Mediating Labour: An Introduction

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SUMMARY: The essays in this volume aim to explain the evolution and persistence of various practices of indirect labour recruitment. Labour intermediation is understood as a global phenomenon, present for many centuries in most countries of the world, and taking on a wide range of forms: varying from outright trafficking to job placement in the context of national employment policies. By focusing on the actual practices of different types of labour mediators in various regions of the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and by highlighting both the national as well as the international and translocal contexts of these practices, this volume intends to further a historically informed global perspective on the subject.

> Maria came to the United States with some 50 other Filipino nationals who were promised housing, transportation, and lucrative jobs at country clubs and hotels under the H2B guest worker program. Like the others, Maria dutifully paid the substantial recruitment fees to come to the United States. But when she arrived, she found that there was no employment secured for her. She did not work for weeks, but the recruiters seized her passport and prohibited her from leaving their house. She and other workers slept side-by-side on the floors of the kitchen, garage, and dining room. They were fed primarily chicken feet and innards. When the workers complained, the recruiters threatened to call the police or immigration.[1]

Maria is but one of millions who in recent times have fallen prey to illegal trafficking agents who promise migrants work in return for a substantial

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1. US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report* (June 2011), p. 34, http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/164452.pdf; last accessed 13 April 2012.

payment. Though varying a great deal, estimates by several institutions indicate that between 1997 and 2009 an average of between 500,000 and 4,000,000 people per annum were victims of human trafficking worldwide.[2]

Apart from those who are victims of outright illegal forms of labour migration and trafficking, many other workers fall victim to various forms of deceit or coercion. Since remittances have become the largest global monetary flow after oil, and since increasing migration control has raised the costs of entering the labour markets of rich countries, labour recruitment has become a global business powerful enough to resist most international legislation attempting to protect the rights of migrant labourers.[3] One way or the other, the global trade in labour relies on local patterns of recruitment and on local intermediaries: the village notables, family heads, and other brokers who cater to the demands of the professional "headhunters". The activities of the latter can in turn often count on the tacit or sometimes even explicit support of governments keen to receive either precious foreign exchange or cheap and willing labour.[4]

This is by no means a new phenomenon, though its determinants have changed over time. Over the past five centuries, if not longer, and in all parts of the world, workers have been attracted, lured, tricked, coerced, and even raided into specific labour regimes, which themselves often featured coercive conditions. Mediators, ranging from free job agencies, contractors, subcontractors, and jobbers, to traffickers of human beings, played a crucial role. This special issue of the *International Review of Social History* (*IRSH*) focuses on labour intermediaries, the persons or agencies who interceded between employers and workers, for which they received payments and commissions. Their practices played a crucial role in the recruitment of both free and forced labour, and frequently blurred the boundaries between the two. In the labour historiography, mediators constitute an intriguing category, operating in the interstices between labour and capital. Both labour

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2. Figures presented by UNESCO. The wide range reflects the fact that the estimates were compiled by different institutions, including national governments and NGOs such as the ILO. UNESCO, http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/culture/Trafficking/project/abc/Selected_Articles_and_Publications/Graph_VT_Trafficking_in_Person_01.pdf; last accessed 13 April 2012.
3. In fact, it is even debated to what extent protective international legislation is favourable to labour migrants, as measures sometimes seem to harm the target groups as well as to increase the phenomenon of trafficking; Michele Ford, Lenore Lyons, and Willem van Schendel, "Labour Migration and Human Trafficking: An Introduction", in *idem* (eds), *Labour Migration and Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia: Critical Perspectives* (London [etc.], 2012), pp. 1–22.
4. Two glaring examples of such governmental complicity were the Marcos and Suharto dictatorships in the Philippines and Indonesia respectively. See, for example, Rachel Silvey, "Transnational Domestication: State Power and Indonesian Migrant Women in Saudi Arabia", *Political Geography*, 23 (2004), pp. 245–264, and Daromir Rudnyckyj, "Technologies of Servitude: Governmentality and Indonesian Transnational Labor Migration", *Anthropological Quarterly*, 77 (2004), pp. 407–434.

and capital have tried to monopolize the placement of labour, a struggle in which the state often joined as a third party. The central question posed in this special issue is how we can explain the emergence and persistence of, and variations in, labour intermediation practices.

Historically, recruitment practices have often had translocal consequences, changing the social landscapes of migrant-sending and migrant-receiving regions. Obvious examples are the 12.5 million Africans who made the middle passage and the other millions who were traded across the Sahara or the Indian Ocean. These flows altered both sending and receiving societies to a great extent, as did the indentured ("coolie") workers sent all over the world.[5] Moreover, forms of slave labour and indentured labour have also coloured the debate about the "labour recruitment problem" in the colonial era.[6] What constitutes free as opposed to unfree labour migration, and the nature of the line dividing one from the other, have been matters of intensive debate. Some historians, such as Tinker, apply a broad definition, whereas others regard any consensual migration as free migration.[7]

The first may be problematic, since it tends to conflate indentured labour with slavery, while the latter might gloss over cases of severe coercion or deceit. It is no coincidence that the definition of trafficking used by ILO and UN agencies includes the possibility of consent by the victim.[8]

5. See, for example, Piet Emmer (ed.), *Colonialism and Migration*: *Indentured Labour Before and After Slavery* (Dordrecht, 1986); Pat Manning (ed.), *Slave Trades, 1500–1800: Globalization of Forced Labour* (Aldershot, 1996); Yoko Hayashi, "Agencies and Clients: Labour Recruitment in Java, 1870s–1950s", IIAS/IISG CLARA Working Paper, No. 14 (Amsterdam, 2002), available at http://socialhistory.org/sites/default/files/docs/publications/clara-wp14.pdf (last accessed 13 April 2012); and Andreas Eckert (ed.), *Europe, Slave Trade, and Colonial Forced Labour* (Munich, 2009).
6. Jan Breman, *Taming the Coolie Beast: Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in Southeast Asia* (Delhi, 1989); Paul Baak, "About Enslaved Ex-Slaves, Uncaptured Contract Coolies and Unfreed Freedmen: Some Notes about 'Free' and 'Unfree' Labour in the Context of Plantation Development in Southwest India, Early Sixteenth Century–Mid 1990s", *Modern Asian Studies*, 33 (1999), pp. 121–157; Dennis D. Cordell and Joel W. Gregory, "Labour Reservoirs and Population: French Colonial Strategies in Koudougou, Upper Volta, 1914 to 1939", *Journal of African History*, 23 (1982), pp. 205–224, 213–221. For a more recent historiographical account of the "recruitment problem" and the role of internal slavery in Africa, see Gareth Austin, "Cash Crops and Freedom: Export Agriculture and the Decline of Slavery in Colonial West Africa", *International Review of Social History*, 54 (2009), pp. 1–37, 8–12.
7. For a broad understanding of coercion and slavery see Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830–1920* (London, 1974). For a more limited understanding see David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922* (Cambridge, 1995).
8. ILO, Report of the Director-General, *Stopping Forced Labour: Global Report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, International Labour Conference 89th Session 2001; Report 1 (B) (Geneva, 2001), pp. 47–48, available online at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—dgreports/—dcomm/—publ/documents/publication/wcms_publ_9221119483_en.pdf (last accessed 13 April 2012).

Other historians reject the entire dichotomy between free and unfree as artificial, and Eurocentric, if not utterly naive.[9] Nonetheless, one could argue that recruitment practices usually lead to less freedom of movement for workers once they become engaged. One might even suggest that this is their raison d'être, the reason why employers are prepared to accept the transaction costs of the recruitment process. From that perspective a distinction between free and unfree labour, or a sliding scale from slavery at one end and a direct labour contract between employer and labourer, without any extra-economic pressures, at the other, might help us delineate the space in which recruiters operated. Recruitment practices that blurred the lines between coercion and consent may, it seems, have played a major role in shaping modern labour markets deeply marked by ethnicity, gender, and age.[10]

The essays in this special issue of the *IRSH* aim to explain the emergence and persistence of, and changes in, practices of indirect labour recruitment. We have added the adjective "indirect" to exclude explicitly forms of direct recruitment by employers, though we do not mean to suggest that these forms always imply freedom for the workers involved. Several other questions arise in the course of analysing labour intermediation. Under what conditions did job intermediaries operate around the world and throughout history? What regional and occupational similarities and differences can be found in labour recruitment practices and methods? What role did economic factors (transaction and information costs, scarcity of labour, for instance) play? To what extent did cultural factors and colonial discourses about traditional labour recruitment patterns play a role in the use of labour intermediaries? What does a focus on indirect labour recruitment contribute to our knowledge of the tenuous and shifting lines of division between "free" and "coerced" labour, as these came to be constituted historically across a range of local and global contexts? What role did gender, ethnicity, and age play in the particular practices of labour recruitment around the world?

This special issue deploys a translocal perspective on the emergence and persistence of intermediation. In so doing, it seeks to extend the debate on this practice as a global phenomenon, transcending the dichotomy between "traditional" labour-supplying societies and "modern" labour-demanding

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9. Jairus Banaji, "The Fictions of Free Labour: Contract, Coercion, and So-Called Unfree Labour", in *idem*, *Theory as History: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation* (Leiden, 2010), pp. 131–154.
10. See, for example, Samita Sen, "'Without His Consent?': Marriage and Women's Migration in Colonial India", *International Labor and Working Class History*, 65 (2004), pp. 77–104; Karen Tranberg Hansen, "Labor Migration and Urban Child Labor During the Colonial Period in Zambia", in Kristoffel Lieten and Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk (eds), *Child Labour's Global Past, 1650–2000* (Berne [etc.], 2011), pp. 595–612.

societies that is usually adduced to explain it. The "transitional" character usually attributed to the labour intermediary, as a temporary institution in the development from pre-industrial to industrial society, will be questioned. Though globalization may have challenged labour market inefficiencies and information asymmetries,[11] the same process also created new asymmetrical relations and new barriers. The introduction of new means of transport, more stringent job requirements, and increasing immigration control raise the costs for migrants and make them more reliant on debt contracts and smuggling. This might all explain why the labour contractor or recruiter is not, therefore, simply a relic of the past.[12] Moreover, the rise and persistence of labour intermediation cannot be explained by mere analyses of the *need* for capital or labour, because labour mediation itself has often become a powerful institution, capable of defending its interests in spite of increasing transaction costs.[13] This special issue focuses therefore on the actual practices of labour mediators in various regions of the world, while also taking into account power relations between the various actors.

HISTORIOGRAPHY ON LABOUR INTERMEDIATION

Recruiting agents and agencies, contractors and subcontractors, slave traders, traffickers, jobbers, headmen, and labour agencies are all part of the broader phenomenon of labour intermediation. The different terms relate, however, to different academic orientations that, until recently, were linked hardly at all to one another in the context of this particular subject. Labour intermediation over the past few decades has featured prominently in studies on labour issues in industrializing countries, but it rarely figures in the historical literature.[14] Trafficking is widely used to connote contemporary people smuggling, but few scholars have endeavoured to provide historical depth to the subject by relating it

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11. David H. Autor, "Introduction", in *idem* (ed.), *Studies of Labor Market Intermediation* (Chicago, IL, 2009), pp. 1–23, 4–10.
12. Tirthankar Roy, "Sardars, Jobbers, Kanganies: The Labour Contractor and Indian Economic History", *Modern Asian Studies*, 42 (2008), pp. 971–998, 997.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 976.
14. For migration history see Christoph Rass, *Institutionalisierungsprozesse auf einem internationalen Arbeitsmarkt: Bilaterale Wanderungsverträge in Europa zwischen 1919 und 1974* (Paderborn, 2010). For labour management and control see John F. Wilson, *British Business History, 1720–1994* (Manchester [etc.], 1995), pp. 32–34; Dick Kooijman, "Jobbers and the Emergence of Trade Unions in Bombay City", *International Review of Social History*, 22 (1977), pp. 313–328; Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900–1940* (Cambridge, 1994); *idem*, "The War on the Shopfloor," *International Review of Social History*, Supplement 14 (2006), pp. 265–277; *idem*, "The Decline and Fall of the Jobber System in the Bombay Cotton Textile Industry, 1870–1955", *Modern Asian Studies*, 42 (2008), pp. 117–210.

to slavery.[15] The role of foremen is almost invariably studied within one specific cultural zone – the work on brickmakers by Jan Lucassen, which stretches from India, to Russia and western Europe being an important exception in this respect.[16]

Recently, it has been pointed out that labour recruiters were also a widespread phenomenon before the rise of industrial capitalism, both in Europe and in other parts of the world.[17] Armies and navies, for example, have deployed recruiters throughout history, and in very different cultural zones.[18] Moreover, subcontracting was widely employed to mobilize migrant labour, ranging from brickmakers in Europe and south Asia to tin miners in south-east Asia.[19] Furthermore, existing patterns of recruitment and subcontracting can be subsumed under new labour regimes. In Asia, in particular, all kinds of informal debt-contracting arrangements, such as the *kangani* systems of southern India or the *kongsi* systems found in China, were "regulated" by the colonial state, in the sense that it gave legal status to labour contracts issued by official recruiters and imposed penal sanctions on employees leaving work without their employer's consent.[20] Thus, they limited labour's freedom of movement, an abstractly upheld value, to address what in their eyes was a greater evil. To combat

15. Suzanne Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century: The Evolution of a Global Problem* (Walnut Creek, CA [etc.], 2005); Michael Zeuske, *Handbuch Geschichte der Sklaverei. Eine Globalgeschichte von den Anfängen bis heute* (Berlin, 2012).

16. See, for example, Jan Lucassen, "Brickmakers in Western Europe (1700–1900) and Northern India (1800–2000): Some Comparisons", in *idem* (ed.), *Global Labour History: A State of the Art* (Berne, 2006), pp. 513–572.

17. By, for example, Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, "Subcontracting in Guild-based Export Trades, Thirteenth-Eighteenth Centuries", in S.R. Epstein and Maarten Prak (eds), *Guilds, Innovation, and the European Economy, 1400–1800* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 81–113; Baak, "About Enslaved Ex-Slaves".

18. "Fighting for a Living", a three-year research programme on military recruitment in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, 1500–2000 CE, conducted by a team led by Erik Jan Zürcher at the International Institute of Social History, is currently investigating this phenomenon.

19. Jan Lucassen, "The Brickmakers' Strikes on the Ganges Canal in 1848–1849", in Rana P. Behal and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Coolies, Capital, and Colonialism: Studies in Indian Labour History* [Supplement 14, *International Review of Social History*, 51] (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 47–83; Mary F. Somers Heidhues, *Bangka Tin and Mentok Pepper: Chinese Settlement on an Indonesian Island* (Singapore, 1992).

20. Jan Breman, *Koelies, planters en koloniale politiek. Het arbeidsregime op de grootland-bouwondernemingen aan Sumatra's Oostkust in het begin van de twintigste eeuw* (Dordrecht, 1987); Peter Robb, "Labour in India 1860–1920: Typologies, Change and Regulation", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 4 (1994), pp. 37–66, 48; Baak, "About Enslaved Ex-Slaves", pp. 136–137, 152; Vincent Houben *et al.*, *Coolie Labour in Colonial Indonesia: A Study of Labour Relations in the Outer Islands, c.1900–1940* (Wiesbaden, 1999); Roy, "Sardars, Jobbers, Kanganies", p. 972; Adam M. McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York, 2008).

the continuation of outright slavery, and in order to regulate labour conditions and separate "bona fide" from "mala fide" recruiters, they had to allow employers to include penal sanctions in labour contracts. Nonetheless, informal methods of debt contracting continued to exist in the Atlantic world, as Gunther Peck has shown.[21]

The negative connotation attached to labour recruitment in Africa and Asia, and the efforts by colonial authorities to regulate recruitment, originated with the struggle against slavery. At the same time, colonial authorities recruited massive numbers of labourers for public works schemes and turned a blind eye to – or even openly allowed – plantation owners to send recruiters to entice labour to work on their estates. In this context, recruitment as a form of intermediation merged with practices that already existed in Europe, where even then they had a quite negative connotation. "Recruit", a word derived from the French in the seventeenth century (*recruer*, "reinforce"),[22] signified the strengthening of the army and navy by crimping men in several ways, some more "decent" than others.[23] In the Asian and African contexts, historians have often described recruitment as part of the effort to force colonies along the path of economic development, of the "*mise en valeur*" of colonial wealth. In the same vein, the role of intermediaries was considered essential to feed emerging industries, such as the jute industry in Bengal, or ports, with labour. Labour intermediation in these regions would have been one way to solve this issue, thus also mediating between "modern" industrialized (often urban) businesses or plantations and "traditional" clan- or family-based (usually village) communities.[24] This interpretation tends to regard labour mediation as a distinct phase in the transition towards an industrial society.

However, this traditional–modern dichotomy falls short of an explanation in at least two respects. First of all, labour mediation existed in pre-industrial

21. Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880–1930* (Cambridge, 2000).

22. A.S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 7th edn (Oxford, 2005).

23. For a historical typology of the recruitment of military labour, see for instance, Jan Lucassen and Erik Jan Zürcher, "Conscription as Military Labour: The Historical Context", *International Review of Social History*, 43 (1998), pp. 405–419. For the maritime sector see Paul van Royen, Jaap Bruijn, and Jan Lucassen, *"Those Emblems of Hell"?: European Sailors and the Maritime Labour Market, 1570–1870* (St Johns, 1997).

24. See, for example, Ranajit Das Gupta, "From Peasants and Tribesmen to Plantation Workers: Colonial Capitalism, Reproduction of Labour Power and Proletarianisation in North East India, 1850s to 1947", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21:4 (January 1986), pp. PE2–PE10; Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Conditions for Knowledge of Working-Class Conditions: Employers, Government and the Jute Workers of Calcutta, 1890–1940", *Subaltern Studies*, 2 (1983), pp. 259–310. Further examples can be found in the historiographical overview given by Baak, "About Enslaved Ex-Slaves", pp. 121–124.

societies; second, the phenomenon is still widespread today.[25] Secondly, it implies a teleological view of the development of societies, with the rise of capitalism from "traditional" to "modern", with labour intermediaries representing the link between these two paradigmatic poles. This involves too rigid and linear a view of the development of industrial capitalism, as well as one-dimensional depictions of pre-industrial societies.[26] That there is no linearity here can be illustrated by the long battle against slavery and trafficking, whose roots stretch back to the abolitionist struggles of the early nineteenth century and which led to increasingly complex international labour legislation in the twentieth century targeting commercial recruitment, with the ILO emerging as the central agency. Even in Europe, commercial recruitment has never been rendered extinct, and is now more present than ever. While in 1926 the ILO succeeded in regulating the recruitment of maritime labour to combat deceitful and profiteering recruiters,[27] in other segments of the labour market intermediaries emerged, with or without the involvement or explicit encouragement of national governments.

In fact, since the time of the guilds labour placement had been a means to regulate the supply of labour and, thereby, control wage levels. Labour organized itself collectively to refuse work when employers offered inadequate wages, while employers tried to organize labour recruitment to increase labour supply and reduce wages. Labour intermediation became an instrument of control both for unions and for employers. Attempts by labour unions in late nineteenth-century Europe to control intermediation failed in most countries, however, and an equilibrium emerged in which unions, employers, and governments collaborated to control the labour market. The temporarily unemployed received unemployment benefit, but only on condition that they registered as being available for work.[28] As Wadauder *et al.* explain in this special issue, labour intermediation became a means to separate those who were able to work from those who were unfit. As we shall now see when discussing the contents of this special issue, labour intermediation practices, both legal and illegal, public as well as private, have been ubiquitous, both in terms of time and place.

25. *Ibid.*; Austin, "Cash Crops and Freedom".
26. See also Roy, "Sardars, Jobbers, Kanganies", p. 976.
27. ILO Convention No. 9, "Placing of Seaman Convention 1920", and Convention No. 22, "Seaman's Articles of Agreement Convention, 1926".
28. Ad Knotter, "Mediation, Allocation, Control: Trade Unions and the Changing Faces of Labour Market Intermediation in Western Europe in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries", in Sigrid Wadauer, Thomas Buchner, and Alexander Mejstrik (eds), *History of Labour Intermediation: Institutions and Individual Ways of Finding Employment* (currently under review).

INDIRECT RECRUITMENT OF WORKERS ACROSS THE WORLD IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

The contributions to this special issue display a wide geographical and thematic scope. The temporal framework is largely confined to the end of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. National and supranational concerns with labour intermediation are addressed in the articles by Rodríguez García (League of Nations), Rass, and Wadauer *et al.* (Europe). The African continent is particularly well represented, in the case studies by Hammad (Egypt), Mark-Thiesen (Ghana), and Martino (Rio Muni and Nigeria). Schettini's article explores the Brazilian and Argentinian entertainment business, and Kaur's contribution addresses issues of labour intermediation in south-east Asia. All sectors of the economy are discussed: agricultural (plantation) labour (Martino) and mining (Mark-Thiesen); industrial labour (Hammad, Rass, Kaur, Wadauer *et al.*); and the service sector (Kaur, Rodríguez García, Schettini). All the articles implicitly or explicitly also address the indistinct boundaries between "free" and "unfree" as well as between "formal" and "informal" labour.

In this wide-ranging set of contributions a fairly limited set of actors can be identified that operate at three different levels. First, recruitment relies on existing authority within the family and/or the local community, whose members might act as mediators between workers and employers, and between labour and employers or professional recruiting agencies.[29] In her contribution Hanan Hammad describes how, in the emerging Egyptian textile industry at the beginning of the twentieth century, workers themselves were able to secure jobs for their relatives and village connections, which enhanced their position within the villages of origin and within the factory. Mechanisms such as these can be found all over the world, and have been recorded for India and Java as well.[30] Apart from in mediation, these connections were also useful in the informal training of newcomers in the factory, and in finding someone to share a place to live. Likewise, Enrique Martino describes how the Spanish authorities considered each contract labourer who had finished the first term of their contract on the cocoa plantations of Fernando Pó to

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29. See, for example, John Ingleson, "Life and Work in Colonial Cities: Harbour Workers in Java in the 1910s and 1920s", *Modern Asian Studies*, 17 (1983), pp. 455–476, 456; Ernst Spaan, "Taikongs and Calos: The Role of Middlemen and Brokers in Javanese International Migration", *International Migration Review*, 28 (1994), pp. 93–113; Ruth Rosenberg (ed.), *Trafficking of Women and Children in Indonesia* (Jakarta, 2003); Graeme Hugo, "Migration in Indonesia: Recent Trends and Implications", in P. Graham (ed.), *Horizons of Home: Nation, Gender and Migrancy in Island Southeast Asia* (Clayton, VIC, 2008), pp. 45–70; Roy, "Sardars, Jobbers, Kanganies".
30. See, for example, Ingleson, "Life and Work in Colonial Cities".

be a potential recruiter for other labourers, through their networks of kinship and ethnicity.

Apart from the workers themselves mediating for their relatives, the family realm might more generally be the locus of labour intermediation. This could range from simply selling their children into captivity or for prostitution, to more subtle and less obvious forms of child exploitation by parents, which could include sexual exploitation. Cristiana Schettini's contribution is highly illuminating in this respect, indicating how difficult it is to a draw a line between the family theatre and entertainment business and the abuse of children's dependence on, and loyalty to, their parents. In some cases, parents acted as the agents (or, at times, outright pimps) of one or more of their children, usually daughters, either directly mediating with customers or making arrangements with employers in the theatre business. Under the influence of a worldwide campaign against white slavery, and the abduction of women for prostitution, this kind of labour recruitment came to be framed by moral anxieties, and removed from the purview of the ILO.[31]

In her contribution to this special issue, Magaly Rodríguez García discerns a similar attitude within the League of Nations towards the worldwide recruitment of prostitutes, which she appropriately typifies as the "moral recruitment" of women. She shows that the question of morality pervaded the approach of the Advisory Committee that was established by the League of Nations in 1922 to gather information on the trafficking of women and children. This committee ordered an extensive investigation into the matter by a body of experts, including "studies on the spot", in order to compile official and unofficial information on the prostitution milieu.

Next-of-kin and neighbourhood or village ties were also important in processes of labour intermediation and recruitment at the level of village communities. Cassandra Mark-Thiesen turns our attention to recruitment practices in the Ghana gold mines, where local headmen recruited "gangs" of young workers in their home villages. As these headmen exerted a degree of authority over other village members, not only because of their political and symbolic function but also through creditor–debtor relations, they possessed the power to mediate between their subjects and employers' representatives. Her contribution has a long pedigree and can be supplemented by other cases. In this respect, mention should be made of the work of Babacar Fall, Dennis Cordell, Gareth Austin, and Carolyn Brown. Though the practice of requisitioning labour through village headmen diminished after the signing of the Forced

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31. Suzanne Miers, "Contemporary Forms of Slavery", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 34 (2000), pp. 714–747, 717.

Labour Convention of 1930, in some areas these practices continued after World War II.[32] Paralleling the types of brokership based upon the political authority of village headmen is the authority of other village notables, such as priests. Brokership for recruitment based on religious authority is not discussed in this volume, but it has been extensively recorded for rural Java and West Africa in the literature.[33]

The second level of actors is the ensemble of public and private agencies of labour mediation at the local or regional level. At the level of the firm, employers regularly made use of commissioned recruiters, agents who were not formally employed by the company itself. This happened, for instance, in the Egyptian Misr textile firm, but also at factory gates throughout Europe. As Wadauer *et al.* note, the first agencies in Europe offering job placement arose in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Most of these associations had a philanthropic or confessional background, and labour mediation typically constituted only one of its many activities. Only towards the end of the nineteenth century, when debates about the problem of unemployment intensified, did labour exchanges come to be seen as the solution. In some countries, such as Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany, these agencies were initiated, set up, and financed mainly by municipal authorities. Private agencies continued to exist too, although in some countries and some periods they were looked upon as problematic, and in many countries (Italy being one) legislation to restrict or even forbid the existence of these agencies was introduced. Outside Europe too, colonial governments set up local agencies for job placement, for instance in Africa and India. However, informal practices of labour intermediation persisted everywhere, because of their lower costs and because they allowed for greater control of labour, as was the case for instance with the *kangani* in India, as Kaur notes in her contribution.

The third set of agents comprises national and international agencies involved in labour intermediation, both as direct providers and as regulators of mediation practices. Examples here include the nation state and the colonial state, but also supranational agents such as the League of Nations

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32. Babacar Fall, *Sénégal: Le Travail au XXe siècle* (Amsterdam, 2010); *idem*, *Le travail forcé en Afrique Occidentale française (1900–1945)* (Paris, 1993); Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996); Gareth Austin, *Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807–1956* (Rochester, NY, 2005); Carolyn A. Brown, *"We Were All Slaves": African Miners, Culture, and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery* (Oxford, 2003); Cordell and Gregory, "Labour Reservoirs and Population".

33. C. Babou, "Brotherhood Solidarity, Education and Migration: The Role of *Dahiras* among the Murid Muslim Community of New York", *African Affairs*, 101 (2002), pp. 151–170; Celia E. Mather, "Industrialization in the Tangerang Regency of West Java: Women Workers and the Islamic Patriarchy", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 15:2 (1983), pp. 2–17.

and the ILO. As mentioned earlier, the end of the nineteenth century witnessed a growing debate in Europe on the issue of unemployment and labour market intermediation. During that period, when the "nation state" was established and consolidated, the role of the state in unemployment policy, social welfare, and job placement became increasingly important in Europe, as Wadauer *et al.* note in great detail. While they emphasize the variety of developments in state-run and national unionized labour exchanges in the various countries, they also point to the remarkable, and almost universal, involvement of the nation state in these facilities in the period 1880 to 1940. Although they do not offer a specific explanation for this phenomenon, other than what they call "a type of intrinsic logic", we believe that the phenomenon of globalization can help us here. It was precisely during this period that, after years of relative international political stability on the continent in the first few decades after 1815, Europe's nation states started to carve out a role for themselves on the international arena. This process extended, of course, to areas outside Europe, where large empires were built and extended, also by relatively "new" colonial powers. During this process, the protection of *national* labour markets became important, both as part of the urge to stand out but probably also in response to the insecurities of increasing globalization. Each country reacted to these challenges in fairly similar ways, while evidently closely watching each other's moves.

At the same time, the colonial rulers in Asia and Africa attempted to control the increasing international labour flows following the processes of industrialization and globalization. As Amarjit Kaur notes in her contribution on brokerage in south-east Asia, British intervention in the region in fact brought about an integration into global networks, while also developing "manpower supply chains" connecting India, China, and Malaya. Similar labour flows had been created by the Dutch colonial state with the introduction of "coolie labour" both within the Indonesian archipelago and between separate parts of the empire.[34] Remarkably, these interventions, aimed at creating a "freer supply of labour" in the region, simultaneously entailed highly unfree and even forced recruitment practices and labour relations.

As in Asia, Africa's colonial authorities intervened in issues of labour migration and recruitment. Cassandra Mark-Thiesen argues, however, that the colonial state's relationship to the labour intermediation of European mining firms, through African headmen and gangs, was ambivalent. On the one hand, it aimed to develop certain industries, for which a steady supply

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34. See, for example, the contributions to Houben *et al.*, *Coolie Labour*; and Thio Termorshuizen, "Indentured Labour in the Dutch Colonial Empire, 1800–1940", in Gert Oostindie (ed.), *Dutch Colonialism, Migration and Cultural Heritage* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 261–314.

of labour was needed; on the other, the state was confronted both with the persistent influence of African mediators, and with the fact that these types of indentured labour contract went against their professed desire to ban coercive labour relations throughout the British Empire. Unlike the British, the Spanish colonial state seems to have been more reluctant to relegate slave-like labour conditions to "the island of no return", as Fernando Pó was called. In his contribution, Martino shows that, while other empires, as well as the ILO, condemned these outright inhuman recruitment practices, the Spanish authorities failed to intervene, and in some cases even encouraged the persistence of coercive labour conditions.

Thus, the challenges presented by globalization and colonialism were taken up too by supranational entities, both in the form of NGOs and of bilateral agreements between various states. Both Schettini and Rodríguez García stress the concern of international associations, such as the ILO and the League of Nations, with the international trafficking of women and children. Rodríguez Garcia's article, in particular, highlights the tensions between concepts of "free" and "unfree" recruitment in this respect, as the (usually bourgeois) members of the Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children automatically assumed each woman to have been a defenceless victim of deceit and forced to enter the prostitution business. Indeed, the increasing migration flows caused an ever-growing and more visible stream of women and girls being trafficked for the sex industry. However, as the author convincingly shows, without wanting to deny the social and psychological damage inflicted by trafficking in general, while the Committee officially battled against trafficking, by defining any prostitute as a victim of forced recruitment it implicitly made a case against the moral vices of prostitution in general.

As Christoph Rass's contribution notes, it was not only international organizations that were concerned with regulating international labour migration. Equally, supranational agreements could be reached by means of bilateral or multilateral agreements between states. In the context of rapidly changing economic structures and demographic regimes – both in terms of natural population growth and migration patterns – in the period 1919 to 1975, European countries were confronted with new labour market problems. On the one hand, the need for flexible (often unskilled) labour increased in what Rass calls the "core economies of north-western Europe"; at the same time, unlimited migration flows increasingly came to be perceived as undesirable. One – historically underexplored – way of regulating this international labour migration was through bilateral agreements. Rass argues that nation states instigated these agreements in order to retain as much control over international migration flows as possible, but that ultimately these bilaterals actually contributed to setting international standards. More implicitly, his contribution can thus also explain how the ILO standards that emerged were predicated upon specific "European"

developments and therefore hardly relevant to migration patterns and conditions elsewhere in the world. Rass's analysis ends in the 1970s, and so we cannot see how these international standards subsequently developed. But Kaur concludes that, at least in south-east Asia, the "second wave of globalization" in the post-Independence era led to transnational labour migration becoming both regionalized and more global.

By and large, the contributions to this special issue of the *IRSH* identify powerful mechanisms that maintain systems of labour recruitment. The combination of indebtedness, family loyalties and needs, the pressure exerted by local authorities, and even national interests is a constellation of forces hard for individuals to withstand, and probably more difficult to withstand for women than for men in patriarchally organized societies. We do not want to give the impression, however, that the women and men who are recruited are just helpless victims. Even in cases where their recruitment could hardly be considered voluntary, their hopes and expectations, and the forms of agency they were able to fashion, are as historically significant as their experiences of exploitation, subjugation, and deceit. This is shown clearly in the articles by Rass, Schettini, and Rodríguez García, all of whom stress the agency and hopes of the recruited migrants, as well as the exploitation and control they suffered. This ambivalence also becomes clear in more recent accounts of contemporary domestic workers, who not only feel a responsibility to take care of their families at home, but also dream of a better life for themselves and their children.[35]

Apart from the desire for economic betterment, there is also the question of women's agency in a context marked by both male domination and by capitalist exploitation and precarity. Earning their own living, whether in a "respectable" or "immoral" job, may expose women to new forms of subjection and uncertainty, but it might also offer them a degree of economic independence, and at least partially free them from the prior constrictions imposed by the household and local community.[36] Again, the uncertain, and shifting, boundaries between free and unfree labour, and between agent and victim, become apparent.

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

Each contribution to this special issue of the *IRSH* endeavours to explain the emergence and persistence of practices of indirect labour recruitment.

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35. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford, CA, 2001).
36. See the contributions by Rodríguez and Schettini in this issue. This could be the case not only for young unmarried women, compared with their position in the parental household, but also for married women. See Sen, "'Without His Consent?'".

It emerges from those contributions that three powerful interest groups are involved. First of all, there are the people who have authority over the labourer (a family member, a spouse or lover, a village head, relatives already employed by a plantation, factory, or at a port). Secondly, there are the professional intermediaries. These were already operative long before a third player emerged on the scene: governments, which, from the nineteenth century, in the wake of the abolition of the slave trade, tried to address and control the phenomenon. This happened at the same time that governments in Europe became involved in labour mediation, which had so far been a contested area between labour collectives and employers. The dual and often contradictory interests of governments become quite clear from the contributions, whether in the case of a colonial administration or of a democratically elected government. In both cases they have to enforce legislation against trafficking and coerced labour conditions, but they also feel responsible for facilitating enterprise in dire need of cheap labour. There is the same dual tension at the family or village level; parents are responsible for the well-being of their children, and village heads for that of their communities; at the same time, they are interested in the income-generating capacities of their kin. This is precisely what makes labour mediation ubiquitous and persistent. At the same time, however, impartial mediation does not exist, and this quite often gives it morally disturbing features.