⁴ Especially important is Mohapatra's contention that Indian migrants were less free than McKeown assumes, as at that time they operated within the British imperial context. Mohapatra puts forward that even outside the formal indenture system most Indian migrants moved in systems of debt and advances. Moreover, at destination they were controlled by employers and forced to accept low wages and bad working conditions. From this, Mohapatra argues that McKeown replaces one sort of Eurocentrism (the dichotomy free Europeans–unfree Asians) for another, that universalizes the – assumed – European model of free migration. Finally, he points at the different nature of Indian migrations, most of whom were sojourners and returned home. Circulation instead of settlement, which was the dominant pattern in the Atlantic,²⁵ prevailed.

Mohapatra's critique of the concept of "free" migration is completely in tune with the comment by Ulbe Bosma, a specialist on Dutch colonial migration,²⁶ who brings the importance of colonialism and imperialism back in, without completely adopting a world-systems approach that reduces migrants to mere victims of imperialist global forces. Moreover, Bosma stresses the largely forgotten or overlooked patterns of coercion, indenture and state-organized migration of European migrants to various parts of the world, including the United States. By pointing at the pervasive influence of social Darwinism on the hierarchy of labour and thus on the racial segmentation of migration systems, Bosma argues that

23. See also Lucassen, *The Immigrant Threat*, pp. 27–49.

24. Mohapatra is a specialist in Indian labour history and the migration of Indians to the West Indies: see a.o. Prabhu Mohapatra, "Assam and the West Indies, 1860–1920: Immobilizing Plantation Labor", in Douglas Hay and Paul Craven (eds), *Masters, Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562–1955* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004), pp. 455–480.

25. Although return migration rates of European migrants who went to the Americas were high for some nationalities (especially Italians), the overall picture is that most migrants stayed; Mark Wyman, *Round-Trip America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880–1930* (Ithaca, NY, 1993).

26. Ulbe Bosma, "Citizens of Empire: Some Comparative Observations on the Evolution of Creole Nationalism in Colonial Indonesia", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 46 (2004), pp. 656–681; *idem* and Roger Knight, "Global Factory and Local Field: Convergence and Divergence in the International Cane-Sugar Industry, 1850–1940", *International Review of Social History*, 49 (2004), pp. 1–26.

coerced migration of white Europeans (for example convicts) was meant to carve out white enclaves in the non-western world.

Finally, Sucheta Mazumdar²⁷ questions McKeown's optimistic and voluntaristic characterization of global migration, both in the Atlantic, Oceania, and within Asia. Especially on the first two continents, native peoples paid a huge price as many were killed, marginalized, and delocalized. Not only is the dark side of so-called free migration underrated, also the imperialist role of states in stimulating their population to move to the fringes should be stressed more fundamentally. A second problem that Mazumdar has with the normative model of free migration in the period 1840–1940 put forward by McKeown, is that it downplays the widespread racialization in the Atlantic and the British Empire worldwide and the continuation of indentured labour systems. Finally, Mazumdar, just like Leslie Page Moch, points at the partly different household dynamics in the Chinese case and the often misunderstood role of women. Finally she stresses the importance of sojourning and return migration, both in the Asian and the Atlantic case.

Last but not least, Adam McKeown responds to these five contributions, focusing on the following main points in the debate:

- (1) The problematization of the concepts of free and unfree migration (Mohapatra, Bosma, Mazumdar).
- (2) The role of colonialism and imperialism in shaping migration patterns and segmenting global regional systems (Mohapatra, Bosma, Mazumdar).
- (3) The problems with neo-classical economic assumptions (Feldman, Bosma, Moch, Mazumdar).
- (4) The need to link the aggregated macro level in his analysis with micro and meso levels of concrete migrants and household strategies and to consider family systems as a form of institution (Moch, Feldman, Mazumdar).

27. Sucheta Mazumdar, *Sugar and Society in China: Peasants, Technology, and the World Market* (Cambridge, MA, 1998); *idem* and Vasant Kaiwar (eds), *Antinomies of Modernity: Essays on Race, Orientalism and Nation* (Durham, NC, 2003).