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Agents of Globalization: Shipping Companies, Labor Recruiters, and Landlords in the
Making of the European Exodus, 1870-1930

By

Noah Daniel Bender

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, Chair

Professor John Connolly

Professor Steven K. Vogel

Summer 2024

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Abstract

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Noah Daniel Bender

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, Chair

This dissertation shows how businesses including shipping companies, labor recruitment agents, and landed elites—“agents of globalization”—decisively shaped global mobility in an era of nominally “free” and unregulated migration. From South Carolina and Argentina to Saskatchewan and Australia, businesses tried desperately to court immigrants, resorting to subsidies and marketing campaigns, or, failing these, deceit and coercion. Recruiters were invariably aided by shipping companies, which agglomerated during the 1870s into a handful of globe-straddling, modern corporations like the British Cunard or the German Hamburg-America Line. Never simply neutral conduits of global interconnectivity, steamship lines indiscriminately fomented migration to countless destinations, which delivered profits far exceeding those on freight. Across Europe, meanwhile, the deluge of shipping agents and foreign recruiters provoked a backlash from commercial farmers, who had been buffeted by world markets and now faced a depleting labor force and rising wages. The net result was an international migration regime quite unlike our own. Ours is an age of chronic structural unemployment in the richest countries, in which liberalized immigration policies are consequently a hard sell. In 1900 by contrast the economies of the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand wrestled with an inexhaustible appetite for labor power. Simply put, even unskilled labor was a desperately sought commodity in a world awash in land and capital.

I'm probably not writing any more books,
so this one is for all those whose love and support
helped me finish writing—my parents,
Paul and Nancy, and above all, my wife,
Christina. Sorry it took so long.

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To research this dissertation, I visited seven archives in three countries, which required generous funding from a variety of sources. The German Fulbright Commission supported an extended stay in Berlin (2021). A number of smaller grants allowed me to range across Europe, visiting archives in the UK, Germany, and Austria. These included funding from the Department of German, the Institute of European Studies, and the Institute of International Studies at UC Berkeley, in addition to the German Historical Institute and the Central European History Society. I owe special thanks to Professors Sebastian Conrad and Ulf Brunnbauer for serving as my hosts at the Freie Universität, Berlin and Universität Regensburg, respectively, during 2021 and 2022.

Countless archivists and librarians helped me to locate some very peculiar and obscure sources. Though by and large I never learned their names, a few warrant special mention. Thank you to the gentleman in Bremen who spotted me staring dumbly at German *Kurrent* handwriting and printed off a helpful guide. At the University of Liverpool, staff members knew the Cunard Archive back to front and were instrumental in getting me the documents I needed during a few short visits. Finally, a special thanks to the staff at the British National Archives, who, on the day of my arrival, were dressed in identical t-shirts which read “We are here to help you!” Maybe Britain isn’t part of Europe after all.

My friends and family were indispensable sources of moral support and comradeship over the past seven years. My parents, Paul and Nancy Bender never questioned my dubious professional aspirations, even if they didn’t always understand what I was doing. Working on this dissertation for seven years wouldn’t have been half as enjoyable without the lifelong friends I made at Berkeley: Daniel Bowen, Evan Fernández, AJ Solovy, Coleman Mahler, Anthony Morreale, Harrison King, Henry Schmidt, Ilya Bobkov, Jordan Mursinna, Claire Wrigley, and Maria Barreiros Almeida Reis.

Lastly, I thank my wife Christina Bender for her unwavering love and support from the moment in 2013 when I decided to become a historian, to the filing of this dissertation in 2024. It is no exaggeration to say that I couldn't have done it without her. Thank you.

Abbreviations

AT-OeStA/HHStA	Österreichisches Staatsarchiv/Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv, Vienna
BArch	Bundesarchiv, Berlin
GStAPK	Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin
MMM	Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool
StAB	Staatsarchiv der Freien und Hansestadt Bremen
StAHH	Staatsarchiv der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg
TNA	The National Archives, London
UoLSCA	University of Liverpool, Special Collections & Archives

Introduction

A peculiar transatlantic business partnership took shape during the 1890s. On the one side were the world's largest shipping companies, the Hamburg-America Line and North German Lloyd, conveyers of millions of European migrants. On the other was the planter elite of Brazil, who had recently abandoned sugar cultivation in favor of coffee, commencing a decades-long export boom. It was a marriage of convenience, for each side needed something from the other. During the 1870s and 1880s, millions of Germans had emigrated, mostly to the United States, fueling the meteoric rise of Hamburg-America and Lloyd. But by the early 1890s the exodus from Germany had slowed to a trickle and the shippers were left casting about for a new source of passengers. The coffee planters, too, had suffered a devastating setback. In 1888 the Brazilian monarchy had done away with slavery, on which the plantation system depended, and then been deposed in a retaliatory coup d'état the following year. The new Brazilian Republic was dominated by the planter class, which now turned to immigration to supply the workers needed to expand the coffee plantations. A deal was struck. At a discount of 100,000 Marks, the German shippers were to purchase more than 500,000 hectares of land in southern Brazil, formerly the patrimony of the banished François d'Orléans, Prince de Joinville. The vast site became home to the Hanseatic Colonization Society, a lavishly financed enterprise with the task of setting off a fresh wave of migration by settling some 50,000 German-speakers from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland in southern Brazil within ten years.¹

Despite its auspicious birth, the Hanseatic Colonization Society managed to settle only a few thousand families before winding up operations in 1904, a far cry from the projected 50,000. What had gone wrong? Brazilian elites had been unwavering in their support, subsidizing the passage of settlers and providing the German engineering firm AEG with a railroad concession to link the settlements to one another and to the coast. Officials in the German and Austrian governments, on the other hand, were adamantly opposed to the project. The German Chancellor and his ministers moved quickly to ban subsidies on settlers' relocation costs paid out by the Brazilian government. In addition, the Chancellor personally oversaw the permitting of the Hanseatic Colonization Society, ensuring that the number of migrants was capped at a measly 500 per year. It was no secret that the government had spoiled the colonization project on purpose and done so on the orders of Germany's agrarian elite, who feared that shippers and New World planters would steal away their workers. In the Habsburg monarchy, too, aristocratic landlords moved to ban migrant recruitment, with the Hungarian Minister of Agriculture ordering officials to "do everything within their legal means to block emigration and act against emigration agents with all possible force of the law."² In other words, European landlords had checked the ambitions of planters an ocean away to siphon off their labor force. This was no isolated incident. Around 1900, it was private

¹ On the history of the Hanseatic Colonization Society, see Carl Fabri, *Deutsche Siedlungsarbeit im Staate Santa Catharina, Südbrasilien im fünfjährigem Werdegange* (Hamburg: Kommissions-Verlag der Ritterschen Buchhandlung, 1902).

² Quoted from Katalin Straner, "Emigration Agents and the Agency of the Urban Press: Approaches to Transatlantic Migration in Hungary, 1880s-1914", *Journal of Migration History* 2:2 (2016): 353.

businesses hungry for labor rather than politicians or ethno-centric electorates that tended to determine migration policies.

The argument of this dissertation is that private businesses including shipping companies, labor recruitment agents, and landed elites—“agents of globalization”—decisively shaped global mobility in an era of nominally “free” and unregulated migration. From South Carolina and Argentina to Saskatchewan and Australia, employers tried desperately to court immigrant labor, resorting to subsidies and marketing campaigns, or, failing these, deceit and coercion. Labor recruiters were invariably aided by shipping companies, which agglomerated during the 1870s into a series of globe-straddling, modern corporations like the British Cunard Line or the German Hamburg-America Line. Never simply neutral conduits of global interconnectivity, steamship lines indiscriminately fomented migration regardless of destination, earning profits far exceeding those on freight. Back in Europe, meanwhile, the deluge of shipping agents and foreign recruiters provoked a backlash from commercial farmers, who had been buffeted by world markets and now faced a shrinking labor force and rising wages. The net result was an international migration regime quite unlike our own. Decades of chronic structural unemployment in the wealthiest democracies have sharpened popular antipathy to migration.³ In 1900 by contrast the economies of the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand wrestled with an inexhaustible appetite for labor power. Simply put, even unskilled labor was a desperately sought commodity in a world awash in land and capital.

Telling the story of Europe’s mass exodus as one of competitive labor recruitment brings to the fore deliberate efforts to shape the movement of people, which cuts against the main current of migration historiography. According to most accounts, the overarching trajectory of Euro-American migration policy commences from an era of laissez-faire before progressing through incremental restrictions on the movement of the sick, the infirm, and the mentally ill, before culminating in near total exclusion during and after the First World War.⁴ By all too often equating “migration policy” to “immigration restriction”, even implicitly, such narratives obscure the frequent pre-1914 interventions in the free flow of people, be they by Canadian and Brazilian elites attempting to siphon traffic from the United States, or German and Austrian lawmakers trying to prevent departures in the first place. Underpinning all such efforts was a persistent shortage of labor in the settler states of the Americas, in addition to Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Apart from the eastern United States, no destination was magnetic enough to abstain from the struggle for immigrant labor. As steamships and railroads knitted together a single, global market for European laborers, that market became a battlefield arraying employers on different continents against one another.

³ The era 2021-2024 has so far marked a break from this longstanding pattern of structural unemployment in the United States, though less so in Europe. Anti-immigrant positions remain common in all western states. Where post-Covid-19 economic developments will lead is still an open question. At the time of writing in the spring of 2024, leading economic forecasters are split over whether we stand on the precipice of another Great Depression or at the dawn of a golden age.

⁴ See Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation By Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Such orchestrated migration is more typically associated with the Asian mass migrations of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, namely those of Indian and Chinese contract laborers. The assertion here is not that European migrants were in fact akin to indentured laborers; the point, rather, is that *all* migration was structured and channeled by the demand for labor, even if Europeans were mostly exempt from exploitative labor contracts.⁵ As the following chapters will make clear, attempts to grasp the dynamics of international migration—past and present—that do not account for middlemen or for the desires of employers are bound to fall short. For example, British colonial administrators transported Indian contract laborers to the sugar islands of the Caribbean because no immigrants would sign up for low-paying and uncomfortable work harvesting sugarcane in Barbados and Jamaica. Likewise, the proprietors of Australian tin mines and Brazilian coffee plantations resorted to recruitment because they could not count on laborers just showing up at the gates as the manager of a factory in Chicago could. Either the job site was too remote as in Brazil, or the wages were too low as on the cotton plantations of the American South, or the job paid well but was just too far from Europe as in Australia and New Zealand.

This story unfolded across Europe, North and South America, Africa, and Australia, yet I am able to tell it thanks to the archival collections left behind by shipping companies as well as their regulatory overseers. Toward the end of the 1890s the leading shippers were operating routes to six continents, placing them among the earliest truly global corporations. Their headquarters in Hamburg, Bremen, and Liverpool were nerve centers of globalization, from which nearly all transoceanic migration originating in Europe was orchestrated. As such, the lines' corporate archives, or what survives of them, furnish a panoptic view of the conflicts unfolding over labor migration in which shippers were invariably among the leading protagonists. Specifically, I focus on the records of the Hamburg-America Line, housed at the Staatsarchiv Hamburg, the North German Lloyd, at the Staatsarchiv Bremen, and the Cunard Line, in the University of Liverpool Library. Bolstering these rich collections are the records of regulatory bodies and police organs in London, Berlin, and Vienna. When, for example, an Australian metallurgical company illegally solicited a number of Germans to work in copper mines in South Australia, German police interrogated the recruitment agent and conducted interviews with the recruits. The transcripts of these interviews and from countless similar cases indicate the scale of labor recruitment activities not only in Germany, but across Europe, and offer glimpses into the inner workings of the agent networks and the perspectives of the migrants themselves. Although some migration historians like Torsten Feys and Drew Keeling have carried out extensive studies in the archives of shipping companies, the files of regulatory bodies tasked with overseeing migration remain largely unexamined. Finally, the political campaigns waged by European agrarians to arrest mass emigration are copiously documented in the national archives of Germany and Austria. I also make generous use of transcripts of legislative

⁵ As we shall see, Europeans were sometimes subjected to contract labor in Latin America. Furthermore, as Mae Ngai has shown, Chinese migrants to places like the United States and Australia were not contract laborers, but free men who had migrated of their own volition.

proceedings in the German Reichstag and the Prussian Landtag to track debates about emigration restriction.

This dissertation has three chapters, each of which cover the entire era 1870-1930 and survey a different facet of private coordination of migration. Chapter 1 examines the role of shipping companies in shaping migration. Although not directly embroiled in struggles to secure labor, shippers were central to all strategies for fostering and inhibiting labor mobility alike. Anti-emigration interests sought to crack down on shippers and agencies rather than migrants themselves, while nearly all international labor recruitment programs were conducted in partnership with shipping companies. Furthermore, German and British firms in particular vied for control of lucrative sources of migrants, a conflict that spilled over into official diplomacy and trade policy. For example, British and German diplomats weaponized unfavorable trade restrictions to beat back repeated Italian attempts to cut foreign shippers out of ports like Naples and Genoa, all at the behest of shipping companies. Most conflicts, however, were structured by the rivalry between German and British firms. As the German lines restricted British access to Hamburg and Bremen, the latter tried to free themselves from Germany's continental dominance by outflanking them in the Mediterranean, concluding an exclusivity agreement with the Hungarians. In exchange for building up the port infrastructure at Fiume, the British lines were guaranteed a minimum number of Hungarian emigrants, to be ushered away from the Germans by a new border police force established for this very purpose. Although large-scale emigration ended with the First World War, British shipping executives struck a final, symbolic victory by successfully demanding that the 1919 Treaty of Versailles contain articles to ensure equal access to east European emigrants, previously monopolized by Germany. For the most part, shipping companies were agnostic to the destinations of migration, but there can be little doubt that they powerfully shaped the routes taken by migrants as well as the overall volume of migration. Rate wars drove down prices, enabling ever more Europeans to emigrate, while shippers worked tirelessly through political channels to route migrants in ways that redounded to their advantage while denying rivals access to the same channels. In sum, fleets of steamships were the infrastructure of international labor mobility, and conflict between the biggest lines structured the routes and rates available to migrants.

Chapter 2 looks at the veritable army of recruitment agents dispatched to Europe in the decades prior to the First World War. Brazil, for example, established a "Propaganda Commission" tasked with locating specific types of workers in Europe and plying them with blandishments like free passage and guaranteed wages in exchange for several years of service. Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and a number of states in the American south pursued similar policies. Problems distinguishing legitimate from unlicensed agents, however, quickly spawned a parallel network of swindlers, whose activities ranged from simple theft to bogus jungle colonies with deadly consequences. The latter cases typically entailed fraudsters delivering hapless migrants to Latifundias in the Brazilian countryside where they had to work off their debt as virtual prisoners without access to adequate sanitation or medical facilities. These incidents induced European governments to ban migrant recruitment altogether, which rendered the agents visible to state regulators and thus, through the archive, to historians. The total number of Europeans who fell victim to scams is impossible to calculate with precision, not least because most instances likely went unreported. Nevertheless, I have uncovered

previously unstudied court proceedings and surveillance reports that call into question the common assertion that malfeasance was vanishingly rare in the transatlantic migration. I argue that a large volume of migration to countries other than the United States can be explained by such deliberate recruitment efforts, which used the promise of high wages or free land to divert migrants away from ostensibly more desirable destinations.

Chapter 3 examines the little-known campaign by European landlords to slow the transatlantic migration. From the Rhine to the Volga, big landowners fought to arrest mass emigration, which disproportionately saw the departure of the landless rural population from which agricultural laborers were drawn. Railroads and steamships had not only created unified markets for commodities like grain, but for labor as well. Accustomed to a surplus rural population content to work the fields in exchange for paltry wages and access to a vegetable patch, landlords now had to contend with wage competition from far away factories. While shippers were growing rich off mass emigration, Europe's agricultural capitalists were panicking as plummeting crop prices and a diminishing labor force threatened to crush them. A rivalry developed between the shipping and agricultural sectors which, I argue, determined the course of political debates about emigration across central and eastern Europe. In the decades around 1900, agrarians and their proxies engaged in bitter polemics, parliamentary lobbying, and grassroots mobilization against unscrupulous "shipping capital", resulting in the passage of numerous "emigration laws" regulating the activities of shipping companies and migration agents. The chapter is largely a case study of Germany's 1897 Emigration Act, which was engineered to prevent the emigration of contract workers. The standard interpretation of the 1897 Emigration Act, and of the politics of emigration broadly, highlights cultural factors: anxieties over the depletion of the national body, the definition of the boundaries of the nation both spiritually and geographically, and fears about Germany's imperial deficit vis-a-vis France and Britain. The chapter reframes Germany's contentious migration politics by shifting the spotlight from "colonial fantasies" to the "visible hand" of the industries that stood to win and lose everything from ongoing emigration.

Finally, for the sake of transparency, I offer a note on historical method. Unlike most social scientists, historians are rarely schooled in a discrete methodological approach, and I suspect most members of the guild would balk at such a standard sociology or political science question as "What is your method?" I, too, would balk, and stutter out something about institutions. But I have undertaken this project in the spirit of social science, specifically interdisciplinary political economy, and while I have enjoyed the near absence of methodological constraints afforded by the great discipline of history, I feel that I owe the reader an explanation. This dissertation makes extensive use of economics papers to give a sense of quantitative scale and significance in an otherwise narrative project. But it is to historically oriented members of the sociology and political science professions that I owe the greatest debt of gratitude. Specifically, the subfield of comparative historical sociology has furnished the tools and bravado (or foolhardiness, depending on who you ask) needed to examine a global migratory process that touched dozens of states. Going back to Emile Durkheim's *Suicide*, comparative historical

sociologists have deployed a method of inductive, comparative reasoning tailored to understand why states and societies follow different historical trajectories in spite of similar starting conditions.⁶ Readers will note the influence of this approach in passages dealing with the different migration policies of the UK, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Russia, as well as in comparisons of immigration recruitment programs in Brazil, Australia, and the United States.

A number of historical sociologists have powerfully influenced this dissertation, probably more than any other thinkers. They include Immanuel Wallerstein, Giovanni Arrighi, and Andre Gunder Frank, all of whom were intellectual descendants of Fernand Braudel and the *Annales* school in one way or another. This is a diverse lot. Wallerstein and Arrighi were Marxists, Frank and Braudel decidedly not. But what unites these intellectuals is a macroscopic perspective on the history of global capitalism. Braudel and Wallerstein each produced multi-volume accounts of the origins and spread of capitalism, exhibiting an astonishing command of the sweep of human history across hundreds of years.⁷ Frank is best known for “dependency theory”, positing that the combined and uneven development of global capitalism left countries in what we now call the Global South poor and economically reliant on rich states.⁸ Arrighi, finally, developed a macroeconomic model explaining the rise and fall of hegemonic empires stretching from the early modern Dutch Republic to the seemingly faltering United States of the 1970s.⁹ All of these works have provoked endless debate and refinement and none are still on the intellectual cutting edge. But as methodological touchstones they remain as relevant as ever. Each author displays a virtuosity in systems thinking that has seldom been matched, linking developments in politics, economics, society, technology, and ideas. The awesome scale of this kind of historical analysis is reminiscent of a John Muir line: “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.”¹⁰ Muir was remarking on the interconnectedness of the natural world, but the observation applies no less to human affairs. As I began unearthing archival evidence of private enterprise shaping global migration, I struggled to manage the ballooning scale of the project—everything I found

⁶ Emile Durkheim, *Le Suicide: Étude de sociologie* (Paris, 1897). For a superb, modern example of this approach, see Theda Skocpol, *States & Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

⁷ Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century, Vol. 1: The Structure of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century, Vol. II: The Wheels of Commerce* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century, Vol. III: The Perspective of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730s-1840s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System IV: Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

⁸ Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967).

⁹ Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (New York: Verso, 1994).

¹⁰ John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 110.

was connected to everything else, and excluding any part would leave the picture incomplete. I do not claim to match the skill or ambition of any of the above thinkers. But I take a page from their book in trying to explain how my “agents of globalization” fit into the larger story of global capitalism around 1900. In part, this dissertation is an attempt to sketch the contours and clarify the inner logic of a world migration system.

Yet another methodological influence is the set of political science tools collectively known as “historical institutionalism”, associated with thinkers like Kathleen Thelen and Peter Hall. One scholar defines historical institutionalism somewhat verbosely as

“...neither a theory of politics, nor a general theory of institutional development. Like rational choice and sociological institutionalism, it is better characterized as a theoretical tradition that gives particular attention to a discrete set of substantive themes that are analyzed with a distinct combination of analytical concepts and methods. The most distinguishing mark of historical institutionalism is the primacy it accords to temporality—the notion that the timing and sequence of events shape political processes. In more specific terms, historical institutionalism suggests that timing and sequence contribute to unpredictability (outcomes may vary greatly), inflexibility (the more time passes, the more difficult it is to reverse course), nonergodicity (chance events may have lasting effects), and inefficiencies (forgone alternatives may have been more efficient.”¹¹

One can almost hear the historians scoff—well over one-hundred words to say that the chronology and sequence of events matters. But historians could learn a thing or two from the political scientists and political sociologists about how even seemingly minor institutional features condition the long-run development of societies and economies. In *The Land of Too Much*, for example, Monica Prasad tackles an empirical, historical question: Why does the US have so much more poverty than other wealthy countries?¹² The answer? America’s extraordinary wealth at the end of the nineteenth century obviated the building of state welfare capacities that elsewhere would prove crucial in weathering the shocks of twentieth- and twenty-first-century capitalism.

Without the aid of this methodological sextant, it would not have been possible to engage such a capacious topic, effectively three miniature dissertations arrayed around a common theme—how private businesses decisively shaped global migration over half a century. Underpinning this project is a model of the global economy around 1900 in which international labor market integration structured conflict among employers and related interests like shippers, conflict which shaped the experience of migration for millions of people. Within this framework it becomes clear, for example, that such nominally similar actors as big landowners could have widely divergent and even conflicting interests dependent upon their position within the global labor market. The historian Shearer Davis Bowman was not alone in asserting similarities between the European landed elite and the planters of the New World, both of whom long presided

¹¹ Orfeo Fioretos, “Historical Institutionalism in International Relations,” *International Organization*, 65, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 370-371.

¹² Monica Prasad, *The Land of too Much: American Abundance and the Paradox of Poverty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

over un- and semi-free labor forces employed in the growing of cash crops for export.¹³ But when it came to securing an adequate labor supply after 1870 or so, the agrarians of the New and Old World were decidedly at odds. As German and Hungarian magnates set about stifling emigration from Eastern Europe, their counterparts from Charleston to São Paulo were paying the salaries of thousands of labor recruiters set loose on all corners of Europe. In addition, the character of the various national labor recruitment programs and of the anti-emigration movements in Europe diverged in meaningful ways owing to the uneven power and influence wielded by the landed elite across different political systems. Comparative historical sociology and historical institutionalism furnish a method and a language with which to schematize the interaction of so many disparate interests scattered across the globe. My hope is that this scaffolding serves to clarify rather than obfuscate the underlying structure.

¹³ Shearer Davis Bowman, *Masters and Lords: Mid-Nineteenth-Century U.S. and Prussian Junkers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Chapter 1: Steamboat Diplomacy: Shipping Companies in the Atlantic Migrant Trade, 1870s-1930s

On June 28th, 1919, the Treaty of Versailles was signed by the victorious Allied Powers as well as a reluctant but exhausted Germany. The treaty is popularly remembered as, in Keynes' memorable phrase, a "Carthaginian peace", imposing upon Germany a hefty reparations bill, official guilt for the war, disarmament, and the cession of territory in Europe and abroad.¹⁴ For the most part, economic historians now disagree with Keynes, insisting that the real toll of the treaty was psychological and that the economic burdens were manageable.¹⁵ The little-known provisions governing the migrant trade, however, had the potential to transfer considerable spoils from German to British and other foreign shippers. Article 368 forbade Germany from applying "to the transportation of emigrants going to or coming from the ports of the Allied and Associated Powers, any technical, fiscal, or administrative measures, such as measures of customs examination, general police, sanitary police, and control, the result of which would be to impede or delay such services."¹⁶ In other words, German shipping companies were set on an equal footing with foreign competitors carrying European emigrants, even when doing business in Germany itself. This new competitive parity upended the status quo in European shipping. For decades Germany's Hamburg-America Line (Hapag) and North German Lloyd had colluded with officials in Berlin to manipulate the flow of migrants across the German border from Russia and Austria-Hungary, depriving British rivals including the White Star Line and Cunard Line of access to much of the traffic from the Continent. The sums involved were considerable. Between the 1870s and the First World War, migration was the lifeblood of the European shipping industry. More than half of the revenue earned by firms competing on the North Atlantic came from migrants travelling in steerage.

When hostilities commenced in the summer of 1914, emigration from Europe ground to a halt, but shipping magnates like Albert Ballin of Hamburg-American and Owen Phillips of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company resolved to carry on the competitive struggle by other means. In boardrooms from Hamburg and Bremen to Liverpool and Southampton, it was clear that emigrants would be among the spoils of war, and the lines moved to enshrine their dominance in the postwar settlement. In 1915 the German lines saw to it that their British, French, and Belgian rivals had their permits to operate in the country canceled.¹⁷ Had Germany emerged victorious, there is little reason to doubt that the magnates of Hamburg and Bremen, and Ballin in particular, would have tried to banish the English from the continent altogether.¹⁸ Given

¹⁴ John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London, 1919).

¹⁵ See Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2008), Part. I.

¹⁶ Treaty of Peace with Germany (Treaty of Versailles), Library of Congress (1920): 222-223.

¹⁷ GStAPK I. HA Rep. 90 A, Nr. 230, June 24th, 1915.

¹⁸ Although often portrayed by contemporaries and historians as a peacemaker, Ballin was in fact a ruthless businessman, a fact obscured by the many hagiographic accounts that have cropped up since his

the extreme plans drawn up by the German government for postwar territorial annexations in eastern Europe, a trade monopoly would hardly have been radical. Less fanciful than their Teutonic cousins, English shipping executives plotted to secure a peace settlement that would crack open the restrictive German market. As early as 1916, when an Allied victory was far from assured, Owen Phillips had written to Alfred Allen Booth, a one-time Cunard chairman who was then serving in government, about including just such a provision in the final peace treaty. “Dear Sir Alfred,” wrote Phillips, “As you are a member of a Government Committee dealing with the Shipping Trade after the War, I hope you will be able to make some recommendation with reference to German and Austrian Control Stations, which have been instrumental in the past in diverting so much emigrant traffic from Eastern Europe away from the British regular Lines. I am aware that you have always taken a great interest in this matter, as it so closely affects the Cunard Line...”¹⁹ Booth needed no convincing that the German “control stations” were a menace, having frequently railed against them during his tenure at the helm of Cunard.

When the Armistice came into effect in the autumn of 1918, the peace was, as far as the German shipping sector was concerned, Carthaginian. Virtually all of Hamburg-American and the North German Lloyd’s fleets had been seized by Allied and neutral powers or else requisitioned by Berlin and sunk in the course of the war. Alfred Ballin, chair of Hamburg-American and more than anyone else the architect of German maritime might, died by his own hand two days before the Armistice, supposedly unable to bear the total annihilation of his life’s work.²⁰ In 1914 Hamburg-America and North German Lloyd had been the largest shipping companies in the world by gross tonnage – now their fleets amounted to a handful of rotting hulks. Worse still, the crown jewel of Hapag’s prewar fleet, the *Imperator*, which had at the time of its launch in 1913 been the largest passenger vessel in service, was now in Cunard hands, sailing under the name *Berengaria* in the place of the sunken *Lusitania*. Though the anglophile Ballin had been close to many in the world of British shipping, it is hard to say the latter were bereaved that November. It soon became clear, however, that the victory of British shipping was a pyrrhic one. In the United States, Congress had imposed a literacy test on arriving immigrants in 1917 and even tighter restrictions were soon to come. Meanwhile the Russian Revolution and the collapse of Austria-Hungary had engulfed much of the continent in chaos, thus lowering the final curtain on decades of transatlantic mass-mobility.

The First World War and Article 368 of the Treaty of Versailles marked the denouement of a drama that had been unfolding since at least the 1870s, in which German and British shipping companies, joined by lesser rivals and partners, battled for the most valuable cargo of the age, emigrants, in a theater extending to all corners of the European continent. In what follows I will sketch out the shippers’ clashes in locales from Hungary and the Russian Baltic to Italy and Latin America. As the German lines

death. See Frank Broeze, “Shipping Policy and Social Darwinism: Albert Ballin and the *Weltpolitik* of the Hamburg-America Line, 1886-1914,” *The Mariner’s Mirror* 79, no. 4 (1993): 419-436.

¹⁹ UoLSCA D42/C1/1/59, April 8th, 1916.

²⁰ Whether Ballin intended to commit suicide or mistakenly overdosed on sleeping pills remains a point of controversy. Those closest to the man attested to the fragility of his emotional state, but of course in the absence of a suicide note or similar testament, there is no way to know for certain how Ballin felt in 1918. See Bernhard Huldermann, *Albert Ballin*, trans. W.J. Eggers (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1922).

tightened their grip on central and eastern Europe, the British looked to outflank them by opening new routes on the European periphery, with mixed results. Elsewhere, as in Italy, the British and German lines joined forces to lean on Rome for preferential access to Italian emigrants. Conflict over the supply of Italian migrants even occasioned episodes of diplomatic sniping, as Rome gradually forced foreign lines out of Genoa, Naples, and Palermo. But first, a brief section will introduce readers to the history of European shipping and the Anglo-German rivalry, as well as the patterns of emigration from the continent that fueled the growth of the industry. European shipping and migration have been intertwined since the Age of Exploration, but this chapter takes the 1870s as its starting point. It was in that decade that steam decisively replaced sail, and the astronomical cost of steam-powered vessels led to the concentration of the industry to a handful of firms, such that by 1900 Hamburg-America, North German Lloyd, Cunard, and White Star were among the largest global corporations, capable of wielding considerable political and economic power.

Shipping: A Primer

Despite shipping companies' far-reaching influence over the course of emigration from Europe, historical studies on the topic remain scarce. The role of shipping companies has, in a sense, fallen between the sub-disciplinary cracks of fields like migration history, maritime history, business history, and global history. The scholars who have scrutinized shipping most extensively, the maritime historians, focus almost exclusively on freight, fueled by interest in commodity chains and globalization. One of the finest works in this vein is Michael Miller's study of twentieth-century European commerce, which outlines in tremendous detail the world-wide commercial infrastructure erected by shippers and their adjuncts and shows how they navigated the calamitous first half of the twentieth century.²¹ But the book virtually ignores migration by relegating it to the separate sphere of migration history, a grievous omission when one considers that passenger transport was the most profitable department in most European shipping companies. Another such book is Gelina Harlaftis' history of several Greek merchant houses as they morphed from local trading outfits in the early nineteenth century into global corporations over the following decades.²²

Migration historians, for their part, overwhelmingly prefer the instruments of social and cultural history, lingering upon the experiences and perceptions of migrants themselves. With few exceptions, shipping companies hang in the background; the steamship serves as a mere backdrop to the social drama of displacement and resettlement unfolding center stage. Meanwhile, causal analysis of migratory processes, in addition to the study of the economic impacts of migration, has been ceded almost entirely to economists, with limited cross-pollination between the disciplines.²³ Finally,

²¹ Michael Miller, *Europe and the Maritime World: A Twentieth-Century History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²² Gelina Harlaftis, *Creating Global Shipping: Aristotle Onassis, the Vagliano Brothers, and the Business of Shipping, c.1820-1970* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

²³ Because it is amenable to quantification, migration is a popular topic among economic historians. Arguably the most important work has been done by Jeffrey G. Williamson and his various co-authors. See Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999); Timothy J. Hatton and

for all their talk of connections, entanglements, and flows, “global” historians have been largely remiss to investigate the physical infrastructure of globalization.²⁴ Indeed, perfunctory acknowledgements of the transportation and communication revolution convey little sense that the “conduits” had interests of their own that helped to direct the process of globalization. One example of a book probing in this direction is Valeska Huber’s brilliant examination of how the opening of the Suez Canal reshaped processes of migration and economic integration.²⁵ Indeed, events in recent decades have wrought significant changes in historians’ perception of economic globalization, from a fundamentally peaceful process that downgraded the importance of states during the 1990s, to a more competitive field shaped by state and private interests like the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and the incipient “Chip War” today. In the latter view, globalization is not a linear development in the direction of peace and unity, but a dialectical one, which constantly ignites new conflicts and transforms power relations. Shipping was arguably more critical to these changes than any other sector because it made large-scale global integration possible in the first place. Further, because transport costs were consistently the largest barrier to trade, far and away greater than tariffs and customs, linking by steamship any two places where the price of a particular commodity—like labor power—differed compelled painful economic adjustments.

With this in mind, some of the most insightful inquiries into the history of shipping companies have been made at the crossroads of business history and migration history.²⁶ A handful of scholars have made the crucial observation that moving millions of Europeans across the globe was big business and that far from being neutral conduits, shipping companies were incentivized to intervene to augment the flow of migrants. Drew Keeling’s study of “the business of the transatlantic migration” provides a business history of migration in the style of Alfred Chandler, the father of modern business history.²⁷ In his *magnum opus*, Chandler described the “revolution in distribution and production” that took place in the late nineteenth century.²⁸ He observed that technological change produced ever larger firms that diminished the scope of the free market, leading to a form of capitalism he called “managerial” because important economic decisions were left to business executives. Armies of shareholders were needed to bear the fixed costs of oil refineries, steel combines, and steam-liners, with

Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Global Migration and the World Economy: Two Centuries of Policy and Performance* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008).

²⁴ The best treatments of “global” history during this era are C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

²⁵ Valeska Huber, *Channeling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁶ There are no complete histories of the European shipping industry. Firm histories, mostly commissioned or inspired by companies themselves, are numerous, but of dubious quality. Likewise, the romance of steamers like the *Titanic* has spawned a virtual cottage industry of amateur accounts. Some of the better general works are John Malcolm Brinnin, *The Sway of the Grand Saloon: A Social History of the North Atlantic* (New York: Macmillan, 1972); Stephen Fox, *Transatlantic: Samuel Cunard, Isambard Brunel, and the Great Atlantic Steamships* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004).

²⁷ Drew Keeling, *The Business of Transatlantic Migration between Europe and the United States, 1900-1914* (Zurich: Chronos, 2013).

²⁸ Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1977).

steamships being “the most expensive capital goods of the era.”²⁹ Accompanying the enlargement of firms was a leap in output that flooded the market, squeezing profits and driving the concentration of industries to a handful of players, like Standard Oil in petroleum refining, or Krupp and Carnegie in steel. Some industries avoided the bankruptcies and mergers that characterized the “managerial revolution”,³⁰ but for shipping, overcapacity problems were (and still are) endemic.³¹ Chandler did not extend his analysis to shipping, but as Keeling shows, the migrant trade functioned according to the very same logic. The christening of larger and more efficient vessels frequently occasioned rate wars, making fleet turnover exceptionally rapid and expensive. It did not take long for a few firms to dominate the north Atlantic—among them were Hapag, Lloyd, Cunard, White Star, and Inman.³² Sky-high fixed costs and razor-thin margins imposed a ruthless logic on shipping: expand or go bust. Between the 1880s and the First World War, competition propelled the construction of ever larger and faster ships. At about 10,000 tons, Inman’s *City of New York* was the bulkiest steamer of the 1880s. Hapag’s *Vaterland* launched in 1913 at a whopping 56,000 tons, a sixfold increase in just 25 years. The *Titanic*, for reference, weighed in at a mere 46,000 tons.

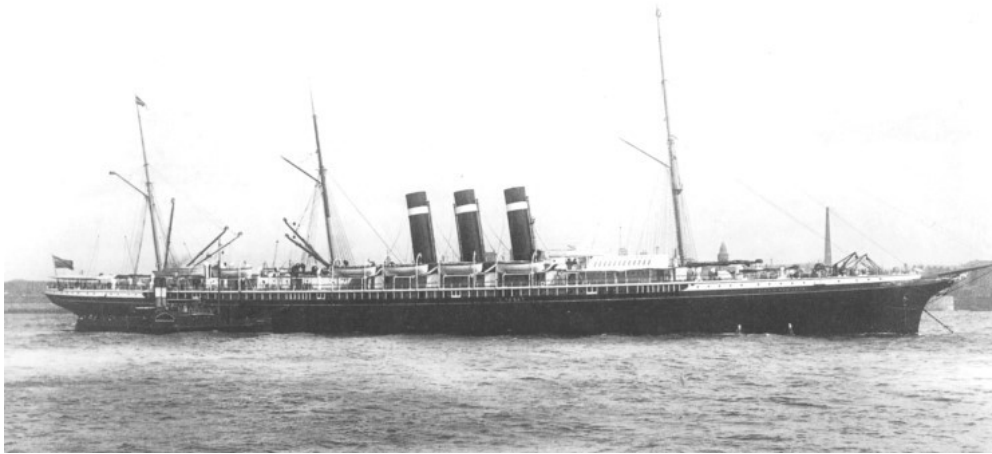


Figure 1. The Inman Line’s *SS City of New York*. Source: Wikimedia.

²⁹ Steven C. Topik and Allen Wells, *Global Markets Transformed, 1870-1945* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2012), 50. Furthermore, multiple ships were needed to fill out a single line. This is why steam-liners always appeared in threes: *Titanic*, with its sister ships *Britannic* and *Olympic*; or *Lusitania* with *Mauretania* and *Aquitania*. Germany’s most hulking pre-war trio exceeded even *Titanic* in size: *Imperator*, *Bismarck*, and *Vaterland*. The capital requirements were therefore immense, and only firms pooling significant resources could undertake liner shipping. To illustrate, Ballin’s trio of *Imperator*-class ships, unsurpassed in bulk until the 1930s, ran up a construction bill approximating 125 million marks (about 770 million in 2020 US dollars. See Gerhard A. Ritter, “Der Kaiser und sein Reeder. Albert Ballin, die HAPAG und das Verhältnis von Wirtschaft und Politik im Kaiserreich und in den ersten Jahren der Weimarer Republik“, *Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte* 42, vol. 2 (1997): 149.

³⁰ See Naomi R. Lamoreaux, *The Great Merger Movement in American Business, 1895-1904* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

³¹ For a more contemporary example of the same phenomenon, see Marc Levinson, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

³² Inman was absorbed by American interests in 1893, and in 1903, J.P. Morgan purchased White Star. Many nominally independent lines were in fact subsidiaries of the biggest lines. For example, Hapag, Lloyd, and Cunard controlled the lines operating out of the Austro-Hungarian ports of Fiume and Trieste. For a time, Hapag also owned the major Dutch lines.

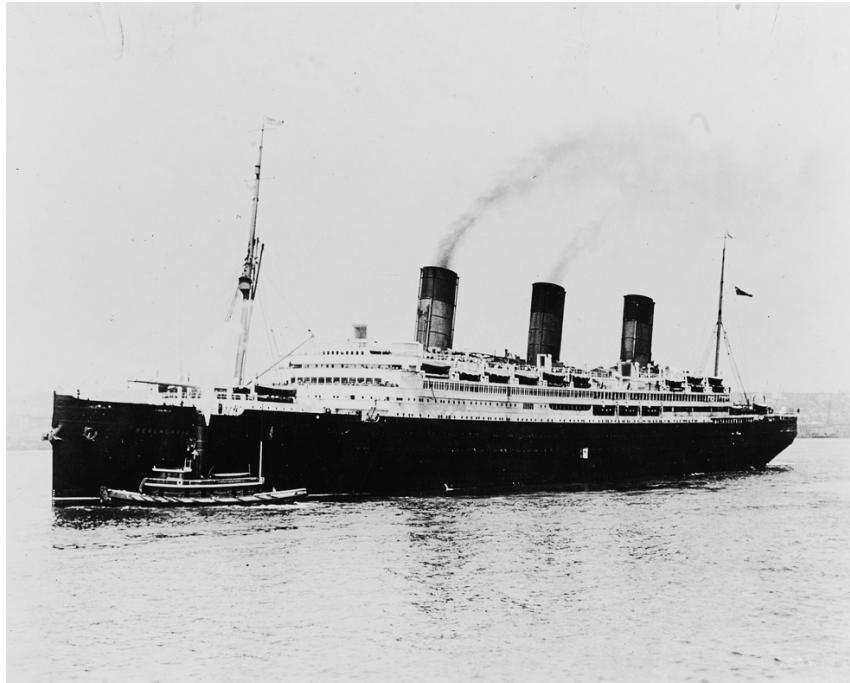


Figure 2. The Hamburg-American Line's *Vaterland*. Source: Wikimedia.

Moreover, the sensitivity of labor migration to economic fluctuations in the United States and other destinations entailed considerable risk for shipping companies, with year-to-year swings in the volume of migration as dramatic as 40% being a regular occurrence. Keeling unpacks the myriad risk-mitigation techniques deployed by Europe's shipping lines, chief among them the system of "rate pools" by which lines collectively set prices and divided market share. Although the pools resembled an anti-competitive cartel, they were in fact a necessary antidote to the extreme volatility of demand for the services of shipping companies. Although successful in preventing bankruptcies, the pool agreements did little to restrain competition, and the lines fought ruthlessly to undermine one another and capture the additional traffic required to inscribe a more favorable pool agreement. Keeling's analysis covers the relatively brief period 1900 to 1914 but compensates by furnishing a lucid and detailed anatomy of the European shipping industry around the turn of the century.

Torsten Feys likewise examines the history of migration as a business. Unlike Keeling, however, Feys takes the long view, tracing patterns of migration to early nineteenth-century maritime commercial networks. The result is a more panoptic examination of the transformation of the migrant trade wrought by the transition from sail to steam during the 1870s.³³ Where Feys comes up short is in his diminutive source base. The book revolves around the Holland-America Line and its home port of Rotterdam. Although the Holland-America archive is arguably the most complete shipping company archive, with the possible exception of Cunard, the line was never a

³³ Torsten Feys, *The Battle for the Migrants: The Introduction of Steamshipping on the North Atlantic and Its Impact on the European Exodus* (St. John's, Newfoundland: International Maritime Economic History Association, 2013).

key protagonist in European shipping, lending Feys' account a somewhat peripheral perspective.

What distinguishes my own approach from that of Keeling and Feys is a desire to locate shipping, and the migrant trade in particular, within the unfolding development of global capitalism. I am less interested in the business of shipping in isolation than in what can only be described as the political economy of migration in turn-of-the-century Europe and the world. A constellation of diverse interests and actors made up this political economy. Central, of course, were the shipping companies, which operated across the continent but were headquartered in countries that provided diplomatic and bureaucratic backup in clashes with foreign lines and governments. The chief objective of the shippers was to increase profits, either by inciting new migration or stealing market share from rivals. The other major set of interests were national governments, each of which pursued a migration policy consonant with the national interest, or at least that of the ruling classes. Such policies were multifarious, ranging from the procurement of plantation labor in Brazil; to the disposal of pesky minorities in Hungary; and the development of the national economy via remittances sent by proto "guest workers" in Italy. A final element, absent from this chapter, is the governments and business elites in the receiving states, chiefly the United States, but encompassing all the Settler societies of the Americas as well as Britain's white settler colonies.

Undergirding the political economy of migration was the internationally recognized right to freely choose one's country of residence. Under the *ancien regime* the norm across continental Europe had been a mercantilist migration policy, which reflected the conviction that the population constituted part of the national wealth and dictated that emigration be limited or proscribed altogether. After the French Revolution this began to change. Population growth increased pressure on the land and the specter of violent upheaval was enough to convince most European sovereigns that emigration was not the worst thing in the world. A new paradigm in political thought hastened the transition, casting migration as a benign or even beneficial force in economic life. According to classical political economists like Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo, the free circulation of persons as well as goods enhanced the prosperity of individuals and nations alike. Today, it is often forgotten that free trade in goods and free movement of people were born as twins, wrenched apart only at the turn of the twentieth century.³⁴ In the United States, for example, Chinese and Japanese exclusion broke new ground not only by limiting immigration for the first time on the basis of race, but also by prising apart the regulation of trade and human mobility.

The freedom to emigrate is only half the picture, however. The dismantling of the right to relocate took the form of restrictions on immigration, which had less to do with developments in European thought and demography, than with the political and economic development of the white-settler states that absorbed the great majority of migrants. Between the seventeenth century and the First World War, these "neo-Europes", as John C. Weaver terms these lands stretching from the Americas to the Antipodes, furnished the essential "pull" factors of high wages and abundant land that migrants found so attractive. Rich in natural endowments of land, minerals, timber, and so on, the sparsely populated settler states were economically constrained by a relative

³⁴ On the unity of trade and immigration policy, see Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

shortage of labor, and consequently welcomed and even recruited millions of immigrants. This was the wider context that enabled and structured the relocation of approximately fifty million Europeans between the 1820s and 1920s. The First World War, the Great Depression, and ensuing political democratization, through which anti-immigration labor parties came to power, brought to a close the European exodus during the first decades of the twentieth century.³⁵

The purpose of the foregoing discussion is to underline the unique set of factors that combined to produce one of the largest bursts of human mobility in history. Anyone looking to understand the mass migrations that unfolded around 1900 cannot avoid reckoning with this unprecedented and, potentially, unrepeatable, confluence of forces. A fixture of recent historiography is the juxtaposition of nineteenth- and twenty-first century processes of globalization, with studies of the former purporting to shed light on the latter. And, indeed, in terms of the volume of international trade, capital flows, and cultural exchange, the two processes of globalization appear remarkably alike. The glaring difference is migration. Since the 1970s, economic globalization has proven remarkably sedentary, with the explosion of foreign investment and trade contrasting starkly with the trickle of people across borders.³⁶ What makes the absence of significant mobility across recent decades so troubling is that, during the nineteenth century, migration was a powerful driver of economic development and convergence in sending societies. If there is to be any hope of restarting this “labor engine” of economic development, we must possess a clear understanding of the politico-economic matrix that permitted its operation in the first place, as well as that which has been responsible for dismantling it over the past century.

The Rise of the Anglo-German (Shipping) Antagonism

“We are probably fools”, observed the British statesman, Arthur Balfour, “not to find a reason for declaring war on Germany before she builds too many ships and takes away our trade.”³⁷ By the time Balfour uttered these words in 1907, German industry had long since surpassed the aging mills of northern England, with the stamp “Made in Germany” serving as a ubiquitous reminder of Britain’s decline. Now it appeared that the German upstarts might topple another pillar of the Pax Britannica in their bid for supremacy in seaborne commerce. In 1906 *The Daily Telegraph* fretted that of all the ocean liners quicker than twenty knots, only White Star’s *Oceanic* was British, while the remainder were all German.³⁸ The panic in Britain was intense but overblown.

³⁵ On democratization and immigration policy in the Americas, see David Scott FitzGerald and David Cook-Martin, *Culling the Masses: The Democratic Origins of Racist Immigration Policy in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014). On the settler revolution, see James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) and John C. Weaver, *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650-1900* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003).

³⁶ On the differences between nineteenth- and twentieth-century globalization, see Richard E. Baldwin and Philippe Martin, “Two Waves of Globalisation: Superficial Similarities, Fundamental Differences,” NBER Working Paper No. 6904, January 1999; and Deepak Nayyar, “Globalisation, history and development: a tale of two centuries,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 30 (2006): 137-159.

³⁷ Quoted in Hugh Neuburger and Houston H. Stokes, “The Anglo-German Trade Rivalry, 1887-1913: A Counterfactual Outcome and its Implications,” *Social Science History* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1979): 187.

³⁸ UoLSCA D42/Ca/25, 1 of 4, 17. *The Daily Telegraph*, July 18th, 1906.

Germany's rise was highly concentrated in sectors like heavy industry and high-tech manufacturing, while Britain retained a commanding lead in finance and shipping.³⁹ On the eve of the First World War, Britain and her dominions possessed a staggering ten thousand merchant vessels weighing in at nearly twenty million gross tons. Even after years of relative decline this still amounted to nearly half of global shipping capacity. The German merchant marine, in comparison, stood at a distant second with less than a quarter as many ships, though it still had twice as many as did the next-in-line French.⁴⁰

The great exception to Britain's durable seafaring hegemony was the Atlantic passenger trade, in which German and British lines were closely matched. It was on the North Atlantic that glittering seaborne hotels like the *Titanic* or the *Imperator* vied to make the swiftest crossings and to imitate the lavish accommodations of hotels like the Savoy or the Waldorf-Astoria. Ever larger and more luxurious ocean-liners acted both as public spectacles and sources of national pride. The arrival of a record-setting vessel in Hamburg, Southampton, or New York drew crowds of onlookers to the quay, and the interminable race for the "Blue Ribband", awarded to the fastest ship on the north Atlantic, was a matter of intense public interest. For well-to-do English travelers, the journey aboard a German steamer, and vice versa, was an opportunity for invidious comparison as well as for humble praise.⁴¹ There were of course French, Dutch, Belgian, and other European lines in the fray, but none managed to seize the Blue Ribband until 1933. Indeed, from the 1880s onward it was Britain and Germany that were home to nearly all the major lines. These were the North German Lloyd, the Hamburg-America Line, the Cunard Line, the White Star Line, and the Inman Line. Despite periodic reconfigurations and the dissolution of Inman in 1893, this oligopoly remained remarkably stable as a host of smaller lines and subsidiaries came and went. Both because these lines dominated the market, and because they structured the Anglo-German rivalry, it is they that are the chief protagonists of this chapter.

But it was not the grasping for accolades in speed and comfort that fired the passions of these lines' executives or that kept the balance sheets in the black. Nor was it the exorbitant first-class fares paid out by the transatlantic elite. What made the transatlantic passenger trade the golden goose of world shipping were millions of poor, European migrants. Drew Keeling has estimated "that shipping companies drew more than half of their revenues from migrant transport and less than a quarter each on non-migrants and freight transport, respectively."⁴² And this was just an average. In 1912 the

³⁹ Ross J.S. Hoffman, *Great Britain and the German Trade Rivalry: 1875-1914* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933), 211. Hoffman's remains the definitive account of the Anglo-German commercial rivalry; for the naval rivalry, see Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War* (New York: Ballantine, 1991). For a more general account of Anglo-German relations, see Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980).

⁴⁰ *Lloyd's Register of British and Foreign Shipping* (London, 1913), 942.

⁴¹ For cultural histories of shipping, see Douglas R. Burgess, Jr., *Engines of Empire: Steamships and the Victorian Imagination* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2016); Mark A. Russell, *Steamship Nationalism: Ocean Liners and National Identity in Imperial Germany and the Atlantic World* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

⁴² Quoted in Torsten Feys, "Between the Public and the State: The Shipping Lobby's Strategies against US Immigrant Restrictions 1882-1917", *International Migration Review* 51, no. 2 (2017): 347. See Drew Keeling, "The Transportation Revolution and the Transatlantic Migration, 1850-1914", *Research in Economic History* 19 (1999): 39-74.

North German Lloyd, the leading conveyor of emigrants, earned a staggering 80% of its Atlantic revenues from migrant fares.⁴³ In the annual shareholder reports issued by the companies, it was not shrinking freight receipts but reduced sales of the cheapest tickets that augured a gloomy outlook for the coming year.⁴⁴ And it was on the basis of anticipated swells in the number of migrants that new vessels worth millions of dollars were ordered. In short, Europe's leading steamship lines were existentially dependent on the flow of proletarian migrants across the Atlantic.

The outsize presence of German steamers on the Atlantic between the 1880s and 1914 was something of a historical anomaly. For the better part of the nineteenth century, it was British and American shipowners who duelled for supremacy on the north Atlantic, with their respective Cunard and Collins lines launching the first trans-oceanic steamships during the 1830s.⁴⁵ At the time, however, ocean-going steamers remained a curiosity better suited for river-borne traffic, unable to compete with American clippers on the high seas. The widespread transition to steam-powered vessels took place only in the early 1870s. Before then, shipping services had been disaggregated, owing to low barriers to entry and limited capital accumulation. Apart from early conglomerates like Cunard, a typical European merchant house might own a handful of ships, with individual merchants, investors, or captains holding stakes in a single vessel. Unpredictable weather over the north Atlantic meant that the duration of voyages fluctuated considerably, making regularly scheduled crossings impossible. The flow of cargo was equally chaotic. Outbound ships had to compete with one another to secure cargo from freight forwarding companies and migration agents, many of whom had no permanent ties to any merchant house.⁴⁶ This pattern of indeterminate sailings, with no fixed ports-of-call, came to be known as tramp shipping, and continued to be practiced across the British empire even after steamships became the norm. Under such conditions, competition was between ports to furnish the largest quantities of profitable cargo, and not between large, vertically integrated firms.

During the 1870s, however, technological and economic changes transformed the industrial organization of shipping and the pattern of mass emigration from Europe, and with it the competitive position of the German ports of Hamburg and Bremen. Extending well beyond shipping, these changes coincided with a Prussian railroad boom that severed the dependence of coastal shipping on inland waterways, lifting the curse of unfavorable geography. Equally significant were shifts in the geographic origins of Europe's emigrants. In the middle of the nineteenth century, most German-speaking emigrants lived in the south and the west, finding it easier to depart from neighboring France or the Low Countries by way of the Rhine. Indeed, during the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, the overwhelming majority of European emigrants hailed from the British Isles, Ireland, and western Germany. The prospect of Hamburg or Bremen becoming a major port of embarkation for migrants was therefore limited. Perched at

⁴³ Keeling, "The Transportation Revolution", 71.

⁴⁴ Staatsarchiv Hamburg 621-1/95_178 Band 5-10.

⁴⁵ William M. Fowler, Jr., *Steam Titans: Cunard, Collins, and the Epic Battle for Commerce on the North Atlantic* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 2-4.

⁴⁶ On the organization of the German migrant trade prior to the advent of steamships, see Arno Armgort, *Bremen, Bremerhaven, New York, 1683-1960: Geschichte der Auswanderung über die Bremischen Häfen* (Steintor, 1991); Agnes Bretting and Hartmut Bickelmann, *Auswanderungsagenturen und Auswanderungsvereine im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1991).

the head of the Elbe, Hamburg's riverine tributaries delivered not migrants but grain exports from the estates of eastern Prussia. That all began to change in the 1870s. It started in the countryside of central and eastern Germany, from which close to three million people departed during the 1870s and 1880s. During the 1890s the exodus metastasized into Russia and the Habsburg monarchy, and millions of additional migrants streamed into German ports. This new geography of European emigration laid the foundations for the power struggle between German and British shipping companies. Hapag and Lloyd's ascent to become the largest shipping conglomerates in Europe is unimaginable without the millions of migrants who departed from central and eastern Europe.

The rivalry between German and British shipping is usually subsumed under the larger narrative of the "Anglo-German antagonism", animated primarily by German industrial and naval power. And indeed, Germany's industrial takeoff was a necessary though not sufficient cause for the shipping rivalry. Though it is tempting to assume that mercantile expansion followed naturally from Germany's industrial takeoff in these same years, in the United States just the opposite sequence occurred. American industrial dynamism after the Civil War coincided with the disintegration of what had been until then the world's largest merchant marine.⁴⁷ Guided by an increasingly protectionist and developmentalist outlook, the American state funneled resources into railroad construction and internal waterways while starving shipbuilding of funds and infrastructure. German exports were plentiful enough to employ a significant commercial fleet. But to explain how the German passenger lines reached parity with incumbent British competitors like Cunard and White Star, one must turn to mass migration.

The German "Control Stations"

There was more to the German shippers' success than the geography of migration, however. In 1894-95, the Prussian government handed over control of border crossings on the Russian and Austrian frontiers to the Hapag and North German Lloyd shipping companies. Until then, the Prussian border had largely been left unguarded, allowing millions of east Europeans to emigrate via Germany without undergoing screening of any kind. But in 1892 a deadly outbreak of Cholera struck the city of Hamburg, killing close to 9,000 people and prompting the United States to suspend all immigration through the port. Blame for the epidemic fell unsurprisingly on the thousands of Russian Jews transiting through the city. The cholera outbreak probably did originate with migrants from eastern Europe, concludes Richard Evans, but blame for the duration and lethality of the outbreak laid squarely with Hamburg's poor public health infrastructure and the shocking incompetence of the city's leaders.⁴⁸ Medical authorities did not even alert the public until after the cholera bacillus had infected the city's drinking water. This was made possible by a patchwork sewage system that fed human waste into the same waterways that supplied Hamburg's drinking water, further exacerbated by an unusually hot summer and low water levels.

⁴⁷ Topik and Wells, *Global Markets Transformed*, 53.

⁴⁸ Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

Nevertheless, what German and American authorities took away from the outbreak was that east Europeans posed an epidemiological threat. The United States responded by subjecting all new arrivals on Ellis Island to physical examinations, sending those deemed unfit back to Europe at the shippers' expense. This marked a turn away from America's heretofore *laissez-faire* immigration policy, which meant that prospective migrants had to undergo health checks before embarking in Europe. In Prussia, Minister-President Botho zu Eulenburg was reluctant to reopen the border, not wishing to bear the cost of screening transmigrants on behalf of shipping companies who paid taxes not to Prussia but to the Free and Hanseatic Cities of Hamburg and Bremen.⁴⁹ Desperate to resume transporting Russian migrants, Hapag and Lloyd offered Eulenburg a deal: reopen the frontier and the shipping companies would assume the costs of policing it. The Prussian authorities leapt at the chance to wash their hands of the matter and authorized Hapag and Lloyd to erect "control stations", as the new migrant processing centers came to be called.

Shippers did not just finance the construction and operation of border crossings; the new dispensation entailed the wholesale privatization of the Prussian frontier. Even the limited number of uniformed officers stationed at the border were on the companies' payroll, not the government's.⁵⁰ To be clear, the lines did not practice anything like modern border enforcement. There were no barbed-wire fences or aerial surveillance and slipping across the border undetected posed little difficulty. Instead, the lines compelled migrants to report to control stations by denying embarkation in Hamburg and Bremen to anyone who failed to present a clean bill of health issued at the frontier. From the control stations, those deemed healthy enough for admittance to the United States proceeded aboard special migrant trains. The sealed carriages made no stops between the frontier and the lodging facilities at the quayside, except in some cases for a second physical examination. The North German Lloyd and Hapag each constructed a city-within-a-city to house outbound migrants. The so-called "emigrant halls" served a number of different purposes. Quarantine was the ostensible reason but segregating migrants between border and boat also helped shippers to blunt the political backlash provoked by conducting trainloads of eastern shtetl Jews into Germany. That is not to say that migrants were prisoners. In fact, there were compelling reasons to prefer the transport and accommodations furnished by lines. The sealed trains and emigrants halls were marked in Yiddish and various Slavic tongues and staffed by native interpreters, shielding the migrants from swindlers and mitigating the stress and uncertainty inherent to the migration process. Hamburg's emigrant halls, opened in 1901, even hosted a kosher cafeteria to accommodate the Orthodox Jewish migrants streaming from the Russian Empire. The system established for the inspection and transport of migrants therefore combined elevated surveillance and policing of migrants with improved customer service and efficiency.

Officially, the control stations and sealed trains were there to defend public health in the face of allegedly diseased migrants from the east. A clear byproduct of this system, however, was that it allowed German shippers to tighten their grip on the flow of emigrants from central and eastern Europe at the expense of foreign rivals. In

⁴⁹ Tobias Brinkmann, "Why Paul Nathan Attacked Albert Ballin: The Transatlantic Mass Migration and the Privatization of Prussia's Eastern Border Inspection, 1886-1914," *Central European History* 43, no. 1 (2010): 58-59.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

particular, British carriers like the Cunard and Anchor Line despised the control stations and regarded them as an instrument for shutting them out of the continental market altogether. In 1904, Cunard's shareholder report blamed lagging sales on "The two German lines [who] have for some time been doing their best to stop the Cunard Company from obtaining any of the emigrant traffic from the East and North-east of Europe by establishing control stations on the frontiers of Germany and stopping all passengers who wish to go by Cunard steamers from Liverpool, and either sending them back to their homes or insisting upon them taking tickets by the German steamers."⁵¹ The *Liverpool Mercury* similarly grumbled that when passengers carrying British tickets reached control stations, "all emigrants coming from Russia and Austria are stopped and sent back, unless they have booked by the Hamburg-America Packet Company or the Norddeutscher-Lloyd steamers."⁵² The historian Lamar Cecil has pointed out that Ballin never attempted to refute the British accusations, further concluding that "there may indeed have been illicit cooperation between Hapag agents and the frontier police to the disadvantage of non-German shippers."⁵³ An injunction to harass migrants holding tickets issued by rival firms was never put on paper, but suffice it to say that complaints of German malfeasance were so numerous and appear in such disparate sources that there can hardly be no truth to them at all. And it is undeniable that the German lines weaponized the control stations in negotiations with foreign shippers. In the decades following the erection of the stations, unimpeded access became a powerful bargaining chip in the shipping "pools", the series of agreements by which all the European lines divided market share. By the terms of a 1908 agreement, for example, the Red Star and Holland America lines were permitted to transport migrants across Germany to ports in the Low Countries. The deal allowed these lines to operate more efficiently by obviating the practice of ferrying passengers around Germany via Switzerland and France but came at the cost of tight surveillance by the German lines. Cunard was unwilling to be similarly cajoled by the Germans and, unlike White Star, remained independent of the pool agreement that encompassed all the major continental and British lines.

Cunard Opens a New Front: The Fiume Contract

Liverpool is a long way from Russia and Austria. To divert migrants away from the German lines, Cunard executives realized it was necessary to open new routes from eastern Europe. The obvious choice was the Russian Baltic port of Libau, Liepāja in modern-day Latvia. British lines already dominated the Scandinavian migrant trade, though Hapag sometimes dangled the threat of entering this market to keep the British out of Germany.⁵⁴ The geographical position of Libau would also enable the British lines to offer sailing times that compared favorably with the two weeks or so required to travel from Russia to the United States via Germany. On the demand side, Russian emigrants were eager for an alternative to the German firms. They resented the poking and prodding of German doctors as well as the confinement aboard sealed trains filled

⁵¹ UoLSCA D42/A5/2/1, April 7th, 1904.

⁵² UoLSCA D42/Ca/25, 1 of 4, 30. *Liverpool Mercury*, November 20th, 1903.

⁵³ Lamar Cecil, *Albert Ballin: Business and Politics in Imperial Germany, 1888-1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 42.

⁵⁴ Huldermann, *Albert Ballin*, 21-24.

with police.⁵⁵ The British, in contrast, adopted a more laissez-faire approach, declining to segregate migrants and leaving them free to wander or even remain indefinitely upon arrival in England. But the success of the Libau route depended upon the cooperation of the Russian government, which was not always forthcoming. Alone among the European great powers, the Tsarist state denied the freedom of movement to its subjects and maintained a regime of internal passport controls. Russian officials signaled a willingness to look the other way with respect to the departure of Poles and Jews but were committed to preventing an exodus of the ethnic Russian peasantry on the pattern of eastern Germany or Upper Hungary.

Within Russian officialdom, however, a contingent of modernizers viewed the departure of Pale Jews and Poles with alarm. It was not the permanent loss of the Czar's subjects that troubled them, but the economic cost incurred by allowing Germans to transport the emigrants. In both Germany and Italy, the shipping industry had undergone explosive growth on the basis of domestic mass emigration, a feat which some Russians hoped to replicate.⁵⁶ A number of proposals centered on Odessa, but the miniscule volume of trade between the Black Sea and the United States made the route unworkable. The only Russian export of any value to the United States was the migrants themselves, and in any event the distance that stood between North America and the Black Sea militated against competitive ticket prices and acceptable voyage durations. In 1906 the Russian *Trade and Industry Gazette* estimated an annual loss of 7.5 million Rubles—allegedly the sum earned by foreign shippers on Russian emigrants—and urged the state to invest in domestic shipping.⁵⁷ Political conditions never allowed the Russian state to seize this monumental opportunity. Even after the humiliating debacle of the Russo-Japanese War exposed the fundamental weakness of the autocratic, Tsarist order in 1905, the Russian Interior Ministry forestalled repeated efforts to legalize and exploit emigration. Under the circumstances, the British lines did manage to ferry a significant number of migrants from Libau to the UK, but the inhospitable political climate precluded the establishment of a significant beachhead in the Russian Empire.

It was not in the Baltic but in the Adriatic that Cunard finally made a breakthrough. Around 1901 A.P. Moorhouse, Cunard's general manager, conducted a statistical survey of the various Mediterranean markets. Italy was booming, of course, with the North German Lloyd commanding the largest share of the Italian traffic in 1903.⁵⁸ Cunard operations there were already extensive, but there was little prospect of cornering the market or diverting Russian and Habsburg subjects all the way to Genoa. What Moorhouse was after in the Mediterranean was an undervalued harbor—somewhere with infrastructure and rail links to eastern Europe already in place, a cooperative government, and where rival firms had not yet set up shop. The Hungarian port of Fiume seemed to check all the boxes. At the turn of the century, it was not at all obvious that Italy would become Europe's leading exporter of emigrants. The rate of

⁵⁵ StAB 3-A.3.R.2. No. 204. Report from the Imperial German Consulate in St. Petersburg, November 21st, 1907.

⁵⁶ Restated in terms of modern national economic accounting, the emigration of Russian subjects was contributing to German rather than Russian GDP. As the Germans and Italians well understood, mass emigration was profitable enough to pay for the construction of a passenger fleet and then some.

⁵⁷ StAB 3-A.3.R.2. Nr. 204. *Handel und Industrie-Zeitung*, May 24th, 1906.

⁵⁸ MMM SAS/3/1/4 Bound volume compiled by A.P. Moorhouse at Cunard offices, pp. 29-30.

departures from the eastern half of the Habsburg monarchy was rising fast and between 1905 and 1907 even surpassed that from Italy.⁵⁹ Fiume looked like a golden opportunity.

Budapest, too, saw the potential benefits of transforming Fiume into a port of embarkation for migrants. According to the liberal *Pester Lloyd*, “It would certainly be of great economic significance to secure for domestic shipping the considerable trade in emigration [from Hungary].”⁶⁰ The *Lloyd* identified German and Italian ports as the targets for Fiume’s poaching but singled out Hamburg both as a rival and as a model for emulation. The Hungarians were especially fascinated by Hamburg’s Emigrant Halls, describing them as “facilities of the first rank in every respect, a facsimile of which had been awarded the Grand Prize at the Paris World Exhibition.” Indeed, before Cunard and Budapest had even reached an agreement, a series of emigrant halls on the German model were already under construction on the quayside in Fiume.⁶¹ No doubt the Hungarian authorities were spurred on to develop Fiume at least in part by the rivalry with Austrian Trieste, a relationship which in many respects mirrored that between Hamburg and Bremen. Although Trieste and Fiume sat on opposite sides of the invisible line between the Austrian and Hungarian halves of the empire, less than fifty miles separate the cities. Proximity intensified the rivalry, forcing the ports to compete for the same emigrants. Investors in Austria, among them the German shipping lines, were intent on making Trieste the next boomtown in the migrant trade, prompting Budapest to move quickly to prevent Fiume from being left behind.

It was perhaps for this reason that negotiations proceeded briskly. It could also have been that Cunard and the Hungarians wanted to close the deal to head off a brewing controversy over the contents of the agreement. In a preliminary version of the contract, the Hungarian government promised to deliver to the Cunard an annual minimum of 30,000 third-class passengers, and to compensate the company in the event they fell short of that target. The proposal unleashed a firestorm. Newspapers in the United States accused Budapest of conspiring with the Cunard to deposit the dregs of Hungarian society on American shores.⁶² Meanwhile, Hungarian nationalists saw the provision as a betrayal. “It is clear as day”, wrote the conservative organ *Hazánk*, “that our travelers are being sold to the Cunard Line.”⁶³ To rescue the deal, Cunard had to drop the 30,000-passenger minimum and the related indemnity, pacifying all but the most rabid American nativists and anti-emigration Hungarians.⁶⁴

Having silenced critics, the Cunard Steamship Company and the Royal Hungarian Government concluded a thirty-one point agreement in June of 1904.⁶⁵ The contract awarded a Cunard subsidiary by the name of Adria Royal Hungarian Steam Navigation Company Limited an exclusive concession to embark emigrants at the port of Fiume for a period of ten years. Adria agreed to conduct a fortnightly service between Fiume and New York, carrying mail and cargo in addition to passengers. Cunard, furthermore, agreed to put in service three of the most modern class of twin-screw

⁵⁹ Julianna Puskàs, *From Hungary to the United States, 1880-1914* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982), 25-26.

⁶⁰ StAB 3-A.3.O.1. No. 119. *Pester Lloyd*, November 18th, 1902.

⁶¹ StAB 3-A.3.O.1. No. 119. Report from the Imperial German Consulate, Fiume, April 13th, 1904.

⁶² Puskàs, *From Hungary to the United States*, 100.

⁶³ StAB 3-A.3.O.1. No. 119. *Hazánk*, August 17th, 1904.

⁶⁴ Puskàs, *From Hungary to the United States*, 101.

⁶⁵ UoLSCA D42/GM20/1/1/1, June 4th, 1904.

ocean liners on the route, among them the *RMS Carpathia*. Immortalized as the vessel that heeded *RMS Titanic*'s distress signal and fished the survivors from the frigid north Atlantic, the *Carpathia* was en route from Fiume at the time of the rescue.

To hold up its end of the bargain, the Hungarian government undertook to reroute the tens of thousands of migrants who departed the country each year. This was a monumental task. Prior to 1904 relatively few migrants exited the Habsburg monarchy via the Adriatic ports of Trieste and Fiume. A more typical itinerary led northward across the German frontier and on to Hamburg or Bremen for a journey by sea that was both cheaper and faster than anything on offer in the Mediterranean. Outcompeting the incumbent German lines anywhere in central Europe using ordinary means was probably impossible, as both Cunard's management and the ministers in Budapest well knew. The success of Fiume as an emigration port would depend upon state intervention. Thus, in 1903 the Hungarian diet laid the legislative groundwork for the most coercive emigration regime in Europe outside Russia. An Emigration Act bestowed on the government sweeping new powers to direct the flow of migrants. Article 6 of the new law "empower[ed] the Interior Ministry to limit emigration to a certain fixed route or routes, which seem most appropriate from the perspective of the state and in the interest of the emigrants."⁶⁶ Europe's myriad emigration laws bore a close family resemblance, amounting to something like a common regulatory framework for the shipping sector and linked by the international norm of freedom of movement. Hungarian statesmen had customarily recognized the freedom of movement since the final elimination of serfdom in 1848 but were in fact under no constitutional obligation to do so.⁶⁷ Under the new dispensation, therefore, the Interior Ministry circumscribed emigration via the northerly German routes, except when demand exceeded Fiume's capacity or in the case of emigrants holding pre-paid tickets for German lines. Finally, to enforce Fiume's preeminence, the Hungarian diet decreed the formation of a new unit of Frontier Police, tasked with checking passports and forcibly diverting unauthorized emigrants to Fiume.

In Germany, the directors of Hapag and Lloyd were outraged by the Cunard's bargain with the Hungarians, even if they had seen it coming. In an open letter published in *The Times* the previous month, Cunard's chairman Lord Inverclyde had declared the Fiume route a direct attack on German monopolism in eastern Europe.⁶⁸ Not only had the German lines been outflanked, but the Cunard was giving the Hapag and Lloyd a taste of their own medicine by manipulating border crossings. As self-serving as the German control stations could be, however, they were never staffed by gendarmes empowered to detain and force march migrants to alternative points of embarkation. Budapest's actions contravened the norms of freedom of movement and, in the view of Hapag and Lloyd, violated the trade agreement between Germany and Hungary conferring most-favored nation status. The lines urged the Foreign Office to press their case with the Hungarians but were unsuccessful in mounting any legal challenge to the Cunard contract.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F15-22-2-3 "Gesetz-Sammlung vom Jahre 1903".

⁶⁷ István Rácz, "Attempts to Curb Hungarian Emigration to the United States Before 1914," *Angol Filológiai Tanulmányok / Hungarian Studies in English*, vol. 7 (1973): 13.

⁶⁸ BArch R901/29939. *The Times*, May 11th, 1904.

⁶⁹ BArch R901/29677. German Chancellery to German Consulate, Budapest, March 12th, 1904.

Emigration agencies in Bremen and Hamburg turned to the imperial Foreign Office as well after reportedly being deluged by letters from Hungarian clients whose tickets had been confiscated. Nearly all of these migrants had been in possession of “pre-pays”, that is, tickets purchased by friends or family already residing in the United States or another destination country. Typically, pre-pays were bought at a branch office of the shipping company located abroad, which then transmitted the names of the passengers to Europe, where the tickets would be available for pickup at the nearest agency. This was the mechanism by which early migrants brought over family and friends. Officially, Hungarian policy allowed that passengers who received pre-pays from family members could cross the frontier into Germany on the way to Hamburg or Bremen. But in practice the gendarmes either did not understand how pre-pays worked or else pretended not to as a pretext for seizing tickets. Officers insisted that so-called “pre-pays” were merely a cover for unlicensed German shipping companies to sell tickets directly to Hungarian migrants. This conviction lay behind a 1905 crackdown, during which the Hungarian Minister of the Interior promised “in the future to subject pre-pays to closer scrutiny and to confiscate those tickets not sent by relatives of the migrant, but by the secret agents of unlicensed shipping companies...”⁷⁰ That unlicensed companies continued to operate clandestinely within Hungary is beyond doubt, but the truth is that “pre-paid” was a method of payment not a class of ticket and there was no way to distinguish pre-pays from other tickets without accompanying paperwork. It would come as no surprise if Hapag and Lloyd were in fact disguising ordinary tickets as pre-pays to circumvent Hungarian regulations, but I have found no evidence that this was the case.

It was not only business interests but foreign governments which protested the activities of the Hungarian gendarmes. The United States, of all places, lodged numerous complaints over the detention of its citizens. The detainees in question were generally naturalized American citizens visiting friends and family back in Hungary. But in the absence of modern passports and routinized border checks, it was not always obvious to the hastily deployed frontier police which travelers were Hungarian subjects and which US citizens. The resulting mix-ups caused a series of diplomatic stirs at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the majority of cases, the detainees were women who had acquired American citizenship travelling with children who were natural-born US citizens. Delivering a formal complaint to the Austro-Hungarian government, for example, the American ambassador Bellamy Storer described the predicament of one Mrs. Toth:

“The papers of identification, which Mrs. Toth had at the time and which she presented to the police authorities as a protection from arrest and molestation, were taken away from her and immediately destroyed and she was then with her children at once put into prison for a number of days and then sent back to Záhony. Her baggage, money and jewelry were all taken from her by the police and have never been returned.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ StAB 3-A.3.O.1. No. 119. German Consulate, Budapest to German Chancellery, July 29th, 1905.

⁷¹ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdA AR F15-46-3. Bellamy Storer, American Ambassador to Austria to Count Goluchowski, Austrian Foreign Minister, December 12th, 1905.

In another instance, reported on in *The New York Times*, a Hungarian mother residing in the United States solicited aid from the State Department after receiving word that her teenaged daughter had been detained in Hungary.⁷² In spite of assurances given early in 1905 that Hungarian officials had been instructed to take greater care in identifying Americans, incidents continued to pile up.

As the American ambassador grew increasingly exasperated, he fired off letters to the Hungarian government, today housed in the Austrian State Archive in a thick stack organized in ascending order of agitation, culminating in a direct threat:

“I need not recall to Your Excellency the serious embarrassment which may have its rise in the frequent renewal of cases similar to this, where the functionaries of Hungary appear to be inclined to adopt extraordinary and arbitrary action to hinder all travel from that country by any route except that via Fiume. In view of the repeated cases of this character, already laid before the attention of Your Excellency, I feel it my duty to express my apprehension of the effect such conduct on the part of the Hungarian officials may have on the public opinion in the United States as to the administration of the laws in Hungary, which perhaps may give rise to demands for our Government to take legislative and administrative action.”⁷³

The detention of American citizens in Hungary exhibited a clearly gendered dimension – every instance documented in the archives describes the plight of a female traveler, sometimes accompanied by children. Why this should have been the case is unclear, but the pattern is unmistakable. No doubt the explanation lies in a combination of factors including the vulnerability of women travelling solo, or the acute danger that men would be mistaken for draft dodgers and arrested, meaning a clear understanding of one’s rights as an American citizen was especially crucial.

Hungarian officials were not entirely at fault, however. The modern border and passport regime was still in its infancy, at least within the white, Euro-American world. The idea that a Hungarian peasant who took a job in the United States and filled out some naturalization papers after a few years was under no obligation to recognize Budapest’s authority, even while travelling in Hungary, would have struck many as unintuitive. Indeed, at least one traveler did not understand that American citizenship entitled her to depart Hungary unmolested and instead reported to the judge in her home village to apply for an exit permit.⁷⁴

Even as Cunard doubled-down on New York-Fiume, the difficulties kept piling on, above all the escalating hostility of the Hungarian government to emigration. Hungary had always been an uncertain patron of emigration. In some respects, the eastern half of the Habsburg realm more closely resembled Russia than its neighbors farther west. Both states were traditionally dominated by aristocratic magnates who lorded over vast and destitute rural populations. Labor productivity and wages

⁷² “Daughter Lost in Hungary: Mother Says Police There Took Steamship Ticket and Money from Her,” *The New York Times*, December 21st, 1904.

⁷³ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F15-46-3. Bellamy Storer, American Ambassador to Austria to Count Goluchowski, Austrian Foreign Minister, June 3rd, 1905.

⁷⁴ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F15-46-3. German Translation of Note from the Royal Hungarian Ministry of the Interior, April 25th, 1906.

remained stubbornly low deep into the nineteenth century. As we will see in the Prussian case, this pattern of rural exploitation was gravely threatened by emigration, which forced the landlords to compete with better-paying industrialists for workers. Yet Hungarian officials were more cooperative than their Russian counterparts in organizing emigration from the country.

To understand Budapest's motives, it is necessary to examine the geographical and ethnic makeup of the emigration. Until 1900 the vast majority of those departing hailed from the hill country of Upper Hungary and from the Croatian and Slovenian districts of the south. Crucially, the denizens of Upper Hungary were (and in fact, still are) Slovaks, for the territory closely corresponded to the modern state of Slovakia. In other words, the early waves of emigration did not encroach upon Hungary's agricultural heartland, where the big estates were concentrated, nor did it affect ethnic Magyars in significant numbers. In fact, only about 26% of all emigrants from Hungary were Magyars, and this figure is substantially lower if one counts only departures prior to 1900.⁷⁵ Despite the objections of some provincial notables in Upper Hungary,⁷⁶ it was an open secret in Budapest that the government desired the emigration of "non-Magyar" ethnic minorities.⁷⁷ When the Hungarian authorities signed the agreement with Cunard in 1904, they wagered that it was possible to spur the growth of Fiume while confining the emigration to the Slavic minority populations that ringed the Magyar heartland. It soon became apparent they had bet wrong. After 1905, Magyars were still in the minority among emigrants from Hungary, but their numbers were growing in both relative and absolute terms.⁷⁸ By then the major pressure groups representing both agriculture and industry—the National Hungarian Economic Association (OMGE) and the National Association of Hungarian Industrialists (GYOSZ)—had energetically taken up the cause of emigration restriction, fearing the depletion of the Hungarian labor force.⁷⁹ Under pressure, the authorities cracked down, and "in 1907 alone about 13,000 illegal emigrants were prevented from leaving the country." And after 1909, "persons attempting to emigrate [illegally] were not only forcibly returned, but also prosecuted."⁸⁰

Despite the mounting hostility of the Magyar elite, Cunard managed to turn a profit on the Fiume route until the First World War.⁸¹ It was, however, far from the blow to Hapag and Lloyd that Cunard executives had envisioned. Cunard's Fiume route was never able to accommodate more than about 30% of the migrant traffic from Hungary, while the White Star and various continental lines split the remainder.⁸² As a result, Budapest *de facto* invalidated Cunard's ten year exclusivity agreement by forcing Adria into an arrangement that saw German and other foreign shippers receive limited sanction to operate in the kingdom. The previous policy of refusing official recognition to Cunard's competitors had failed to banish them from Hungary, so that the main

⁷⁵ Puskàs, *From Hungary to the United States*, 28.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁷⁸ Rácz, "Attempts to Curb Hungarian Emigration to the United States Before 1914," 9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸¹ UoLSCA D42/C1/2/98. Hugo von Eidlitz, Director of Adria Line to Mr. Weiss, Vice-President of the Pester Ungarische Commercialbank, Budapest, May 22nd, 1914.

⁸² Puskàs, *From Hungary to the United States*, 103.

result of the absence of licensure was that these lines were free to operate underground and thus unregulated. This was because, in 1904, the Hungarian authorities had failed to understand that contracting with the independent Cunard Line would turn the country into a battlefield as Cunard's enemies tried to bring the line to heel. The Fiume deal coincided with a withering price war, launched against the Cunard by the continental lines as well as White Star, now under American management. Ticket prices temporarily collapsed and emigration from Hungary surged, making it impossible for Cunard to meet the demand or consolidate the planned-for monopoly. In spite of the government's best efforts, emigration from Hungary remained steady until the First World War, but the country ceased to be a major theater in the conflict among Europe's shippers. Instead, the shippers of Germany, Britain, and France turned their attention to what was quickly becoming the largest market yet for migration services—Italy.

Italy's Migration Mercantilism

The Italian exodus was like no other. In scale it was rivaled only by the British. But the departure of 11.4 million people from the British isles unfolded over more than a century, whereas 9.9 Italians departed in a span of just twenty-three years, between 1890 and 1913.⁸³ A further five million Italians went abroad seeking employment but later returned home. Italian departures crested in 1913 around 900,000, and there is little reason to doubt that these figures would have continued to climb had the First World War not intervened.⁸⁴ Stated in terms of departures per 1,000 inhabitants these figures are even more striking. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Italians left at a rate of 17.97 per 1,000 people—nearly 2% of the total population. The British rate peaked during the same years at 7.08 while Germany, usually listed among the major sending societies, never exceeded 2.91. Only Ireland at the height of the Potato Famine, during which a full quarter of the pre-famine population departed, ever experienced a higher rate of 18.99.⁸⁵

As the Italian emigration gathered steam from the 1890s onward, the country became a site of fierce conflict among shipping companies. For the first time, none of Europe's major international shipping lines enjoyed a home field advantage, since, with the partial exception of the French port of Marseilles, migrants embarked at the Italian ports of Genoa, Naples, and Palermo. Yet the situation differed fundamentally from that in Hungary or Russia, where shippers faced a ruling elite hostile to emigration. Rather, Italy's complex migration politics took shape within a tripartite struggle among the central government in Rome, local elites in the provinces, and foreign shipping companies eager to tap what was quickly becoming Europe's largest market for migration services.

The result of this constellation of interests was a migration regime quite unlike any other, in which the state both encouraged labor migration and intervened tirelessly to ensure that the benefits redounded to Italy and Italian businesses. It did this through the *Commissariato dell'Emigrazione*, or Commissariat of Emigration, empowered by a

⁸³ Dudley Baines, *Emigration from Europe, 1815-1930* (London: MacMillan, 1991), 9-10.

⁸⁴ Giuseppe Lucrezio Monticelli, "Italian Emigration: Basic Characteristics and Trends with Special Reference to the Last Twenty Years", *The International Migration Review* 1, No. 3 (Summer, 1967), 11.

⁸⁵ Timothy J. Hatton and Jeffery G. Williamson, "What Drove the Mass Migrations from Europe in the Late Nineteenth Century?", NBER Historical Paper No. 43 (1992), see Table 1.

1901 law to “grant licenses to carriers, fix cost of tickets, maintain order in ports of embarkation, establish and manage hostels for emigrants, provide information, suspend emigration, inspect emigration on departure, grant permits to recruit workers for European countries... ensure protection of emigrants on board ships through the medium of travelling commissioners, prepare international agreements on emigration and labor, and give aid and protection to emigrants in foreign countries.”⁸⁶ No agency in Europe boasted a more expansive mandate. The British Emigrants’ Information Office, in contrast, was a bare-bones operation that did little more than hand out informational pamphlets. In a unique and controversial move of 1904, for example, the Commissariat banned freelance emigration agents from operating in the country. But unlike German and Hungarian measures that criminalized migration agents for the purpose of restricting emigration, the Italians erected a more streamlined system of migrant recruitment, in which each shipping line was entitled to name a representative for each district, reducing the number of agents in the country from around 10,000 to 6,555.⁸⁷

Rather than fearing emigration, Rome was determined to capitalize on Italy’s competitive advantage as an exporter of labor, particularly from the underdeveloped south. To this end, the Commissariat relentlessly sought to enable emigration, but also to bring it under state supervision and control. The 1901 law mandated that all emigrants must depart from the Italian ports of Genoa, Naples, and Palermo. While British and German shippers chafed under the new rules, the French Compagnie Générale Transatlantique was furious at the prospect of being forced to relocate all operations from Marseilles. The Commissariat enabled Rome to subsidize the Italian shipping industry indirectly by hamstringing foreign lines through overzealous regulation. It is not always easy to determine where officially sanctioned harassment of foreign shippers ended and outright corruption began. The classification of vessels for the purpose of setting ticket prices is a case in point. Per the Emigration Act of 1901, the age, accommodations, and, above all, speed of a vessel determined the maximum permissible fare. The purpose of this rule was to incentivize Italian lines to replace aging steamers with safe and speedy vessels that could simultaneously charge higher rates and complete more voyages. For the most part, the law had its intended effect. Quoting figures from *Finanza Italia*, the German consulate in Naples drew up a report on the modernization of Italy’s civilian fleet. Around 1901 approximately half of Italy’s ocean liners were more than fifteen years old, at a time when the operational life of seafaring vessels rarely exceeded a decade or two. By 1908 a large majority of the fleet had been christened in the preceding five years.⁸⁸ The swiftest of these modern liners, sometimes referred to as “greyhounds”, could steam from Naples to New York in just twelve days, charging a hefty 185 Lira for the service. Earning no more than 128 Lira per head, meanwhile, were vessels that made the same crossing in a sluggish 17 days. As just noted, the overall result of coupling fares to speed was to effect a rapid modernization of the Italian shipping industry.

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Cometti, “Trends in Italian Emigration”, *The Western Political Quarterly* 11, No. 4 (Dec. 1958): 821-822.

⁸⁷ TNA FO 881/8321X. Abstract of a Report on Italian Emigration, addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs by Commendatore Bodio, Director-General of the Permanent Commission on Emigration, June, 1904.

⁸⁸ STAB 3-A.4.-311 German Consulate, Naples to the German Chancellery, August 25th, 1910.

The Commissariat did not hesitate to weaponize this rate-setting authority to blunt the competitive edge held by state-of-the-art German and British liners. The Anchor Line's brand-new *Italia* saw its maximum fare reduced to 165 from 170 Lira despite boasting a higher top speed than more favorably rated vessels. Likewise, the *Algeria* underwent constant modifications and re-modifications at the behest of inspectors in Naples and Palermo, whose conflicting demands forced the crew to load and unload perishable foodstuffs until everything had to be thrown away. The Anchor Line appealed to the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Gray, for intercession with the Italians, but to no avail.⁸⁹ The North German Lloyd fared no better. In 1905 the Lloyd complained to leading German diplomats that the Commissariat had demoted the steamers *Königin Luise*, *König Albert*, *Prinzess Irene*, and, *Neckar* to a lower class and therefore fare schedule. The liners were all less than ten years old and of the modern twin-screw variety, meaning they were equipped with two propellers rather than one. Twin-screw steamers became standard around the turn-of-the-century, furnishing superior speed and safety by enabling ships to complete a crossing even after a single engine failed. Meanwhile, the Commissariat placed in the highest category a series of single-screw Italian steamers laid down in the early 1880s, none of which could regularly cross the Atlantic in fewer than fifteen or sixteen days.⁹⁰ Non-Italian shipping companies were likewise subject to a procession of hatchet jobs in the Italian press. An investigation by the British consulate in Palermo uncovered ties between the Lloyd Italiana shipping company and the author of an article suggesting that foreign lines abused Italian passengers. And the periodical in which the piece appeared, the *Palermo Ora*, was owned by a "paramount" financial backer of the Navigazione Generale Italiana.⁹¹

Corrupt functionaries of the Commissariat occasionally secured favorable rate adjustments for influential Italian shipowners. A common graft involved bribing officials to misclassify obsolete vessels, purchased at bargain-basement prices, as swift, modern liners. As the British envoy in Palermo Sidney J.A. Churchill complained, it was not uncommon for enterprising Italian politicians to take part in such schemes. In 1904 a Sicilian senator, named only as Commendatore Plaggio, resigned his post on the board of the Navigazione Generale Italiana and established a new outfit under the name Lloyd Italiana. Plaggio immediately put into service a ship, the *Florida*, which never crossed the Atlantic in fewer than 14 days yet was soon earning 180 Lira per head. In another such incident, the Navigazione Generale Italiana chartered a cargo vessel fresh from the shipyard in Palermo and outfitted it to carry one thousand passengers. Despite a typical voyage requiring around 17 days, the ship's fare was set at 165 Lira.⁹²

Corruption was likewise apparent in the courts, where Italian prosecutors experienced considerable difficulties in obtaining convictions for migration-related offences. A Commissariat report translated by the British Foreign Office noted that

⁸⁹ TNA 368/30/11. Sidney J.A. Churchill, British Consul, Palermo to His Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London, July 16th, 1906.

⁹⁰ StAB 3-A.4. No. 265. North German Lloyd Central Office to Senator Stadtländer, Bremen, October 11th, 1905.

⁹¹ TNA FO 368/30/11. British Consulate, Palermo to His Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, July 16th, 1906.

⁹² TNA 368/30/11. Sidney J.A. Churchill, British Consul, Palermo to His Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London, July 16th, 1906.

“between September 1901 and March 1904 the judicial authorities had to deal with 1,027 prosecutions under the [1901 Emigration Law].” Of these 407 cases were brought against shipping companies and their agents, while the remaining 620 involved “clandestine agents”. “The report observes”, according to the British, “that the Courts showed considerable tenderness in dealing with offenders, and 62 per cent. of those charged were acquitted.”⁹³ It is difficult not to conclude that frequent acquittals were related, at least in part, to the preponderance of local notables among shipping agents in Italy.⁹⁴

In 1908 the Commissariat’s campaign to exclude foreign lines from the Italian market entered a new phase with the passage of a new Emigration Act. The law levied new head taxes on migrants who departed from non-Italian ports, principally those in France, in a renewed attempt to channel the entirety of the Italian migrant trade through domestic ports. More significant were rules requiring that “All emigrant ships both home and foreign, must be enrolled in the 1st class of the Italian Register exclusive of any other registration whatsoever of equal value notwithstanding.”⁹⁵ This was exceedingly unusual. Then as now, vessels are beholden to the laws and mercantile regulations of the country in which they are registered. But unlike the present, the norm prior to the First World War was to register ships in the country of ownership or headquartering, so that Cunard ships were British flagged, Hapag ships were German flagged, and so on. Today the overwhelming majority of trade vessels sail under so-called “flags of convenience”, typically that of Panama or Liberia. As a result, Panamanian or Liberian labor laws, maritime regulations, and minimum wages apply aboard these vessels, and there is little oversight over the registration process. In contrast to this regulatory race to the bottom, the Commissariat forced German-, British-, and French-owned vessels onto the Italian register to secure additional powers to inspect, regulate, and tax these ships, powers that were used unsparingly.

In the struggle against foreign shippers, Italian officials drew inspiration from an unlikely source. Budapest’s increasingly heavy-handed anti-emigration interventions had drawn condemnation from London and Berlin. But so far British and German jurists had failed to establish that limits on the activities of shipping companies and agents constituted a breach of existing trade agreements. “The Hungarian government”, wrote the periodical *Tribuna*, “has enshrined the principle that the emigration business has nothing to do with trade treaties, and that emigration may be a monopoly, over which each government may exercise discretion.”⁹⁶ The Hungarian precedent emboldened Rome further. Whereas previous regulations had ostensibly applied to Italian and non-Italian lines alike, a new set of licensing rules were plainly designed to exclude foreign ships. In 1913 the Commissariat announced that it would only issue a license to a new vessel if a previously licensed ship was taken out of service. The rule effectively capped the number of foreign vessels permitted to take part in the Italian

⁹³ TNA FO 881/8321X. Abstract of a Report on Italian Emigration, addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs by Commendatore Bodio, Director-General of the Permanent Commission on Emigration, June, 1904.

⁹⁴ On the role of notables in the Italian migrant trade, see R.F. Harney, “The Commerce of Migration”, *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 9, no. 1 (January, 1977): 42-53.

⁹⁵ TNA MT 9/852. Translated from *Giornale D’Italia*, January 25th, 1908.

⁹⁶ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdÄ AR F 15-64-19. Quote from *Tribuna* translated in Report of Austro-Hungarian Embassy, Rome, May 24th, 1911.

migrant trade. A corollary to the new regulations stated that any licensed ship not employed in the Mediterranean in the following year would be stripped of its certification. Slowly but surely, the Italian authorities as well as lines like the Navigazione Generale Italiana succeeded in the assault on foreign shipping companies. In 1910 the daily *Finanza Italiana* reported on the progress of the Italian lines in conquering market share. Between 1902 and 1908 the Italian lines solidified a commanding lead in the Latin American traffic and went from carrying less than one-third of migrants to the United States to just more than half, at 51%.⁹⁷ In this way, Italy exemplified the mercantilist approach to emigration policy, with Italian shipping lines becoming virtual labor brokers for agricultural and industrial interests in South America. Furthermore, the ferocity of the competition between shippers involved in the Italian migrant trade drove down prices and undoubtedly contributed to the extraordinary scale of the Italian exodus.

By relentlessly harassing non-Italian shippers, the Commissariat of Emigration permanently soured relations between Italy's shipping companies and their many foreign rivals. Foreign shipping executives came to see competition with the Italians in a different light from that against other companies. British shippers in particular tended to characterize Italians in quasi-racial terms as devious and untrustworthy. In a letter to another British manager, the chair of the Anchor Line, A.C.F. Henderson, complained that the Italians were unfairly applying seaworthiness and sanitation standards to allied vessels following the First World War, signing off by commenting that "The Italians are, without any exception, an ungrateful lot of people, and seem to take any advantage however mean to do a dirty trick to somebody else."⁹⁸ Prior to the war, the rest of the European lines made a point of excluding the Italians from their sectoral lobby groups. When in 1909 the enactment of a literacy test for immigrants arriving in the United States seemed imminent, the major German, British, French, Dutch, and Belgian lines clandestinely organized a press campaign to extol the economic benefits of immigration, and attack opponents as nativist dupes. The lines also assembled a series of pro-immigration reports to be presented to Congress, with the aim of "correct[ing] the injustice and harshness that exist in the Act, and to prevent the introduction of any measures in the administration of the laws that would be detrimental to our interests."⁹⁹ For suggesting that the Italian lines be included in the campaign, Gustav H. Schwab, North German Lloyd's representative in New York, received a sharp rebuke from A. A. Booth, the chairman of Cunard. "We do not", wrote Booth, "like the idea of the Italian lines being associated in this movement. The matter is a very delicate one, and a very great deal of harm would be done if any statement got into the Press. This statement might be outrageously exaggerated and yet impossible to refute. It appears", he continued, "that a movement of this sort should be kept strictly in the hands of lines... with regard to whom we have 'arrière-pensées'."¹⁰⁰

All European lines enjoyed some measure of state support at one time or another, but the unparalleled aggression of Italy's policymakers in cutting foreign lines out of Italian ports resulted in a lingering animosity and distrust that did not exist between,

⁹⁷ StAB 3-A.4. No. 311. Report from German Consulate, Naples, August 25th, 1910.

⁹⁸ UoLSCA D42/C1/1/47. A.C.F. Henderson to A. A. Booth, January 31st, 1920.

⁹⁹ UoLSCA D42/C1/1/69/3-4. Gustav H. Schwab to A. A. Booth, December 7th, 1909. See also Feys, "Between the Public and the State".

¹⁰⁰ UoLSCA D42/C1/1/69/5. A. A. Booth to Gustav H. Schwab, December 15th, 1909.

say, the German and British lines, who readily collaborated when their interests aligned. British and German shipping executives remonstrated bitterly against the other's machinations, but never attributed underhanded business practices to national character. Indeed, the ferocity of the competition between British and German shippers was belied by the amicable personal relations that prevailed between the chairmen of the leading firms. In 1912, for instance, A.A. Booth accepted Albert Ballin's invitation to enjoy the Kiel Regatta together from the deck of a Hapag yacht, though he was prevented from attending by the national coal miners' strike that spring.¹⁰¹ Even after the commencement of hostilities in August 1914, the British continued to speak of their German foe in more respectful terms than were used to describe their ostensible Italian allies.

The outbreak of war in 1914 was Italy's chance to monopolize the domestic migrant trade once and for all. At the beginning of the war, Rome maintained a policy of neutrality, meaning that Italian shipping was theoretically safe from attack on the high seas. The same could not be said of the major non-Italian shipping lines, all of whom were now belligerents. In the case of the German lines, the British did the dirty work of blockading the North Sea and seizing German vessels in port across the Atlantic. Then France's civilian fleet was requisitioned for military service. That left only British lines to compete against the various Italian outfits for the Italian migrant traffic. Despite the insistence of the British Admiralty that the sea lanes were safe from German predation, the Commissariat banned the carriage of Italian migrants aboard the ships of any belligerent power.¹⁰² As events like the sinking of the *Lusitania* demonstrated, the Italians were right to distrust the British. At long last the Italians had monopolized the migrant traffic from their own country, though there was hardly time to enjoy the spoils before Italy entered the war in 1914.

Beyond the First World War

By most reckonings, the story of the great European exodus ended with the First World War. But if that was true, the shippers never got the memo. Instead, they hit the ground running in 1918, plotting a comeback. And indeed, there were reasons for optimism. True, the United States had instituted a literacy test for prospective immigrants in 1917. But in the decades since American nativists first formulated the test as a means of filtering out "undesirable" immigrants, the illiteracy rate in much of Europe had fallen dramatically. By 1920 shippers regarded the literacy test as an inconvenience rather than the existential threat it had once been. In Europe, Russia was at war with itself, and political instability wracked much of the continent through the early 1920s. But there was still little reason to doubt that emigration from the former lands of the Austrian, German, and Russian empires would continue after the political situation stabilized.

"When things settle down a little more in Europe," wrote Cunard's A.A. Booth 1920, "we shall depend largely, as in the past, on Continental passengers for our Third Class business. The main fields from which these passengers will be drawn will no doubt

¹⁰¹ UoLSCA D42/C1/1/7.

¹⁰² TNA MT 9/1057. Oceanic Steam Navigation Co. Ltd., Signed A.B. Cauty, Manager to Sir Norman Hill, September 1st, 1914.

be Poland, the Czecho-Slovak Republic, Hungary, the Balkan states, including Jugoslavia, and possibly Austria.”¹⁰³ Cunard offices were slated to open in Prague, Warsaw, and Belgrade, and exploratory missions were underway to Constantinople and the Levant. Booth intended to forward passengers to England via Germany for final embarkation, adding that “under the peace treaty, Germany has to allow the transit of goods and passengers through her territory without any discrimination in rates, and without the impediment of Control Stations which formed such a serious complication of our business before the war.” With Article 368 of the Treaty of Versailles in place, British shippers were given a free hand in Germany. But new problems soon got in the way.

Plans to revive transatlantic mobility were plagued by operational issues on both sides of the Atlantic. New passport rules implemented during the war caused mayhem in ports of embarkation, and there were cases of passengers residing in the Hamburg Emigrant halls for months while visa issues were sorted out.¹⁰⁴ It is hard not to think of such cases as an antecedent to individuals forced to spend months or even years living in airport terminals after having fallen through the cracks in international borders.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, it is impossible to imagine this state of immigration limbo existing prior to the First World War. Conditions in the United States were no better. When immigration collapsed due to the war, the US government had fired most of the staff tasked with processing new arrivals at Ellis Island.¹⁰⁶ With the application of the literacy test slowing operations further, shippers were finding it difficult to disembark passengers and get ships away on schedule.¹⁰⁷ Complaints of inefficiency at Ellis Island continued into 1921, when the first immigration restrictions came into effect. Early in the year, Cunard’s agent in New York, D.W. Cooke, had reported to chairman Booth on “[rumors] that the Senate Bill will propose a restriction of immigration based on a percentage from each foreign country of the people of that country now in the United States.”¹⁰⁸ Rumor became reality when congress passed the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, capping annual immigration at 350,000 and setting quotas on ethnic groups based on the 1910 census. This was a major setback, and when it became clear that further restrictions were in the offing, the writing was on the wall. In 1924 congress passed the National Origins Act, reducing the overall quota to 150,000 immigrants per year and recalculating ethnic quotas based not on the 1910 census, but that from 1890, effectively barring the immigration of Slavs, Italians, and Jews, among other latecomers. For most shipping companies, the transatlantic migration was officially over. The British could still subsist on Canada’s appetite for immigrants, but the Dominion’s capacity for absorbing newcomers was a fraction of what the United States’ had been.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ UoLSCA D42/C1/1/76 Part 3 of 3. A.A. Booth to Sir Ashley Sparks, January 2nd, 1920.

¹⁰⁴ StAHH 373-7 I_IV C III 6.

¹⁰⁵ This was most famously the plight of Mehran Karimi Nasseri, an Iranian man who resided in Charles de Gaulle International Airport for eighteen years, and whose life was the subject of the Steven Spielberg film *The Terminal*. Such an outrageous predicament would have been inconceivable prior to the First World War.

¹⁰⁶ UoLSCA D42/C1/2/3. D.W. Cooke to A.A. Booth, February 2nd, 1921.

¹⁰⁷ UoLSCA D42/C1/2/3. D.W. Cooke to A.A. Booth, February 25th, 1921.

¹⁰⁸ UoLSCA D42/C1/2/3. D.W. Cooke to A.A. Booth, February 2nd, 1921.

¹⁰⁹ UoLSCA D42//A5/2/3. Verbatim Report of Ordinary and Extraordinary General Meetings of Shareholders (1924-1933), April 26th, 1927.

During the 1920s, Italian diplomats tried in vain to find a *modus vivendi* with the Americans that would allow for the ongoing circulation of labor between the two countries. Before the war, remittances had furnished Italy with tens of millions in foreign currencies and covered the trade deficit. In other words, migration was central to Rome's pursuit of macroeconomic growth and stability, and without it would face balance of payments difficulties as well as the loss of a major source of investment in the south. The provisioning of jobs in the United States even became a source of populist discontent in Italy. In 1922 the Commissar of Emigration visited Washington to plead Rome's case, proposing that the United States submit to Italy lists of desired tradesmen and laborers.¹¹⁰ That same year Benito Mussolini promised "to obtain a raising of the immigration quota for Italians. The United States must open its doors... If Italy could send 100,000 well-organized workmen to America yearly, it would be a great thing for America and for civilization."¹¹¹ Washington was intransigent, and Italy only resumed sending "guest workers" abroad, this time to northern Europe, after the Second World War, once again flooding the country with remittances.

During the interwar years, survival demanded adaptation. The migrant trade was dead, declared a Cunard shareholder report in 1924. That year, "immigration into the United States was so restricted... that the third class accommodation on many of our voyages was comparatively empty." "When I tell you that the foundation of the Trans-Atlantic Passenger Trade was the Emigrant business," the report continued, "you will realise how vitally the interests of the Companies engaged in that trade are involved in any legislation that materially reduces the numbers of Third Class Passengers crossing the Atlantic..."¹¹² Undaunted, Cunard's leadership pitched a new service for the twentieth century—tourism. The increasing popularity of overseas tourism, particularly among Americans, was made possible in part by the destruction of the migrant trade, as shippers sought new sources of profit. Shipping companies had previously made forays into mass-market tourism, but never on a large scale. Albert Ballin pioneered the pleasure cruise as a way of putting surplus tonnage to use during the slow winter months. But this was a seasonal offering that catered to a limited market of well-to-do vacationers and not a central plank of Hapag's corporate strategy. During the 1920s, Cunard was the first shipper to recognize the appetite of America's burgeoning middle class for European tourism. By the late 1920s Cunard's fleet had surpassed its prewar size. But capitalizing on this new market for leisure travel would have to wait.

The crash of '29 devastated shipping more than most sectors. Cunard's 1930 shareholder report outlined the problem with unusual elegance for a financial document: "As regards prospective revenue, the first thing to remember is that shipping is not an end in itself; it is but a part of that movement of commodities and people which the world calls trade. When trade is sick shipping cannot flourish generally, and trade is sick to-day."¹¹³ In other words, no trade, no migration, no shipping. The 1930s were marked by a sluggish recovery. The merger of Cunard and White Star in 1934 helped the

¹¹⁰ Cometti, "Trends in Italian Emigration", 826.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Quoted from *The New York Times*, November 10th, 11th, 1922.

¹¹² UoLSCA D42//A5/2/3. Verbatim Report of Ordinary and Extraordinary General Meetings of Shareholders (1924-1933), April 16th, 1924.

¹¹³ UoLSCA D42//A5/2/3. Verbatim Report of Ordinary and Extraordinary General Meetings of Shareholders (1924-1933), April 8th, 1931.

company to regain its footing, but the commencement of war in 1939 saw Cunard's fleet once again requisitioned by the Admiralty as troop transports.

After 1945 the process of rebuilding started anew, but once again the shipping industry found itself in peril. Just as steamships had rapidly overtaken sailing vessels in the early 1870s, jet liners displaced ocean liners during the 1950s, with 1958 being the first year in which aircraft carried more passengers than ships. Transatlantic ocean liners continued to operate into the 1960s as a budget travel option, but the passenger business was critically endangered. According to the *Wümme Zeitung*, 1960 was a healthy year for the North German Lloyd. All told, 13,885 passengers departed Bremerhaven, by then the line's only port of embarkation.¹¹⁴ The replacement of ocean liners with jets was not merely a technical advancement. It reflected a novel structure of demand for transatlantic passage. Immigration restrictions meant that, for the first time, the overwhelming majority of transatlantic voyages were undertaken for leisure and not in search of employment. This virtually eliminated demand for slow but low-cost options like ocean liners. Until airfare became truly affordable in the 1970s and 1980s, it is conceivable that transatlantic ocean liners would have remained a standard travel option for itinerant laborers.

With the withering of the passenger trade, the North German Lloyd, Hamburg-America Line, and Cunard closely mirrored the broad developmental tendencies of the German and British economies. In line with Britain's postwar transformation into a service economy, Cunard completed the pivot to tourism. The Cunard Line lives on as a subsidiary of Carnival Cruise Lines, offering transoceanic luxury cruises meant to evoke the romance of turn-of-the-century ocean liners. Offerings include a seventy-four day "World Voyage" calling at cities on five continents (and starting around \$5,000!). The Holland-America Line also survives as a cruise line. In Germany, Hapag and Lloyd merged in 1977 to form one of the globe's major container shipping conglomerates. Whereas Hapag and Lloyd had ridden the migrant trade to become Europe's largest shipping companies, the Hapag-Lloyd AG is closely intertwined with Germany's export-oriented manufacturing sector. In this way, the shipping sector has continued to reflect the evolving modalities of global economic integration just as much as it has shaped them. It should come as no surprise that many of the leading shipping companies are now Chinese and Taiwanese rather than German and British (though Danish and Swiss conglomerates have fared extremely well. The largest vessels, moreover, are container ships, the biggest of which, the *MSC Irina*, is capable of carrying more than 24,000 intermodal shipping containers. This is illustrative of globalization in the twenty-first century. The great proletarian population movements have ceased and in their place has emerged a system in which capital and goods are free to roam wherever returns are greatest. Meanwhile much of the global labor force remains trapped in low-wage employment in the Global South. Historians are resistant to the romanticism exuded by countless dilettantish books on the golden age of European shipping. But we should not soon forget that the steamship was quite literally an engine of social mobility for tens of millions of people.

¹¹⁴ StAB 9, S 9/19 – 47. *Wümme Zeitung*, September 23rd, 1960.

Chapter 2: Agents Abroad: Swindlers, New World Planters, and Labor Recruiters in the European Exodus, 1870-1930

“The traffic in ocean passages has reached a stage of fierce competition, unscrupulousness, and even inhumanity, inconceivable to those not familiar with its details. Men who profit by the march of these millions of people have a drag-net out over Continental Europe so fine in its meshes as to let no man, woman, or child escape who has the price and the desire or need to go. Three great countries, Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Russia—where the masses of the people are low in the social scale, and where the percentage of illiteracy is discreditable to the twentieth century—are being drained of their human dregs through channels made easy by those seeking cargo for their ships.”

— James Davenport Whelpley, *The Problem of the Immigrant*, 1905

In 1907 the North German Lloyd shipping company and the government of New South Wales negotiated a secret agreement to direct German migrants to Australia. For years the Labour government in Sydney had restricted immigration as a way of forcing employers to keep wages high. Now the 1907 election had swept the Liberal Reformers to power and the new government was eager to do away with the immigration policies that Labour had seen as the guarantor of high living standards, but which businessmen regarded as causing a perpetual labor shortage. To carry out migrant recruitment in Europe the state created the New South Wales “Intelligence Department”, which dispatched a delegation to Europe tasked with evaluating recruitment opportunities across the continent, and in Germany and the United Kingdom in particular. In Germany, as in most of Europe, the solicitation of migrants was a serious crime, punishable by fines and jail time. Indeed, agents based in London regarded the German laws as singularly extreme, citing a case in which “the ordinary advertisements of a steamship company, notifying dates and rates of passage to Australia and America, were recently called into question by [the Germany police] as inciting to emigration.” Although part of an official delegation, the Australians had to tread carefully.

One of the businessmen who met with the Intelligence Department agents was Heinrich Wiegand, the chairman of the North German Lloyd shipping line. Together, Wiegand and the Australians concocted a scheme to drum up interest in New South Wales without violating the prohibition on propagandizing emigration. In exchange for the exclusive right for ten years to recruit on the continent on behalf of New South Wales, the Lloyd would assume responsibility for “selecting good, sturdy emigrants of the agricultural type” desired by the Intelligence Department and channel them in the direction of Sydney. The crucial thing was to avoid any whiff of the company’s direct influence, which was sure to attract unwanted police inquiries, and to instead subtly initiate the process of chain migration. That way, “once begun, the emigration movement will steadily grow of itself. The United States furnish a case in point. Though there is now no active propaganda in Europe on behalf of that country, there is a

constant stream of emigrants flowing in that direction, induced solely by the favourable reports of those who have gone before.” To get the ball rolling, Wiegand proposed “send[ing] out to New South Wales forty or fifty farmers... to study on the spot the actual farming conditions, and after a stay of two or three months, to return and report to their countrymen what they think of the prospects.”¹¹⁵ As was typical of such agreements, the paper trail ends there. The German Foreign Office, ostensibly charged with overseeing such matters, only became aware of the agreement by way of internal memos passed to the Consulate in Sydney by somebody in the New South Wales administration. The North German Lloyd and the Intelligence Department had sought to conceal the plot, taking care that any observer of migration between Germany and Australia would get the impression that this traffic had arisen organically.

Secrecy was essential for any labor recruiter who wanted to stay in business for long. This rule applied whether one worked for a private recruitment firm or for a government agency like the New South Wales Intelligence Department or the Brazilian Propaganda Commission. This cloak and dagger element is part of what makes migrant recruitment so interesting, not to mention understudied, but it also imposes certain limits on what can be definitively said about the phenomenon. Fundamental questions like “How many Europeans emigrated as a result of recruitment?” are unanswerable. The archival record suggests a figure between several hundred thousand and several million people; anything more specific is little better than a guess. Criminal enterprises do not tend to leave much of an archival footprint. The richest sources detailing migrant recruitment, therefore, are police records and consular reports. Police forces from Germany, to Britain, and Austria-Hungary pursued recruiters endlessly, if somewhat ineffectually, compiling dossiers on the most prolific agencies and bringing perpetrators to trial. Consular officials in destination countries observed migrant recruitment from the other end. The unexplained arrival of a troop of migrants all destined for a particular job site or settlement was usually enough to trigger an inquiry, occasionally resulting in the repatriation of the migrants in question. Though police actions and consular investigations uncovered much about the activities of recruitment agents, neither appear to have been particularly effective in combatting migrant recruitment.

Between the 1870s and the First World War, Europe was swarming with labor recruiters. Australian mining magnates dispatched agents to collect workers from the German coalfields; cotton planters from the American south sought Italian sharecroppers to replace black laborers; the Canadian government courted Galician and Ruthenian farmers to settle the western plains; and Brazilian coffee growers offered bounties to agents who could supply any workers at all. In an age of deep economic globalization, the white settler colonies of the Americas and the Antipodes found themselves locked in a struggle for a limited number of white, European laborers, having implemented racist immigration policies barring entry to workers from Africa and Asia. Employers from South America to Australia were acutely aware of the competition between themselves, not to mention with the United States, and tailored enticements accordingly. This competition for scarce European labor was a major reason why turn-of-the-century Argentina, Australia, and Canada were among the wealthiest and most egalitarian yet racially exclusionary societies in the world. Not all

¹¹⁵ BArch R 901/30537. “Report on the Question of European Emigration to Australia”, Intelligence Department New South Wales, 1907.

recruits benefitted from the high wages proffered by white settler states, however. Because labor recruitment was illegal everywhere in Europe, with the partial exception of the British Isles, migrants had few reliable ways to differentiate legitimate recruiters from grifters. Dishonest agents frequently swindled would-be migrants out of savings or, less commonly, sold them into virtual debt peonage abroad. Fear of predatory agents unleashed waves of panic across Europe and fueled rumors of a “white slave trade” that saw bourgeois girls trafficked into lives of prostitution overseas.

Acknowledging the central role played by labor recruiters in shaping the European exodus brings to the fore the relationship between migration and business. Emigration within and from Europe was most fundamentally a matter of wages and employment. Yet historians have long insisted on studying migration as a predominantly social phenomenon. Classic accounts saw emigrants as boldly voting with their feet, “uprooting” themselves and striking out for “America” (invariably the United States) to seek a life of freedom and opportunity.¹¹⁶ A more critical generation of historians dispensed with the “uprooting” hypothesis, observing that communities structured the process of migration. Not individuals but entire villages relocated from Europe to the United States.¹¹⁷ Where migrants tended to be solo, young men in search of work, social networks channeled men from particular regions to the same destinations or even employers. This is why the Upper Midwest is home to the overwhelming majority of Norwegian-Americans, and why Melbourne has such a large and durable Greek community. This concept of “chain migration” remains the prime mover in migration history. For decades no alternative explanation for how migration took place has come close to displacing it, and rightly so. Even contemporaries understood this well, as attested by Wiegand’s plan to ignite chain migration to Australia. But if the chain migration paradigm is broadly correct, its dominance has served to obscure the role played by private enterprise in shaping emigration from Europe. By analyzing social networks between people rather than the economic interests that often initiated and coordinated migration, the chain migration paradigm paints an incomplete picture of the process of migration.

The primacy of the United States as the destination of choice for European emigrants has also helped to obscure the significance of labor recruitment. Of the approximately 55 million people who departed European shores between 1840 and 1932, some 37 million landed in the United States. Only a miniscule fraction of these migrants was recruited. In the decades following the American Civil War, the states belonging to the former Confederacy experienced a labor shortage, as is typical following the dismantling of systems of enslaved labor. States from Texas to North Carolina repeatedly opened recruitment offices, dispatched recruiters to Europe, and negotiated with shipping companies to open routes to cities like Charleston and

¹¹⁶ The totemic text of this interpretation is Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1952).

¹¹⁷ See Walter Kamphoefner, *The Westfalians: From Germany to Missouri* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); June Granatir Alexander, “Staying Together: Chain Migration and Patterns of Slovak Settlement in Pittsburgh Prior to World War I,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1981): pp. 56-83; Harvey M. Choldin, “Kinship Networks in the Migration Process,” *The International Migration Review* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1973): pp. 163-175.

Galveston.¹¹⁸ All these efforts were, without exception, failures. Working conditions on cotton plantations were abject, and Italian workers were subjected to abuse and even lynching at the hands of native Anglo-Americans.¹¹⁹ Under such conditions, there was little reason to remain in the South when there was no legal obstacle to seeking industrial employment in the North, which paid significantly more and offered the security of large ethnic enclaves. Western states also solicited immigrants landing in eastern ports like New York and Boston but generally did not dispatch agents directly to Europe.

That recruitment played so marginal a role in American immigration is a sign of the uniqueness of the United States among destination countries. The combination of unremitting industrial expansion and relative proximity to Europe made the US an immigrant magnet without equal. With the partial exception of Argentina, Latin American states tended to have wage levels too low to compete with the United States, necessitating recruitment. Australia, in contrast, had at times a higher standard of living for working people than the United States, but distance made attracting immigrants from Europe difficult. In short, the United States was a uniquely magnetic destination for European migrants, receiving some two-thirds of the total number, and leaving the rest of globe's settler societies to fight over the remainder. Any examination of migration recruitment, therefore, naturally shifts the focus away from the United States and onto other destination countries.

This chapter opens with an outline of the global labor recruitment landscape around 1900. Where did the agents come from and who did they work for? What types of workers were recruited and from where? What were the political and economic determinants of labor recruitment? The analysis then zooms in on the inner workings of the recruitment system. How did agents operate outside the law so successfully and for so long? How were migrants convinced to forego migration to somewhere like the United States in favor of other destinations? Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of malfeasance and scams in migrant recruitment.

Labor Recruitment in Settler States

The most consequential development in modern history is undoubtedly the great land rush that unfolded between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is thanks to the extraordinary success of the land rush and, relatedly, the labor rush, that four of six continents are inhabited predominantly by people descended from Europeans. The land rush is closely bound up with but not identical to European imperialism. While European states conquered or otherwise subdued virtually the entire globe, only certain regions with favorable climates were singled out for large-scale European settlement. North and South America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, once home to vibrant indigenous societies, were each depopulated by conquest, mass murder, and disease and then settled by land-hungry Europeans. These are only the success stories. Across the centuries there was no shortage of abortive or failed settler projects like

¹¹⁸ Rowland T. Berthoff, "Southern Attitudes toward Immigration, 1865-1914," *The Journal of Southern History* 17, no. 3 (Aug., 1951): 328-360.

¹¹⁹ See Charles Seguin and Sabrina Nardin, "The Lynching of Italians and the Rise of Antilynching Politics in the United States," *Social Science History* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2022), pp. 65-91.

German Southwest Africa, French Algeria, or the Dutch East Indies, not to mention more obscure attempts like New Sweden. Labor recruitment was practiced to varying degrees by all white settler states, where economic expansion tended to outpace population growth, owing to the abundance of land, natural resources, and capital investment leading to chronic shortages of labor.

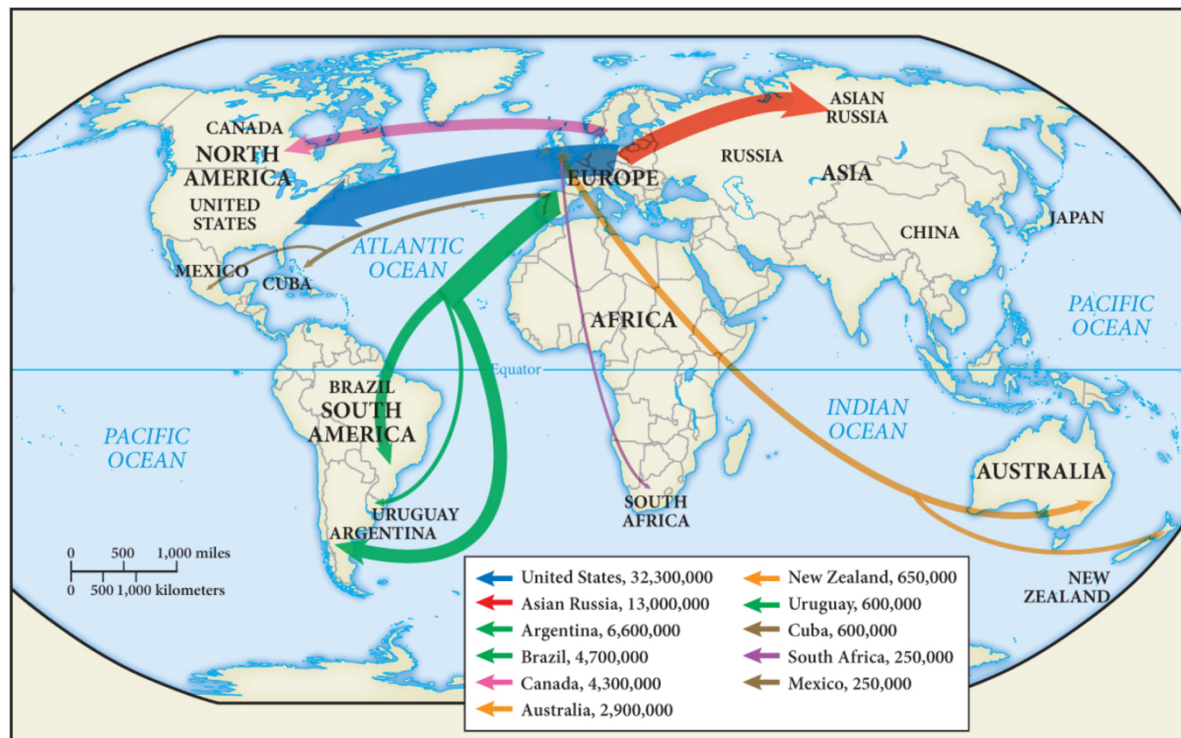


Figure 3. Map of global migration from 1815 to 1939. Source: Robert Strayer, *Ways of the World*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016), 755.

Historians have approached the settler colonial land rush in a variety of ways. John C. Weaver describes the formation of “neo-Europes”, where the legacy of frontier settlement produced an enduring hostility to government meddling in private affairs along with a radical commitment to free enterprise.¹²⁰ This libertarian ethos has proven remarkably durable over the centuries. Indeed, economists and political scientists regard the species of capitalism practiced in the Anglosphere as differing in fundamental ways from that of Europe and Asia.¹²¹ James Belich narrows his focus to Britain’s wildly successful settler projects from the United States and Canada to Australia and South Africa.¹²² Anglophone settlement produced a global power structure that all but

¹²⁰ Weaver, *The Great Land Rush*.

¹²¹ The so-called “varieties of capitalism” school has proven highly influential in the social sciences. In the classic formulation by Peter Hall and David Soskice, the English-speaking countries are classified as “liberal market economies” (LMEs) while Germany and Japan are “coordinated market economies” (CMEs). States like France and Italy have institutions which place them somewhere in the middle. See Peter A. Hall and David Soskice, *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹²² James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

guaranteed Allied victories in both world wars, while laying the foundation for successive British and American global hegemony.¹²³ Finally, William H. McNeill has argued that settler societies—which he terms the “great frontier”—tended to embody the extremes of freedom and hierarchy.¹²⁴ The great frontier permitted settlers to escape the European social hierarchy and establish themselves as independent proprietors. In this way, settler colonialism became an engine of upward social mobility for millions of mostly white people. This very freedom and prosperity for whites structurally determined the introduction of unfree labor to the settler states. On the great frontier, it was virtually impossible to secure free wage laborers to work on plantations so long as the option existed to acquire one’s own plot of land. Thus, the only way to profitably operate a sugar or cotton plantation was with some form of coerced labor. For a time, it was possible to subjugate poor European men under contracts of indenture, but by the latter eighteenth century the spread of liberalism had rendered contractual servitude untenable. Unable to secure a reliable source of labor from Europe, the planters of the great frontier became slavers, importing millions of African captives to toil in the New World. The abolition of New World slavery during the second half of the nineteenth century was a key determinant of the labor rush, as planters from Alabama to Brazil scrambled with varying success to replace enslaved workers with recruits from Europe.

The Great Labor Rush was an almost inevitable consequence of undertaking settler colonization in the context of global, liberal capitalism. That being said, not all settler states experienced equally acute labor shortages or recruited immigrants with the same intensity. The most aggressive recruiters by far were the states of South America, where comparatively low wages and linguistic difficulties for non-Spanish and -Portuguese speakers required immigration subsidies and propaganda to match the appeal of the United States. The North American colossus was an exception in this regard, enduring the labor shortages characteristic of all settler states but abstaining almost completely from recruitment. Only the states of the former Confederacy carried out recruitment independently after the abolition of slavery left the South chronically short of farmhands. Geography and politics also distinguished Australia from other settler states. Even after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 brought the Antipodes much closer to Europe, Australia was still more than twice as far as North America. Furthermore, the periodic electoral triumphs of the Labour Party resulted in governments hostile to immigration, making it difficult to establish in Australia the chain migration feedback loop that fueled migration to the United States or Argentina.

From the moment Europeans first laid claim to distant shores, every settler society has developed under a similar set of material constraints. There are certain critical differences, to be sure. Slavery, for example, developed only in the Americas. And Australia came far closer to the *terra nullius* ideal than did anywhere else, with an Aboriginal population that was never very numerous to begin with, and which was quickly overrun by arriving Europeans and their offspring. Rich in land and European capital, what settler societies consistently lacked was an adequate labor supply, resulting

¹²³ This point is worth emphasizing. The absence of a German great power during the early-modern colonial conquests of the Americas and Australia meant that Germany came to the colonial game exceedingly late, after the regions best suited for European settlement had already been claimed. This put Germany at a fatal disadvantage in the interstate conflicts of the twentieth century.

¹²⁴ William Hardy McNeill, *The Great Frontier: Freedom and Hierarchy in Modern Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

in exceptionally high wages for working people. A state that owes its existence to the settlement of foreigners on distant shores will also develop along different institutional lines than the metropole. As Louis Hartz famously argued in *The Liberal Tradition in America*, the United States, and by extension each of the settler states, was born free of feudal or pre-modern institutions, obviating any struggle against an *ancien regime*.¹²⁵ Social scientists no longer accept that a Manichean showdown between the forces of feudalism and capitalism is a necessary step in the modernization process. But it is nonetheless undeniable that the absence of pre-capitalist institutional overhangs imparted to the settler states a liberal governing ethos unequaled in the Old World. One result of this swashbuckling libertarianism was that not only governments, but private firms, took it upon themselves to recruit immigrants from abroad.

Broadly speaking, political and economic conditions in destination countries shaped the type and quantity of emigrants sought. The British white-settler states, for example, all pursued different strategies dictated chiefly by landholding patterns and administrative structures. In the most populous Australian states of New South Wales and Victoria, a clique of wealthy ranchers known as the “squatters” had seized and then won legal title to the choicest agricultural land.¹²⁶ Likewise, in the more tropical environment of Queensland there developed a plantation economy dependent upon the labor of Pacific Islanders and Chinese.¹²⁷ Neither the squatters nor the planters left much room for the kind of independent yeoman farmers that many policymakers hoped to attract.¹²⁸ Around 1900 it was a truism of Australian politics that the Commonwealth represented a toehold of European civilization in the Orient, and that bolstering the white population via immigration was of vital importance. Yet it remained impossible to muster the political will to pursue a unified immigration strategy across the component states of the Commonwealth of Australia. In fact, one result of home rule from the 1850s onward was to pit the colonies against one another in a struggle for immigration and investment.¹²⁹ The shortage of suitable land meant that recruits were predominantly miners or urban workers and tradesmen of various kinds. This inevitably drew the ire of Australia’s powerful Labour Party, which sought at times to ban immigration even from the British Isles, viewing it as an oligarchic scheme to bid down the price of a day’s labor.¹³⁰ Pro-immigration politicians often compared the Australian situation unfavorably with happenings in Canada, where immigration and recruitment were centrally directed from Ottawa.¹³¹ But in Canada the vast western plains lay predominantly in government hands, leaving the state free to dispense lands to independent farmers without interference from a pseudo-aristocracy.

¹²⁵ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1955).

¹²⁶ See David Greasley, “Industrialising Australia’s natural capital”, in *The Cambridge Economic History of Australia*, eds., Simon Ville and Glenn Withers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 150-177.

¹²⁷ Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 104.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹³¹ TNA CO 885/17/9. “Emigration Report by Mr. H.C.M. Lambert on his Visit to Australia and New Zealand in 1905-06.”

No settler state abstained from labor recruitment. European police routinely apprehended agents in the employ of large-scale recruiters like Brazil, Argentina, and Australia, but it was not uncommon to encounter agents of smaller Latin American states like Cuba, Paraguay, and Venezuela. In fact, the less capacity a country had to attract migrants on reputation alone, the stronger the impetus to recruit. In a single chapter, it is impossible to survey the approximately two dozen national—not to mention perhaps one-hundred subnational and thousands of private—recruitment programs in operation around 1900. The primary recruitment programs covered in this chapter are therefore those of Brazil and Australia, which exemplify two sub-types of settler state which took shape during two different historical epochs. Brazil was a cornerstone of the early-modern Atlantic economy, exporting sugar and importing millions of captive Africans. In the Americas, wherever slavery was prevalent it made the planters fabulously wealthy but exacted an economic price in the longer term. From Alabama to Bahia, wages lagged far behind compared to regions where slavery had never gained a foothold. This pattern persists into the present day. Regions where slavery prevailed are invariably poorer than areas settled by independent farmers.¹³² When the Brazilian coffee export boom heated up in the late nineteenth century and the labor shortage grew more acute, the task of recruiting workers was made all the more difficult by a wage level far lower than that of competing destinations like the United States or even neighboring Argentina. The result was a migration recruitment regime which relied more heavily on subsidized passage and duplicity than any other.

The unparalleled scale and ambition of the Brazilian recruitment program makes sense only in light of the country's history of slavery. From the seventeenth until the twentieth century cash crops cultivated and harvested, until the 1880s largely by slaves, made up the backbone of the Brazilian economy. The sugar and later coffee plantations devoured the lives of millions of captive Africans in a slave economy wholly unlike that of the United States. Although Brazilian planters often likened themselves to their cotton-growing counterparts in the American south, the factors constraining the growth of the Brazilian and American slave economies were fundamentally different. Sowing cotton plants year after year rapidly depletes the soil, which helped to press the borders of the cotton kingdom inexorably westward. Furthermore, by the 1840s most American "plantations" were not quasi-aristocratic country estates, but highly speculative, debt-financed operations that could easily tip into insolvency if cotton prices fell even slightly. The long-term survival of the southern economic model therefore depended on unlimited geographical expansion of the area put under cotton and worked by slaves.¹³³

In contrast, the Brazilian planter elite could take for granted an abundance of virgin soil, particularly after the laying of railways to the interior got underway in second half of the century. What constrained the geographical spread of coffee cultivation was

¹³² Economic historians have consistently linked slavery to economic underperformance, but the exact causal mechanism is still not well understood. See Kenneth L. Sokoloff and Stanley L. Engerman, "Institutions, Factor Endowments, and Paths of Development in the New World," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14, no. 3 (Summer 2000): pp. 217-232; Nathan Nunn, "Slavery, Inequality, and Economic Development in the Americas: An Examination of the Engerman-Sokoloff Hypothesis," MPRA Paper No. 4080, May 2007.

¹³³ See Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

instead a shortage of labor, specifically enslaved African workers.¹³⁴ Unlike the United States where the enslaved population grew naturally, in Brazil slaves tended to die young of illness and abuse, and due to a high ratio of men to women could hardly reproduce anyhow. Coffee planters therefore depended upon the transatlantic slave trade for their entire labor force, even after British haranguing led the Brazilian legislature to nominally ban the trade in 1831.¹³⁵ It was only in 1850 that a British naval crackdown ended slave imports altogether. With the end of the trade Brazil's agrarian elites began casting about for ways to replace dying slaves. The institution itself remained legal until 1888, so southeastern coffee growers were able for a time to purchase slaves from the declining sugar plantations of the northeast. But with the total enslaved population shrinking, it was clear to all that a transition to wage labor was inevitable.

Feeling the pinch, planters had first dispatched labor recruiters to Europe during the 1840s and 1850s, intending to put Germans and Frenchmen to work alongside enslaved Africans. This first attempt to recruit European laborers proved disastrous. The limited number of recruits were reluctant to take up the labor of slaves, in many cases having to work side-by-side with still enslaved Afro-Brazilians. The implementation of parallel systems of discipline for free and enslaved workers also proved troublesome.¹³⁶ Once European governments got wind of what was going on, many banned emigration to Brazil outright. In Germany, the ban on migration to Brazil remained in place until 1897. This did not stop the Brazilians from trying, however. In 1876 the Associação Ausiliadora da Colonização et Immigration of São Paulo—the Colonization and Immigration Assistance Association—struck a deal with the Hamburg agency Morris & Co. to recruit workers for the coffee plantations. “As a consequence of the abolition of slavery”, stated a Chancellery report, “... it was necessary to find a substitute for the dwindling population of Negroes.” Allegedly, this renewed push for European immigrants came on the heels of “an unsuccessful attempt to replace [black slaves] with Oriental Coolies.”¹³⁷ In any event, German authorities became aware of the scheme early enough to prevent Morris & Co. from recruiting in Germany, but the agents likely found success elsewhere in Europe. Beginning in the 1870s, Brazil attracted (or enticed) hundreds of thousands of Italians to work on the coffee plantations of São Paulo. The section below will examine in greater detail the strategies used by Brazil and other settler states to recruit immigrant labor.

White settler states from the Americas to the Antipodes were the “distant magnets” which drove the migration of tens of millions of Europeans during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In states like Australia, economic expansion outpaced population growth, driving up wages and producing an assertive and militant working class. Capitalists therefore turned to immigrant recruitment to control wage growth and discipline the labor movement. In Brazil, the planter elite were equally labor hungry, but unremunerative jobs in agriculture tended to keep immigrants away. Here, recruitment was a response to the undesirability of Brazil relative to other potential

¹³⁴ Francisco Vidal Luna and Herbert S. Klein, *The Economic and Social History of Brazil since 1889* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7.

¹³⁵ Thomas E. Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42.

¹³⁶ See Giralda Seyferth, “The Slave Planation and Foreign Colonization in Imperial Brazil”, *Review: The Fernand Braudel Center* 34, no. 4 (2011): pp. 339-387.

¹³⁷ GStAPK, I. HA Rep. 90 A, Nr. 232, Seite 136-137. The Office of the Chancellor, April 15th, 1876.

destination countries. Both Australia and Brazil recruited aggressively and without regard for European laws, using a wide variety of methods to be examined in the next section. Finally, it should be noted that “Australia” and “Brazil” are here metonyms for all recruitment programs operating out of these countries. Federal or sub-national governments frequently organized immigration, but so did individual firms, sectoral interest groups, and even individuals.

How Recruitment Happened

Labor recruitment was a fundamental part of European migration going back to the system of indentured servitude in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But it was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that mass recruitment campaigns met legal prohibitions in most European countries, leading recruiters to develop techniques to circumvent or evade the law. No country did more to perfect these recruitment techniques than Brazil. The Brazilian recruitment program entered a new phase in the years following the birth of the Republic in 1888, with the state pouring funds into subsidized immigration. European officials were slow to register the uptick in recruitment activity. But when, in 1908, the Brazilian government kicked off a major recruitment drive with the dispatch of a “Propaganda Commission” to Europe, investigators began paying close attention. On paper, the Commission’s job was purely informational.¹³⁸ For example, the Commission representative in Germany, Dr. Hans Heilborn, toured the country giving lectures and showing slides depicting the beauty and abundance of the Brazilian countryside. German police tailed Heilborn but could not figure out any way to charge him under the 1897 Emigration Act outlawing “the inducement of emigration”.¹³⁹ Technically, the law only forbade such activities on the part of “emigration purveyors”, i.e., shipping companies and emigration agencies. Heilborn was neither and because he was sending recruits to Amsterdam for embarkation no illegal acts actually took place on German soil. By 1910 the police had grown tired of Heilborn and the Interior Ministry determined that there was sufficient evidence to file charges, but Heilborn never went to trial. Given that charging an agent of the Brazilian state would have been undiplomatic, the government in Rio de Janeiro was prevailed upon to call off their agent.¹⁴⁰ But Heilborn’s travelling slideshow was only the beginning of a Brazilian recruitment blitz.

In 1907-1908 two developments spurred Brazil’s immigrant recruitment campaign to new heights. The 1907 Immigration and Colonization Law was modeled on the American Homestead Acts, which aimed to populate the western United States by disbursing parcels of federal land to settlers. Likewise, Brazil’s 1907 law provided for the distribution of land and set out guidelines for shipping companies to recruit and transport immigrants.¹⁴¹ Then, in early 1908, the state of São Paulo, the most aggressive recruiter among the Brazilian states, approved subsidies for 10,000 European

¹³⁸ BArch R 901/29679. “Aufzeichnung betreffend Entsendung einer brasilianischen Propagandakommission nach Europa”, January 30th, 1908.

¹³⁹ BArch R 901/29680. “Der Polizeipräsident”, Berlin, October 5th, 1909.

¹⁴⁰ BArch R 901/29680. Interior Ministry, Berlin to Imperial chargé d'affaires [Kaiserlichen Geschäftsträger] Herrn von Biel in Petropolis, Brazil, January 29th, 1910.

¹⁴¹ StAB 3-A.B.4. Nr. 209. “Übersetzung: Einwanderungs- und Kolonisationsgesetz vom 27. Dezember 1906”.

immigrants to meet the expanding labor needs of the coffee plantations.¹⁴² Between 1908 and 1914 the volume of police files on Brazilian recruitment operations exploded. These documents, including surveillance reports, interrogation transcripts, and interviews with migrants, paint a comprehensive picture of one of the largest subsidized population movements in modern history.

Between 1884 and 1913 close to three million people immigrated to Brazil. Subsidies were disbursed in such a haphazard manner that reliable data on the total number of immigrants who received enticements does not exist. What data does exist seems to suggest that the proportion of subsidized immigrants declined over time. In 1891, some 99% of all European immigrants to the state of São Paulo had been subsidized.¹⁴³ Two decades later in 1912 the German Consul in São Paulo inquired into the percentage of immigrants who had been subsidized and came up with a figure of one-third.¹⁴⁴ Another clue comes from a 1902 row between Brazil and Italy, which supplied more itinerant agricultural laborers than any other state in Europe. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Italian Emigration Commissariat intervened ferociously to guard the health and safety of the kingdom's enormous overseas labor force. With reports of dreadful working conditions in São Paulo pouring into Rome, the Minister Foreign Affairs, Giulio Prinetti, issued an edict that came to be known as the "Prinetti Decree", banning sponsored migration to Brazil. Migrants who independently financed the journey were still free to travel to Brazil, but the provision of free and discounted fares was henceforth banned. As a result, the number of Italians who migrated to Brazil in 1903, the year after the decree came down, fell nearly eighty percent, suggesting that a majority had been subsidized.¹⁴⁵

With recruitment and subsidized migration outlawed in much of Europe, how did Brazilian agents manage to transport tens of thousands of people year after year? After the 1907 Immigration and Colonization Law came into effect, virtually all the dirty work was done by shipping companies and their agents. There quickly emerged a geographic division of labor meant to disaggregate crimes across numerous jurisdictions, making it virtually impossible to prosecute recruitment. Shipping companies contracted to recruit Germans were headquartered exclusively in France and the Low Countries, namely the Royal Holland Lloyd of Rotterdam and Compagnie Générale Transatlantique of Marseille. The French were major players in the Italian trade but were otherwise boxed out of carrying central and east European migrants. Engaging in the illicit Brazil trade permitted the French to siphon off traffic which the German lines were legally unable to participate in. Companies out of Marseille were also favorably placed to transport illegally recruited Italians. Indeed, the Hamburg-America Line protested to Berlin that the ban on transporting German recruits to Brazil damaged the firm's bottom line, to no avail.¹⁴⁶ Dutch and Belgian lines, for their part, jumped at the opportunity to earn

¹⁴² StAB 3-A.B.4. Nr. 209. German Consulate, São Paulo, December 20th, 1907.

¹⁴³ C.R. Cameron, "Colonization of Immigrants in Brazil," *Monthly Labor Review* 33, no. 4 (October, 1931): 46.

¹⁴⁴ StAB 3-A.B.4. Nr. 209. German Consulate, São Paulo to Office of the Chancellor, January 12th, 1912.

¹⁴⁵ Diana Garvin, "The Italian coffee triangle: From Brazilian *colonos* to Ethiopian *colonialisti*," *Modern Italy* 26, no. 3 (2021): p. 4. Migration levels fluctuated from year to year in concert with the business cycle, and typically exhibited a similar pattern across the Americas. 1902-1903 saw a significant increase in arrivals in the United States, from around 650,000 to 850,000. This suggests that the collapse in Italian arrivals in Brazil is largely attributable to the end of the subsidies program.

¹⁴⁶ BArch R 901/29681. Hamburg-America Line to German Ministry of the Interior, December 13th, 1913.

additional revenue above and beyond the official quotas allotted to them within the market sharing framework led by the Germans. Even if the German lines were unable to transport German migrants whose fares had been subsidized by the Brazilian government, there was nothing stopping them from transporting foreign recruits. In fact, Bremen and Hamburg were the ports of choice for migrants recruited for Brazil within the Habsburg Empire, who were unable to legally depart from Fiume and Trieste. These arrangements whereby subsidized migrants travelled to neighboring countries for embarkation were a source of diplomatic friction between France and Germany, Italy and France, and Germany and Austria-Hungary in the years prior to the First World War.

In an attempt to interdict illegally recruited migrants bound for Marseille, Rotterdam, Hamburg, and Bremen, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy beefed up security on their frontiers. Migrants who admitted that they had received subsidized tickets to Brazil or whom the gendarmes suspected of having been recruited were turned back. Because most Europeans enjoyed the constitutional right of free movement, however, there was only so much the frontier police could do to prevent migrants from crossing the border. In November 1913, for example, the Berlin police received word that a troupe of German migrants in possession of subsidized tickets to Brazil was en route to Amsterdam. Officials in Berlin wired the gendarmerie office in Bentheim, on the Dutch border, who then boarded the migrants' train and took the group into custody. The police regarded this as nothing less than a rescue operation, but the migrants did not see it that way, protesting bitterly as the gendarmes escorted them back to Berlin. Nevertheless, the police file is at pains to emphasize that the migrants were never formally detained, which would have constituted a breach of the right to free movement. Back in Berlin, the police offered to pay for the migrants' travel home, in accordance with the law against fraudulent recruitment. The group insisted on receiving train tickets back to Bentheim, however. Without any legal basis for rejecting the migrants' destination of choice, the police were forced to agree to send them right back where they had come from.¹⁴⁷ Presumably, the group travelled on to Brazil without further incident. Such episodes were a source of immense frustration for law enforcement. Neither the possession of free tickets to Brazil nor the crossing of international borders with the intention to emigrate were crimes. German law criminalized unlicensed recruitment and little else, meaning that the police's hands were tied when dealing with the migrants themselves.

In Austria-Hungary, the frontier police felt themselves less constrained by constitutionality, even if citizens of the Empire technically enjoyed the right of free movement. The Hungarians were particularly heavy-handed, owing to the enduring political power of the feudal elite. This necessitated greater discretion on the part of the migrants and agencies began coaching them on how to cross the border into Germany inconspicuously. Officials in Vienna had long complained to their counterparts in Berlin that German agencies were carrying out illegal recruitment in Galicia. At a loss for how the migrants were slipping across the border into Germany, however, the Austrians concluded that the German agents were smuggling the recruits into the country after nightfall.¹⁴⁸ But then Austrian police intercepted a letter from the Bremen agency Karesz

¹⁴⁷ BAArch R 901/29681 „Zu der heutigen kommissarischen Besprechung...“, November 18th, 1913.

¹⁴⁸ BAArch R 901/30306. Austro-Hungarian Embassy, Berlin to German Foreign Office, October 21st, 1897.

& Stocki with instructions for making the crossing unnoticed. The letter instructed a group of Galician farmers bound for Brazil to arrive at the German border posing as seasonal agricultural workers heading to Silesia. To appear convincing, the Galicians were told to travel with agricultural tools and to dispense with any possessions that would raise suspicion.¹⁴⁹ Because a significant number of Galicians did travel to Germany each year to bring in the harvest, it was impossible for Habsburg officials to identify subsidized emigrants. Officials across Europe faced the same dilemma, and not just with migrants bound for Brazil. The German agent Carl F.A. Flügge recruited on behalf of land settlement companies in Canada, instructing his clients to make their way to Hamburg posing as agricultural workers bound for Schleswig-Holstein.¹⁵⁰ German officials only became wise to the scheme when unaccounted for emigrants began surfacing in Canada in significant numbers.

Even if most Europeans enjoyed a constitutional right to free movement, there was still demand for people smugglers. In Austria-Hungary and Germany, the right to emigrate was circumscribed only by the requirement that adult men complete a compulsory stint of military service prior to departing. But “military age” happened to coincide with the years in which young men could earn the highest wages abroad—in Germany men were required to complete three years of service between the ages of 20 and 27. This created a powerful incentive even for migrants bound for the United States to contract with foreign emigration agencies who could get them out of the country. Travelling with false papers was another way of evading military service. In 1905 Austrian police arrested Andreas Meyer for impersonating his own brother or cousin, traveling in the country with American naturalization papers belonging to John Meyer.¹⁵¹ On another occasion in 1914, investigators in Krakow arrested David Kupperman, an employee of the Hamburg agency Falck & Co. The court in Krakow charged Kupperman with supplying Austrian men subject to military service with counterfeit papers and with “instigating” [*Verleitung*] migration.¹⁵² The battle to prevent the unlawful emigration of draft-eligible men [*Militärpflichtige*] was an exclusively continental preoccupation. Lacking a draft, the British avoided the impossible task of locking down the porous borders which were the norm prior to the First World War.

If detecting subsidized migrants proved tricky for European law enforcement, the recruitment agents themselves were exceedingly slippery, though police did succeed in catching and interrogating a few. Early in 1914 investigators in Baden interviewed an agent of the Royal Holland Lloyd.¹⁵³ A Swiss polyglot, Alfred Furrer had made the acquaintance of a Brazilian agent in Berlin who hired him to work as an interpreter at the Emigration Office in Rio de Janeiro. When Furrer’s fragile health proved unable to withstand the tropical climate, he quit. But the Brazilian authorities had further use for his talents. The Agriculture Ministry hired him on as a recruitment agent, tasked with

¹⁴⁹ BArch R 901/30306. Karesz & Stocki, Bremen to [Name Illegible], April 24th, 1897.

¹⁵⁰ StAHH 373 I_IV C II 10: Carl F.A. Flügge.

¹⁵¹ AT-OeStA/HHStA MdA AR F 15-46-3. Austrian Foreign Office to American Embassy, Vienna, November 21st, 1905.

¹⁵² StAHH 373-7 I_IV C II 7: Rudolf Falck in Firma Falck & Co. “Behörde für das Auswanderungswesen, Auszug aus der Akte der Polizeibehörde, Abteilung II, Insp.D. J.Nr. 3005/14, betreffend Festnahme des David Kupperman wegen Vergehens gegen das oesterreichische Wehrgesetz”, May 18th, 1914.

¹⁵³ BArch R901/29681. Baden Foreign Ministry and Justice Ministry to German Foreign Office, Berlin, March 16th, 1914.

sending 100 families from Switzerland and the Tyrol to Brazil in exchange for free passage back to Europe via Amsterdam. Before leaving the Netherlands, the directors of the Royal Holland Lloyd instructed Furrer to solicit recruits from the German side of the border in order to sidestep the Swiss ban on propagandizing emigration. Furrer seems to have worked undetected for some months before mistakenly recruiting a German who lied about being Swiss. The police dossier does not elaborate on the circumstances of Furrer's arrest, though the lying German does suggest that investigators may have entrapped him. Investigators in Baden ultimately declined to prosecute Furrer, and his fate is unknown. If he chose to continue recruiting migrants, then it is likely that his employer transferred him to a different border town, possibly somewhere in France or Switzerland. It was a common practice by shipping companies and emigration agencies to rotate into new jurisdictions agents who had been caught recruiting illegally.¹⁵⁴

Furrer's tactic of recruiting migrants by mail while hiding out across an international border was a common practice which police were never able to effectively combat. For example, when German police learned the identities of a cell of recruiters operating out of Switzerland. The investigation simply hit a dead end when Swiss authorities flatly refused to arrest or extradite the agents.¹⁵⁵ Even today, multinational law enforcement operations are reserved for only the most wanted criminals and the most intractable of cross-border problems. Around 1900, coordination was even less developed. Indeed, I can find no examples of successful extradition of migrant recruiters.

The distribution of pamphlets and posters advertising free passage to Brazil and other destinations was another recruitment tactic that police struggled to suppress. One morning, a city would be plastered with posters, or flyers advertising migration services would be tucked into magazines, and investigators simply could not find anyone to hold accountable. In November of 1910, for example, there appeared countless magazine inserts offering high wages and subsidized passage for farm workers in Australia. Those interested were to fill out an attached post card and mail it to an address in London, well beyond the reach of the German police.¹⁵⁶ Officials in Budapest were especially determined to halt the flow of emigration propaganda into Hungary. Police began searching and seizing parcels originating in the port cities where recruitment agencies were based. This was effective for a time, until the agencies devised a workaround. The agency Falck & Co. began routing propaganda shipments to Vienna, in the Austrian half of the empire, where an intermediary repackaged and forwarded the material to Hungary with Habsburg postmarks.¹⁵⁷ Too much mail passed between Vienna and Budapest to practically search, making it all but impossible to intercept the shipments of propaganda. Even when the Hungarians arrested Falck's agents, it did not stop the agency from recruiting. Those arrested were simply rotated out of the country and into posts elsewhere in Europe while new agents unknown to the Austro-Hungarian police were dispatched to carry on the work.

Australia and Brazil adopted different labor recruitment philosophies. Brazil contracted with shipping companies and established emigration agencies, erecting a multinational recruitment infrastructure to deliver tens of thousands of workers to

¹⁵⁴ StAHH 373-7 I_IV C II 7. Rudolf Falck in Firm Falck & Co., p. 108.

¹⁵⁵ BAArch R 901/29681.

¹⁵⁶ BAArch R 901/29680. Zentralkunftsstelle für Auswanderer, November 14th, 1910.

¹⁵⁷ StAHH 373-7 I_IV C II 7. Rudolf Falck in Firm Falck & Co., p. 108.

coffee plantations and homesteads. The New South Wales Intelligence Department represented an attempt to emulate the Brazilians. But the overwhelming majority of Australian recruitment was carried out in an ad hoc manner, often by individual firms seeking labor rather than by shipping companies or government agencies. Most commonly these were mines located in remote parts of the country, like the sparsely populated northern colony of Queensland. Australian recruiters were therefore heavily concentrated in the coalfields of England and Wales as well as the Ruhr in western Germany. It appears as though Australian recruitment efforts on the Continent were intended to gather workers who were unlikely to fall in with the radical Australian labor movement that so vexed the big capitalists of Sydney and Melbourne. This was not always successful, as attested by a May Day celebration held aboard a ship bound for Australia. A troupe of migrants from Berlin departed London for Queensland in the spring of 1910 aboard the *SS Osterley* of the Orient Steam Navigation Company. On May 1st, the Germans unfurled a red banner on the top deck and sung the *Marseillaise*. Offended British passengers responding by belting out *God Save the King*. The incident provoked fears in the bourgeois Australian press that the Queensland recruitment program was importing dangerous radicals, a charge that one official brushed off by remarking that the Germans did not speak English and could therefore not preach socialism.¹⁵⁸

Illustrative of the Australian approach to recruitment is the 1903 trial in Frankfurt of an Australian “recruiter”. Police opened an investigation after spotting an advertisement in the newspaper promising high wages for miners at the Lancelot Freehold Tin & Copper Mines, Ltd. in Queensland, Australia. Testimony suggests that investigators were able to identify the Australian agent because a miner chose to sign a contract, pocket the cash advance, and rat out the recruiter to the police. This was a rare opportunity for German authorities to put a labor recruiter on trial. But as soon as the accused was in front of a judge, the case fell apart owing to a set of almost comical technicalities. The “recruiter” was in fact an executive at the Lancelot mines, a category to which the 1897 Emigration Law technically did not apply. Only “emigration purveyors” [*Auswanderungsunternehmer*] were barred from recruitment. In addition, the executive was offering three-year contracts, a temporary labor arrangement which theoretically did not constitute permanent emigration from Germany.¹⁵⁹ Given the larger pattern of Australian recruitment schemes, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the mining executive knew that he would skate on the charges. Scrupulous adherence to the letter of the law combined with flagrant disregard for the spirit was typical of Australian recruitment efforts.

Labor recruiters played a significant role in shaping emigration from Europe around 1900. The most prolific recruiter, Brazil, subsidized hundreds of thousands of immigrants between the 1880s and 1914. Because the various Australian states recruited in such a decentralized and ad hoc manner, even an approximation of the number of immigrants recruited is impossible to ascertain. The total was no doubt substantial, if somewhat less than Brazil. Even relatively out of the way places like South Carolina, Uruguay, New Zealand, and Venezuela developed recruitment programs and subsidized

¹⁵⁸ BArch N 901/30541. From German Consulate in Australia, Sydney to German Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, July 22nd, 1910.

¹⁵⁹ BArch N 901/30531. Report addressed to German Minister of the Interior, June 29th, 1903.

a non-trivial number of immigrants to meet labor needs that consistently outpaced the natural rate of population growth. The most sophisticated recruitment programs involved hundreds if not thousands of people, from the agents and subagents on the ground in Europe, to the shipping staff, and the employers and government officials who oversaw recruitment. Nearly all labor recruiters deployed elaborate strategies to avoid capture and prosecution in Europe, where immigrant recruitment or “enticement to emigrate” were universally outlawed. The majority of recruiters were legitimate businessmen or agents of foreign states. But the very illegality of migrant recruitment created significant space for genuine criminality.

Migration Fraud

If all labor recruiters were technically criminals, what did it mean to commit fraud? For the most part, recruiters occupied the same legal terrain as drug dealers; in other words, clients typically got what they paid for, but without any recourse if the product turned out to be shabby. And as in the case of the drug trade, the absence of legal rules or official oversight encouraged dishonest brokers to enter the market. The boundary between legitimate and fraudulent migrant recruitment is a blurry one, to be sure. But a good litmus test is whether the migrants themselves felt deceived. A German who accepted free passage to Australia may have been party to a crime in his own country but was very often satisfied with the result. Yet an Austrian who took the same deal from an agent of Brazil might end up a virtual debt peon on a coffee plantation or learn too late that the advertised “colony” was a deadly jungle outpost.

Migration fraud existed on a spectrum from the mundane to the potentially deadly. At one extreme were cases of fraudsters making off with the savings of would-be emigrants by posing as the agents of shipping companies or as legitimate recruiters in the employ of a foreign government. These were the crimes of opportunistic conmen, like James Fife, who impersonated a Cunard booking agent in Limerick, Ireland in the 1880s. Fife sowed confusion by renting an office in the same building as a legitimate Cunard agent, taking the money of would-be migrants and promising to send the ticket at some future date. The police eventually caught up with Fife, whose trial occasioned some drama in Limerick. In the face of overwhelming evidence of Fife’s guilt, the Magistrate immediately pronounced him “Not Guilty” before it was revealed that members of the court had been “paid off”.¹⁶⁰ Although tampering with the courts was uncommon, scams of this kind were not. In Germany a conman by the name of Ernst Schauss masqueraded as the proprietor of a rubber plantation in the Amazon collecting 2,000 Mark deposits from prospective settlers before absconding with the money.¹⁶¹ In another case, a scammer named only as Schernitzky was sentenced to a mere two weeks in prison for impersonating an emigration agent.¹⁶² If the perpetrators of such crimes escaped justice, the results could be devastating. Families often liquidated ancestral plots of land, animals, and bulky possessions like furniture to finance emigration. If the

¹⁶⁰ TNA MT 9/316/M18435/87. “Memorandum: Reg. v. Fife, Acting as Passenger Brokers Agent and receiving money for passages without giving Contract Ticket. Passenger Act 1855 Secs. 66 and 71.”

¹⁶¹ BArch R 901/30299. “Bekanntmachung No. 44”, April 7th, 1912.

¹⁶² BArch R 901/29681. Regierungspräsident to German Minister of Trade and Industry und German Minister of the Interior, September 12th, 1913.

proceeds ended up in the hands of an illegitimate agent, it could be impossible for the family to recover the assets.

Yet, an even more sinister variety of migration fraud involved real, overseas destinations, ones that were very different than the migrants were led to believe. As we have seen, settler states recruited immigrants because labor was in perennial short supply. But there were some settler projects and job sites so unpleasant or fanciful that ordinary recruitment methods did not suffice. An offer of fabulously high wages could be fraudulent, or it could indicate that the job site was exceptionally dangerous, as in the case of railroad construction in the Amazon rainforest, where disease took a heavy toll. Promises of vast estates and aristocratic wealth enticed gullible migrants to sign on with shady land speculators. And the cleverest agents simply disguised themselves as ordinary recruiters. The overwhelming majority of fraudulent recruiters worked for interests in Latin America, but otherwise exhibited great diversity in methods and aims.

Indeed, it is difficult to overstate the outlandishness of some sham colonization projects. Take for example the bogus colony of “New France”, a contrivance of the French nobleman the Marquis de Rays located in what is now Papua New Guinea. Styling himself “King of New France”, de Rays set out to populate his imaginary new realm in the south Pacific with Frenchmen. But after the French minister of agriculture forbade de Rays from recruiting in the country, he went looking farther afield, ultimately enrolling close to six-hundred volunteers, mostly Germans, Italians, and Irishmen. What de Rays failed to disclose to the eager settlers was that the earthly paradise of “New France” was as yet uninhabited by Europeans and that the task of terraforming the jungle into a viable settlement fell to them. Nor did de Rays accompany the recruits on the long, 1880 voyage to the Pacific. Though perhaps he should have—the self-anointed king of New France soon went to prison in the old France for the debacle before eventually perishing in a mental asylum in 1893. The settlers of New France found the island uninhabited and lousy with malarial mosquitos, which claimed many lives before the survivors could reach New Caledonia and thence Australia.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ StAB 3-A.4.-30. Berlin, September 30th, 1879.



Figure 4. A poster distributed in 1893 by the British Emigrants' Information Office, warning about an agent recruiting migrants for the Province of San Paulo. *Source:* TNA MT 9/482.

The de Rays affair was unusual, but mostly on account of its oddball patron and fanciful objectives. Deadly mining expeditions and ill-conceived jungle colonies were not unknown and were frequently behind the shadiest of recruitment efforts in Europe. The stories of what took place at these destinations, overwhelmingly located in South America, gripped the public imagination, and stoked fearsome rumors that emigration agents were little more than traffickers in human flesh. Across Europe grave warnings appeared in newspapers and authorities plastered up posters cautioning against emigration to areas of concern. “CAUTION to EMIGRANTS. BRAZIL. FURTHER WARNING” read a typical poster distributed by the British Emigrants’ Information Office in 1893.¹⁶⁴ A troupe of migrants bound for an unusual destination was usually the first sign that something was afoot. So, the Board of Trade instructed emigration officers posted in British ports to report any uptick in departures for Brazil “or any part of South America.”¹⁶⁵ Brazil was the most commonly warned of destination, with other South American states in a distant second, among them Chile, Venezuela, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Mexico. In continental Europe various parts of the British empire periodically came under scrutiny for their ceaseless efforts to recruit immigrants. Canada took the most heat by far, with some German states going so far as to ban migration to parts of the country. In Hanover, for example, it was prohibited to book migrants’ passage to

¹⁶⁴ TNA MT 9/482/M10222/93

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Manitoba and the Northwest Territories until the Imperial Emigration Act of 1897 superseded legislation at the state level.¹⁶⁶

Survivors of ill-fated colonies offered hair-raising tales of life in the jungle. In 1912 the Berlin police assembled a dossier on unauthorized emigration to Brazil, which included interviews with a number of former colonists who were promised land and riches in Santa Catharina. But shortly after the Austrian Lloyd steamer *Austria* weighed anchor and set sail for Brazil, it became clear that the colonists had been duped. Survivors testified that the food aboard was inedible, and that protests were met with the whip as well as the threat of arrest upon arrival. A number of children did not survive the voyage. The colony itself was carved from a patch of forest infested with poisonous snakes and inhabited by indigenous raiders. Amid a failed harvest, the threat of starvation loomed, and multiple colonists testified that aid was given only to those families who handed over a daughter or wife “for use” by the Director, Dr. Clement, or other senior administrators. Another colonist was convinced that the Director monitored outgoing mail to prevent the truth about conditions at the colony from leaking out.¹⁶⁷ The ordeal ended only when a colonist succeeded in reaching the German consulate in Curitiba.

Schemes for luring European workers into debt peonage proliferated in the decade or so after Brazil did away with slavery in 1888. Thanks to the spread of coffee plantations and soaring demand on world markets, the Brazilian economy was undergoing explosive growth constrained only by the number of workers available to harvest and dry the beans. Police records across Europe registered the uptick in illegal Brazilian agents, but investigators struggled to disrupt multinational recruitment networks. In 1898 German police traced a major recruitment operation to an agent named Jose dos Santos in Lisbon after a group of Westphalian migrants showed up in the Imperial Consulate in São Paulo complaining of having been duped. Upon landing in Brazil, the migrants claimed to have been held in a “hotel” that was in fact a walled compound and were not permitted to leave until their captors sent them to an inland *Fazenda*, or coffee plantation. The promised plots of land were in fact real, but were generally miniscule patches, no larger than 100 square meters, hacked from the jungle and equipped with a tiny shack and a pig stall. Families that refused work on plantations were thrown out onto the street. The possibility must be considered that the migrants exaggerated these hardships to garner sympathy and a free ticket back to Germany. But the sheer quantity of similar tales—not to mention archival copies of some rather suspicious pamphlets—makes the danger posed by migration fraud difficult to deny.¹⁶⁸

Following up on the complaint by the Westphalians, German investigators learned that several years prior the state of São Paulo had contracted Santos in Portugal as well as an Italian agency, A. Fiorita & Co., to recruit 60,000 agricultural workers from Europe. To meet such an ambitious target, the agencies had circulated flyers promising migrants spacious plots of land and discounted passage to Brazil. Despite the obvious fraud, there was little that the German authorities could do. The recruitment agencies were based in Portugal and Italy, and the migrants themselves embarked not from a German port but in Marseilles. As an offense carrying at most a fine and few months

¹⁶⁶ GStAPK, I. HA Rep. 90 A, Nr. 230

¹⁶⁷ BArch R 901/29681 „Betrifft Auswanderung nach Brasilien ohne Erlass“, October 17th, 1912.

¹⁶⁸ StAB 3-A.4.-105. German Consulate, São Paulo, April 13th, 1898.

prison time, migrant recruitment was typically not worth pursuing extradition over. The result was interminable game of whack-a-mole, with law enforcement authorities virtually powerless to halt the activities of fraudulent recruiters.

Agents from Latin America were not the only ones involved in fraudulent recruitment. Within the Anglosphere, Canada acquired a reputation for shady dealings with immigrants. In part, this was a consequence of the landholding pattern described above. In Australia, the dominance of the “Squattocracy” squeezed out the kind of freebooting land speculators often associated with immigration fraud. The Canadian prairie, in contrast, remained in the hands of the central government and of land companies eager to distribute plots to settlers. A flood of European investment kept such land speculation enterprises afloat, many of which had only the most tenuous relationship to the territory they supposedly controlled. As new opportunities for settlement opened up, it was not only adventurers and ambitious homesteaders who seized the chance to get rich. Joint-stock corporations scooped up tracts of land across the globe, offering smalltime investors in Europe the opportunity to own a stake in the Australian Land and Emigration Company, the Texas Freehold Farm and Emigration Union, the South African Emigration Company, and hundreds more. Anyone with a bit of cash could purchase a few shares. A catalog of investors in the Canadian Land and Emigration Company includes the predictable merchants, bankers, officers, and gentlemen, in addition to an array of more modest individuals, among them farmers, clerks, “spinsters”, a tobacconist, and a hatter.¹⁶⁹ Financial statements published between 1861 and 1889, when the company wound up operations, do not indicate how many parcels of land were actually distributed, though the directors did manage to raise some £250,000 in capital. For it was hardly necessary to arrange transport and place farmers on real plots of land to turn a profit in the migration business. Fortunes were plainly being made on speculation alone, and the game seems to have come to halt only when the supply of desirable land dried up or, as in Canada, the state took responsibility for disbursing farmsteads.

Land speculators drove significant illicit recruitment of migrants for Canada, but there were structural factors that drove Canadian firms to engage in illegal recruitment as well. Officials in Ottawa found it challenging to recruit the agricultural laborers and independent farmers that Canada needed through legal channels. Britain’s white-settler colonies enjoyed the right to recruit immigrants from the United Kingdom.¹⁷⁰ This was a very favorable arrangement for Australia, which, like Britain itself, was heavily urbanized and in need of craftsmen and industrial workers. But the Canadian state was intent on settling the western plains, a task for which British immigrants proved unsuitable. In 1910 some 70% of the British population resided in cities of 5,000 or more inhabitants, making the United Kingdom the most urbanized society in Europe.¹⁷¹ It appears that British emigrants skewed even more urban than the population at large, making skilled farmers hard to come by. According to a report on Canadian immigration

¹⁶⁹ TNA BT 31/548/2222.

¹⁷⁰ See Marjorie Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁷¹ The second most urbanized European state was Belgium, with a rate of 56.6%. In the Americas, both Canada and the United States were approximately 41.6% urban. Paul Bairoch and Gary Goertz, “Factors of Urbanisation in the Nineteenth Century Developed Countries: A Descriptive and Econometric Analysis,” *Urban Studies* 23 (1986): 288.

assembled by the German consulate in Montreal, it was not uncommon for news ads soliciting farmhands in Canada to include the caveat “English need not apply”.¹⁷² The shortage of qualified agricultural workers in the United Kingdom prompted the Canadians to abandon the ethnocentric recruitment criteria observed in other British white settler states. West European smallholders were unlikely to emigrate, and so Canadians turned to eastern Europe, where a landless, rural population possessed the desired agricultural know-how.¹⁷³ Another result of the shortage of agricultural workers was the use of graft. During the 1890s, for example, a Canadian outfit under the name “International Emigration Association, Ltd.” began soliciting “farm pupils” from Britain. Advertisements in outlets like *Life* magazine gave an air of legitimacy to the operation, which claimed to place young men on model Canadian farms for an apprenticeship. International Emigration Association pamphlets even warned applicants to steer clear of shady “Mushroom Agencies”—presumably so named because they pop up overnight and quickly disappear. After a year or two, the “pupils” would be ready to take on managing farms of their own. In reality, the program was a sham and participants found themselves in a state of unpaid servitude on remote farms, sleeping in the hayloft and enduring physical abuse.¹⁷⁴

Migration fraud was not always a crime, however. Some of the most disastrous instances of false advertising received official sanction thanks to the political connections of investors or business directors. Nothing better exemplifies this phenomenon than the Madeira-Mamoré Railway—better known in Brazil by the bloody epithet “The Devil’s Railroad”. The purpose of the railroad was to link groves of rubber trees located in Bolivia to the Brazilian harbor of Porto Velho on the Madeira River, a tributary of the Amazon. Rubber had swiftly become a vital geo-strategic resource with the introduction of early automobiles around 1900. However, mature rubber trees existed in just two places: the Congo Basin in Central Africa and deep in the Amazon Rainforest. Since the founding of the Congo Free State in 1885 under King Leopold II of Belgium, Central Africa had exported rubber at an extraordinary cost to the indigenous population.¹⁷⁵ But the majority of the global supply of natural rubber was harvested in the Amazon Basin of Brazil and Bolivia.¹⁷⁶ Since the 1870s American investors had tried to construct a railroad linking Porto Velho to Guajará-Mirim on the Bolivian frontier, which would open additional rubber groves to exploitation. After repeated failures due to the inhospitable terrain of the so-called “Green Hell”, an American engineer named Percival Farquhar successfully completed the Madeira-Mamoré railroad between 1907 and 1912.¹⁷⁷ The project was a commercial flop. By 1910 the bulk of the global rubber

¹⁷² StAB 3-A.3.G.2. Nr. 507. German Consulate, Montreal to Office of the Chancellor, March 11th, 1908.

¹⁷³ See Lisa Chilton, *Receiving Canada’s Immigrants: The Work of the State Before 1930* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 2016). Despite the apparent inclusiveness of Canadian immigration policy, it does appear that the best farmsteads went to British and Germanic settlers, while eastern Europeans received less desirable plots.

¹⁷⁴ TNA MT 9/553/M4919/96. “Warning to Intending Emigrants”, Emigrants’ Information Office, 1896.

¹⁷⁵ See Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1998).

¹⁷⁶ Zephyr Frank and Aldo Musacchio, “The International Natural Rubber Market, 1870-1930”, in *EH.Net Encyclopedia*, ed., Robert Whaples (2008). <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-international-natural-rubber-market-1870-1930/>

¹⁷⁷ Charles A. Gauld, *The Last Titan: Percival Farquhar: American Entrepreneur in Latin America* (Palo Alto: Stanford Institute of Hispanic-American and Luso-Brazilian Studies, 1964).

supply came not from South America or Africa, but from plantations in British Malaysia and Dutch Indonesia, to which the Brazilian rubber tree, *Hevea braziliensis*, had been transplanted decades earlier.¹⁷⁸ What made “The Devil’s Railway” infamous in Brazil was the heavy price paid in human lives during construction. Estimates range from a few thousand up to eight thousand dead, chiefly owing to tropical diseases like Yellow Fever.

Among the dead were an unknown number of European recruits, victims, in part, of negligence on the part of the German Foreign Office. In September of 1909 some three hundred men climbed aboard the ocean liner *Rugia* in the port of Hamburg, Germany. A mix of Germans, Austrians, Poles, and Russians, the men were predominantly manual laborers, and all had signed one-year contracts with the Madeira-Mamoré Railway Company. In exchange for free passage to the job site and 15 marks per day, the men were to work clearing jungle flora and laying railroad tracks. The high rate of pay and the remoteness of the Brazil-Bolivia border region might have been cause for suspicion. German police regularly fined labor recruiters from Latin America and warned against the dangers of too-good-to-be-true job offers overseas. In this case however the Foreign Office had specifically authorized the railway’s representative, a Mr. Jürgens, to recruit workers in Germany, attesting to the legitimacy of the business. But as the *Rugia* steamed away from Hamburg, most of its three-hundred passengers bound for Porto Velho were seeing Europe for the last time. Why the German authorities had given the green light for the Madeira-Mamoré Railway Company to recruit works in Germany remains unclear. The year before a similar permit had been sought by Philipp Holzmann & Co., a German railroad company operating in Chile. The German Foreign Ministry rejected the application and referred the company to the Italian authorities.¹⁷⁹

It was not long before a handful of workers raised the alarm. Before docking, the *Rugia* steamed several hundred miles up the Amazon River to Itacoatiara, Brazil, where a riverboat was waiting to carry the workers to Porto Velho, some 600 miles farther down the Madeira River. When a few representatives from among the men went to inspect the riverboat, the *Antonio Olyntho*, they raised concerns over the cramped quarters, declaring the vessel unfit for more than about one hundred men and objecting to the absence of a doctor. Nevertheless, the captain and the company overseer, Mr. May, managed to placate the majority and before long the *Antonio Olyntho* weighed anchor with two-thirds of the three-hundred men aboard.¹⁸⁰

Cholera and foodborne illness struck at once. Food and water stores depleted rapidly, though much of it was already rancid. And among the puny rations were offputtingly exotic fare like turtle meat. Within days dozens of men were afflicted and demanded that the ship turn back. Unwilling to defy orders, the captain instead dropped anchor and went to locate a doctor in a nearby town. The doctor diagnosed ailments from cholera and severe constipation and noted one man with appendicitis, who soon died. The doctor offered some advice and left instructions for the care of the worst off, but without better food and relief from the insalubrious climate there was little to be done. “The men’s agitation mounted gradually, until on the thirteenth [of October] an

¹⁷⁸ Frank and Musacchio, “The International Natural Rubber Market, 1870-1930”.

¹⁷⁹ BArch R 901/29679. Philipp Holzmann & Co. to German Foreign Office, Berlin, April 8th, 1907.

¹⁸⁰ BArch R 901/30294. “Überwachung der Auswanderung aus Deutschland nach Brasilien”.

open revolt broke out”, recalled the captain in later testimony. Led by the Poles, the men raided the ship’s hold, seizing several cases of beer and wine and throwing overboard some twenty turtles.¹⁸¹ The mutiny was without clear objectives, however, and evidently the capture of all alcohol on board did much to tamp down violent tempers. Booze did nothing to prevent the death toll from continuing to climb. Of the 300 men who set out from Hamburg, only 80 reached the job site deep in the Amazonian interior. According to Madeira-Mamoré Railway Company officials, the fate of the European workers was in line with the “enormous rate of death” on the job site, as evidenced by the staggering number of graves in jungle.¹⁸²

What are we to make of the Madeira-Mamoré railroad saga? Were the deaths of the European workers nothing more than a tragic but isolated event, or part of a larger story? The drama and sheer deadliness of the Madeira-Mamoré railroad saga were exceptional, but the basic plot points were not. Numerous Europeans—not to mention Latin Americans and Asians—fell victim to slick-tongued labor recruiters and found themselves in a deadly predicament. A typical article in the German *Kreuz-Zeitung* described how in 1896 1,500 Polish farmhands had been lured to Brazil with the promise of land and then forced into servitude on plantations.¹⁸³ The Madeira-Mamoré railroad was also typical in that none of the perpetrators faced justice of any kind. Indeed, it seems unlikely that a crime was even committed, given the project’s endorsement by the German Foreign Office. Perhaps the most significant effect of recruitment fraud was to sow fear among would-be migrants in Europe. Deadly episodes such as this fueled suspicion in Europe of migration agents, who were frequently stereotyped as Jews selling hapless peasants into foreign bondage to make an easy buck. Somewhat paradoxically, the panic unleashed by migration scams manifested itself almost entirely in concerns about women forced into prostitution, even though the majority of victims were men.

Across Europe, mass migration was accompanied by heightened concern for its deleterious effects upon sexual propriety and the patriarchal family. This manifested itself in a number of ways, not least in the specter of the “White Slave Trade”, or “Mädchenhandel” in Germany, referring to the sexual trafficking of young women. In Britain especially it was widely believed that many young women traveling alone were in fact bound for involuntary prostitution not only in America but also in seemingly more exotic and threatening destinations like China and India. That virginal European maidens were spirited away to make prized additions to the harems of imagined eastern potentates was pure fantasy, of course. But it was nonetheless true that long-distance sex trafficking as we understand it today first became widespread in the mass population movements of the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁴ Sprawling metropolises and isolated communities around mines and railroads in which single men predominated were undoubtedly central to this development. Regardless, the true extent of sexual trafficking and involuntary prostitution is impossible to ascertain, no thanks to contemporaries. Definitions dating to the period confined the notion of a trafficked

¹⁸¹ BArch R 901/30294. „Anlage 4“.

¹⁸² BArch R 901/30294. “Sehr geehrter Herr Konsul!“, October 6th, 1909.

¹⁸³ BArch R 901/29665. *Kreuz-Zeitung*, January 15th, 1896.

¹⁸⁴ Jessica R. Pliley, “From White Slavery to Anti-Prostitution, the Long View”, in *Human Bondage and Abolition: New Histories of Past and Present Slaverys*, eds. Elizabeth Swanson and James Brewer Stewart (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 190-218.

woman to those from “good families” who had been outright kidnapped or else lured away by the promise of a job or a husband. According to a Belfast newspaper, one trafficker was said to have married multiple women in order to trick them into prostitution abroad.¹⁸⁵ Women who were forced into sex work by poverty or ill fortune, who no doubt constituted the great majority of prostitutes, were seen as disreputable and undeserving of aid and so simply did not figure within the prevailing framework.

It was not uncommon therefore for European police to focus investigations on unlikely traffickers. Christian preachers belonging to unpopular or idiosyncratic sects, for example, were subject to special scrutiny. Suspicion of Mormons was widespread in prewar Britain, escalating at times into physical confrontations between troupes of missionaries and angry mobs.¹⁸⁶ “If their religion is so good, why do they send it away to Utahland, California, and China, 7,000 miles distance”, inquired one pamphlet from the time.¹⁸⁷ Anti-Mormon sentiments mixed readily with rumors of the “White Slave Trade”, and many in Britain, dimly aware of the Mormons’ reputed penchant for polygamous marriages, jumped to the conclusion that the missionaries’ true aim was the procurement of additional wives. Rumors circulated widely that Mormon preachers were turning away male converts while courting women to join missionary outposts in the United States and East Asia. Constables and journalists alike scrutinized the Mormons in Britain but never managed to pin anything conclusive on the missionaries.¹⁸⁸ In San Francisco, meanwhile, the German consul observed numerous Mormon “sendlings” bound for Germany and other European countries to solicit converts and advised that the police keep the missionaries under close surveillance.¹⁸⁹

Fraud was an unavoidable consequence of mass migration on the scale experienced by Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Few historians have picked up on the prevalence of migration fraud around 1900, perhaps because the archival sources are so different from those ordinarily consulted by migration historians. Yet shady labor recruiters had an outsized influence on how places like Latin America were perceived by the European public and contributed to the widespread villainization of shipping companies and legitimate emigration agencies. Although quantifying migration fraud is impossible, it is clear that most perpetrators were never apprehended or convicted of a crime. Nonetheless, authorities in Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the United Kingdom did occasionally succeed in putting fraudulent recruiters on trial.

Agents in Court

For the enterprising European grifter, scamming migrants was a good gig. The odds of getting caught were low, especially if the migrants went overseas leaving no

¹⁸⁵ TNA MT 9/822. *The Whisperer*, July 6th, 1907.

¹⁸⁶ Malcolm R. Thorp, “The Mormon Peril’: The Crusade against the Saints in Britain, 1910-1914,” *Journal of Mormon History* 2 (1975): 69-88.

¹⁸⁷ TNA MT 9/822. “Whispers to All: New Emigration Scheme Sailing Under Secret Colours”, March 18th, 1907.

¹⁸⁸ The investigation files do speak to the exoticism of Mormonism in Britain around 1900. One report describes an unusual sect preaching from a mysterious prayerbook, a copy of which is enclosed in the file—it turns out that the tome is none other than the *Book of Mormon*.

¹⁸⁹ BArch R 901/29678. Reichskanzler to Senat der freien und Hansestadt Hamburg, June 3rd, 1905.

victims to testify to a crime. Penalties were also incongruously lenient given the level of political and police concern with migration fraud. Even prolific fraudsters subjected to lengthy trials often skated with modest fines and prison sentences reckoned in weeks if not days. Nevertheless, authorities across Europe brought numerous migrant recruiters, both “legitimate” and fraudulent, to trial. The court proceedings are one of the best sources available for understanding the operation of migrant recruitment networks. They are also a virtually unstudied source.

The only scholarly account of a trial available in English is Tara Zahra’s work on the events of 1889 in Oświęcim, then part of Habsburg Galicia, in which some sixty-five Jewish shipping agents were put on trial.¹⁹⁰ Across Eastern Europe the rapid onset of mass emigration during the 1880s raised the specter of national decline and even extinction on native soil, and in the Habsburg monarchy in particular sent nationalist activists into a panic at the prospect of losing demographic ground to rival nationalities. Amid the fervor, nationalists and state officials alike were more than willing to attribute the exodus to scapegoats rather than admit that dreadful living conditions were to blame. Above all their suspicions fell upon the Jews, whose frequent employment as shipping agents was more the result of social discrimination foreclosing other professional avenues than unusual avarice or a lack of national sentiment. It is this projection of social ills—including transatlantic migration—onto the Jews that most occupies Zahra’s keen analysis. Incisive though her account of what may have amounted to a show trial is, Zahra is fundamentally disinterested in the question of the agents’ guilt. For her the Oświęcim trial is an episode in which the social anxieties stirred by mass emigration crystallized. Although the antisemitic rancor of Oświęcim was severely misplaced, widespread suspicion among European populations of emigration agents was hardly unfounded. Agents in the employ of shipping companies, foreign powers, or as freelance conmen perpetrated crimes of astounding variety and number.

Britain, Germany, and Austria-Hungary each brought agents to trial, but did so within very different political frames. And these national patterns of migration politics shaped the ways in which migrant recruiters were prosecuted in each country. The politics of emigration in the Habsburg monarchy were marked by fierce interethnic conflict, of which antisemitism was just a single facet. The democratization of the Empire after 1900 raised the stakes of emigration, as the demographic strength of each nationality became a source of political power. As in so many other aspects of Austro-Hungarian politics, the key fault lines in conflicts over migration were national. This differed markedly from Germany, where sectoral conflict was paramount. Even after the German Conservative Party embraced political anti-Semitism during the 1890s, only partly from conviction and partly in an effort to head off populist insurgents, conservative organs and parliamentarians never linked the detested emigration to Jews. Behind the swarms of emigration agents that had fanned out across the Prussian countryside, the conservatives perceived the hand of the big shipping companies, which, it was believed, fomented migration without regard for the consequences for the agricultural sector. Migration in Germany thus never became an object of mass politics as did imperialism or naval construction. Battles over migration policy were instead fought out in the ministerial bureaucracy and in the legislature, venues in which sectoral

¹⁹⁰ Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: Norton, 2016), 23-64.

lobbying was most effective. In Britain, the politics of migration were, as was so often the case, far more placid than on the Continent. London enjoyed a unique advantage in that a significant share of emigrants made for British possessions and thus made the empire more powerful. Compounded by the fact that no significant British economic or ideological grouping stood to lose much from emigration, all of the major sources of conflict over migration were defused. Indeed, Britain even permitted labor recruiters from the white settler colonies to operate in the country, prosecuting only true conmen, chiefly from Latin America.

It is somewhat ironic, then, that the British National Archives contain the most complete trial records, including verbatim transcripts of trial proceedings. The 1914 case of *Rex v. Hetherington* was more typical of the trials of emigration agents than were the events in Oświęcim. Frederick Hetherington was the proprietor of an emigration agency on the Strand, in London, accused of tricking seven British workers into migrating to Argentina with false promises of high wages and guaranteed employment.¹⁹¹ Ads in major British papers including the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* read “Buenos Ayres, £7; free board on arrival five days and work found by State Labour Bureau. Hetherington’s, 161a, Strand.” Respondents got a packet of pamphlets bearing the imprimatur of the Argentine consulate, indicating that immigrants received free boarding, a guaranteed job in an appropriate trade, and transportation to the job site. Furthermore, the materials suggested that no knowledge of Spanish was necessary to get around and work in Buenos Aires.

When the seven plaintiffs in the case arrived in Buenos Aires aboard a Royal Holland Lloyd steamer, conditions were rather different than promised. The craftsmen reported calling at the Labour Bureau once and sometimes twice per day, for weeks on end, and receiving only rejections. In the meantime, the five days of free lodging ran out and the complainants were forced to support themselves in a foreign country without work or income. Nor was English widely spoken, as the Englishmen had been led to believe. Eventually, all seven men gave up and filed complaints with the British Consul, which repatriated the men as victims of a scam. Representative of the British Emigrants’ Information Office confronted Mr. Hetherington in his office on the Strand, where he deflected the charge of misleading migrants by claiming that many who departed for parts of the British Empire found themselves destitute, and that many who went to Argentina did alright. It was therefore not his fault that these migrants had failed to find work, and anyway, if he did not sell them tickets somebody else would have. Hetherington blew off the warning and continued to advertise guaranteed jobs in the Argentine Republic.¹⁹²

Hetherington was brought up on charges of violating section 24 of the Merchant Shipping Act of 1906, which read that “If any person, by any false representation, fraud, or false pretense, induces or attempts to induce any person to emigrate, or to engage a steerage passage in any ship, he shall on each offence be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding fifty pounds, or to imprisonment with or without hard labour for a period not exceeding three months.”¹⁹³ Unlike the events in Oświęcim, this was not a show trial. The prosecutor called a parade of witnesses whose damning testimony left no

¹⁹¹ TNA MT 9/936. “Rex v. Hetherington: Verbatim Note of the Proceedings Before the Chief Magistrate at Bow Street, February-March 1914”

¹⁹² Ibid., 7.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 1.

doubt of Hetherington's guilt. The agent had placed countless ads promising migrants a better life in Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, and India. The travail of seven craftsmen shipped to Buenos Aires under false pretenses had initiated the trial, but in the course of the testimonies it became clear that Hetherington had fraudulently sent hundreds of men to any number of destinations.

Buried in one of the pamphlets distributed by Hetherington was the advice "The best chances of employment are, of course, for those who can speak some Spanish."¹⁹⁴ Other passages indicated that job prospects for immigrants were better in the countryside than in Buenos Aires. The defense zeroed in on these passages to prove that Hetherington's alleged "victims" really ought to have known better and were fools for taking at face value the promise of a job in Argentina. As witness after witness described the decision to travel to Argentina for work, and the subsequent impossibility of finding a job, the trial came to hinge on the issue of false advertising. Did Frederick Hetherington maliciously and knowingly deceive clients? Or were the migrants themselves to blame for failing to read the fine print?

In Britain, the Emigrants' Information Office was tasked with alerting prospective emigrants to criminal recruiters and providing information on the various destination countries. In the course of *Rex v. Hetherington*, the competence of the Office was repeatedly called into question by the prosecution. Among the witnesses called by the prosecution was Terence Charles Macnaghten, chair of the Emigrants' Information Office, who testified that Frederick Hetherington was among the worst migration fraudsters in the country. But then why, asked the prosecutor, did the Office do so little to stop Mr. Hetherington? Macnaghten deflected by stating that the Office had taken out ads warning against emigration to Argentina but had not taken any special steps to ensure that Hetherington was aware of the heightened scrutiny. Only later did agents of the Office pay a visit to Hetherington, presenting to him documents proving that British migrants to Argentina almost invariably ended up destitute. Hetherington blew off the warning and continued to send British migrants to Argentina.

With damning evidence piling up, Frederick Hetherington took the stand, adopting the tried-and-true legal strategy of claiming not to remember any of the plaintiffs. Hetherington also denied responsibility for the lying pamphlets, which were supplied to him by the Royal Holland Lloyd shipping company. He had no stake in any particular destination and was simply an emigration broker, a middleman who was blameless if a migrant's voyage should go awry. Hetherington did confess to sending approximately 600 people to Argentina during 1912 and 1913 but continued to pin blame for the ordeal on the Royal Holland Lloyd.¹⁹⁵

Before the Magistrate announced the verdict, he summarized the charges:

"The summons against the defendant charges him with having induced persons to emigrate by the fall representation, to the Argentine [*sic*], that they would be found State-aided work. Mr. Raeburn very properly pointed out that in order that the defendant should be convicted, it must be proved first of all that he induced Mr. Wright—I will take Mr. Wright's case here as the type of the others—to emigrate or to go to the Argentine Republic, and, secondly, that the inducement

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 17.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 50.

was by a representation, and that that representation was false, and lastly, that it was false within the knowledge of the defendant.”¹⁹⁶

By comparison with other cases, the verdict handed down was harsh. The court ordered Frederick Hetherington to pay a fine of £120, which amounts to more than £17,000 in 2024 British Pounds Sterling, with failure to pay resulting in two months imprisonment.

The Contradictions of Globalization

On the eve of the First World War in 1914, the tide of illegal labor recruitment activity in Europe was at an all-time high. Uncommon prosecutions of agents like Hetherington aside, police from London to Budapest were overwhelmed, unable to make inroads against the swelling ranks of agents representing dozens of states and territories not to mention hundreds of individual enterprises. The headquarters to which these agents answered were located overseas, beyond the reach of European law enforcement, while steamship lines with operations transcending the political jurisdiction of any state were complicit in numerous recruitment programs. There was, quite simply, very little that European authorities could do, at least until the First World War and its aftermath ushered in a dramatic reorganization of the international border and passport regime. Put differently, European officials faced a crisis of unauthorized migration, though one very different than the European Union is confronting today. The problem of “illegal emigration” in fact says a great deal about the global political and economic order around 1900.

If the first wave of globalization could be described in a word it would be “imperial”. Before 1914 the political scaffolding of the global economy was the system of European and American empires, which consisted both of formal colonies and informal, economic colonies.¹⁹⁷ Although technically independent, states like Argentina, for example, developed as extractive, export economies owing entirely to British capital. The flow of goods and cash across the globe thus assumed a hub-and-spoke pattern with Europe and, to a lesser extent the United States, at the center, exporting capital and finished goods and importing raw materials and foodstuffs. The scale of the financial outflows from Europe during these years was nothing short of extraordinary. In 1910, “7.4 percent of British gross domestic product (GDP, a measure of a society’s total production) was invested overseas each year, and accumulated total British foreign investment amounted to 53 percent of GDP.”¹⁹⁸ The overwhelming majority of European, particularly British, foreign investment found its way to the temperate and resource-rich settler states of the Americas and the Antipodes, precisely those states which were responsible for virtually all labor recruitment activity in Europe. This was no accident.

The quickening tempo of labor recruitment in Europe in the years before 1914 was a rebound effect of overseas investment in the settler states, which were consequently growing at a faster pace than the natural increase in population could

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 57.

¹⁹⁷ Informal, economic imperialism is most famously examined in John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” *The Economic History Review* 6, no. 1 (1953): 1-15.

¹⁹⁸ Dickinson, *The World in the Long Twentieth Century*, 42.

sustain. By 1913, Australia had a higher GDP per capita than Britain itself, while Argentina had surpassed Germany and France.¹⁹⁹ It is little wonder, then, that these economies were generating excessive demand for labor, and began looking abroad to supply it. The army of immigrant headhunters which descended upon Europe in the late nineteenth century was thus a peculiar kind of imperial blowback, a movement to correct the labor market disequilibrium engendered by monumental capital exports. Put differently, Europe was exporting demand for labor, which, given the racist immigration policies of the white settler states, could only be met in Europe itself. One irony of this state of affairs is that the European states which bore the brunt of the illegal recruitment, like Austria-Hungary and Italy, furnished only a small portion of total overseas investment.

The deluge of unwelcome labor recruiters is just one example of the ways in which globalization around 1900 was rife with conflict and contradiction. There was, for example, considerable friction between the labor demands of the global

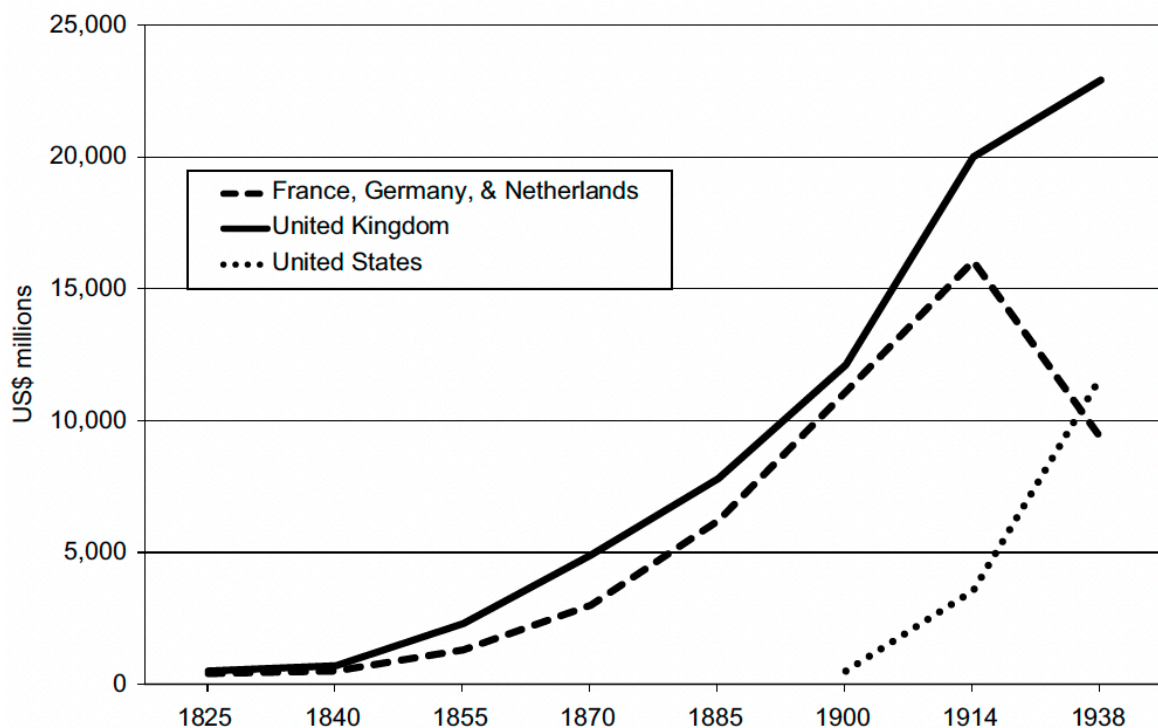


Figure 5. Outward Foreign Direct Investment Stocks by Origin, 1825-1938. *Source:* Edward Ross Dickinson, *The World in the Long Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 41.

¹⁹⁹ Maddison Project Database, version 2020 by Jutta Bolt and Jan Luiten van Zanden (2020), “Maddison style estimates of the evolution of the world economy. A new 2020 update.”

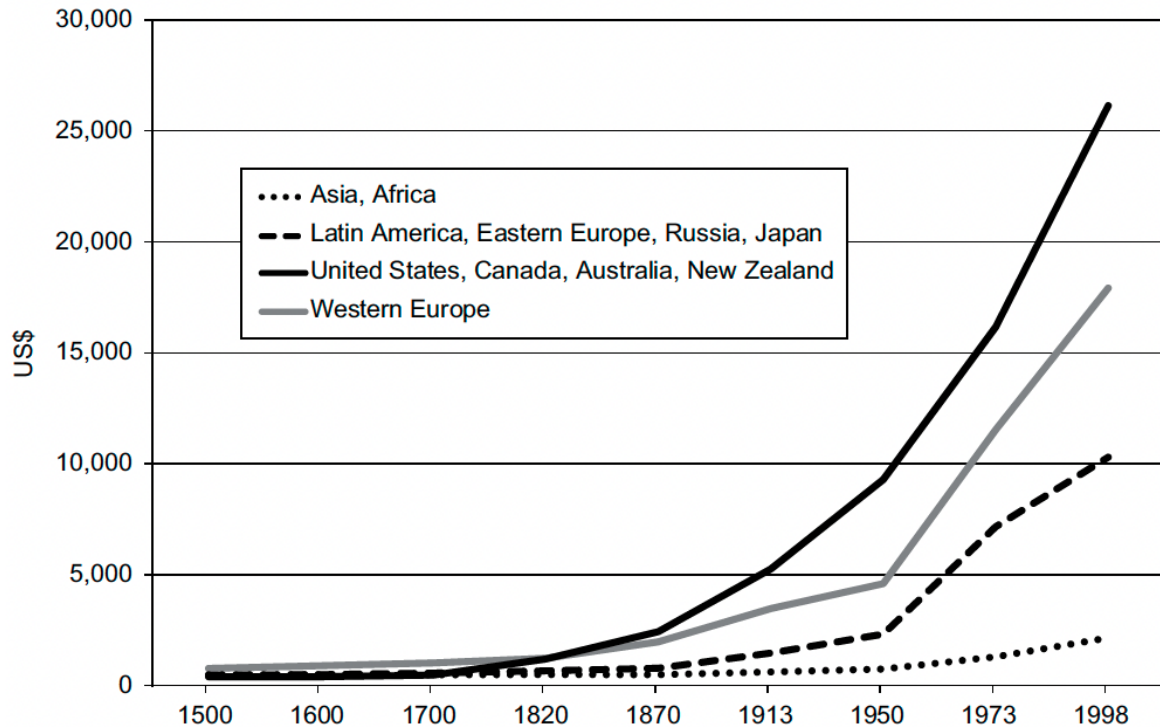


Figure 6. Per Capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by Region, 1500-1998. *Source:* Edward Ross Dickinson, *The World in the Long Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 46.

capitalist economy and the nation-building projects underway in nineteenth-century Europe. Sebastian Conrad has written compellingly on the relationship between globalization and the nation in nineteenth-century Germany and beyond, arguing that, far from eroding the nation-state and tempering interstate conflicts, globalization tended to strengthen the national idea and thus sharpen conflicts.²⁰⁰ Modern Chinese nationalism, for example, was in no small part a product of the miserable treatment of emigrant laborers in the United States and the British Empire. Increasing interaction sharpens the perception of difference, in other words. Labor recruitment was no exception. Nationalists across Europe mobilized against the recruiters, if not against emigration in general, viewing them as parasitic leeches on the national body. The inculcation by nationalist activists of national sentiment among the peasants who made up the bulk of emigrants from much of Eastern Europe was seen as a kind of inoculation against unpatriotic emigration. But if global economic integration invigorated the national idea in Europe, this should not obscure the ways in which it undercut sovereign power, including the capacity to effectively regulate migration. As departures reached new heights, emigration control rose to the top of the political agenda for those economic sectors negatively affected. The chapter that follows examines one such political campaign, as European landlords fought to arrest mass emigration and secure for themselves a cheap and compliant labor force.

²⁰⁰ Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Chapter 3: Against Globalization: The Agrarian Campaign to Halt Emigration from Europe

“The stripping of labor from the eastern provinces is among the most difficult questions of our time”, declared the Graf Hans von Kanitz, a representative of the German Conservative party and himself the proprietor of an East Prussian estate. The occasion, the 23rd of February 1897, was a debate in the Prussian Diet over the Ems-Dortmund Canal, then nearing completion. When finished, the canal would link the Rhenish cities of Dortmund, Essen, Duisburg, and Bochum to the North Sea, significantly widening the arteries through which the Ruhr’s industrial exports flowed onto world markets. It was predicted, according to Kanitz, that the canal would increase coal exports by around 2 million tons. Kanitz perceived correctly that economic development in western Germany was fueling emigration from the eastern provinces. “Who”, he queried, “should mine these 2 million tons of coal? The existing workers in the coalfields can’t do it; so, then the workers will have to be brought in from other provinces, and the east, at the expense of which Westphalian mining has already reached its heyday, would lose even more workers than before... In 1890 there were 13,800 workers in Westphalia hailing from the province of Posen; today that number is believed to be over 100,000!”

Kanitz is best known as the architect of the protectionist “Kanitz Plan”, which would have established a state monopoly on grain imports and fixed prices well above the world market average. As evidenced by Kanitz’s remarks on the Ems-Dortmund Canal, however, his anxieties over global market integration extended well beyond the price of bread.²⁰¹ Equally ominous in his view was the internationalization of labor markets, which, if not truly global in scope, were coming to encompass the economies of the north Atlantic. The result was a staggering exodus, numbering in the millions, from low-wage regions like eastern Germany to more remunerative industrial employment in the western provinces or in North America. In short, the decline in grain prices was accompanied by an exodus of the rural population, driving up wages and squeezing agrarians on both sides of the balance sheet. For agrarians like Kanitz, the “rural flight”, or *Landflucht*, and the fall in agricultural prices were two sides of the same coin—indeed, both came about through Germany’s increasing entanglement in world

²⁰¹ Recent work on agrarian protectionism includes Rita Aldenhoff-Hübinger, *Agrarpolitik und Protektionismus: Deutschland und Frankreich im Vergleich, 1879-1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002); Shearer Davis Bowman, *Masters and Lords: Mid-Nineteenth-Century U.S. Planters and Prussian Junkers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Oliver Grant, “Few better farmers in Europe?: Productivity, Change, and Modernization in East-Elbian Agriculture, 1870-1913”, in *Wilhelminism and Its Legacies: German Modernities, Imperialism, and the Meanings of Reform, 1890-1930*, eds. Geoff Eley and James Retallack (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 34-50; Oliver Grant, *Migration and Inequality in Germany, 1870-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Cornelius Torp, *The Challenges of Globalization: Economy and Politics in Germany, 1860-1914* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014); Cornelius Torp, “The ‘Coalition of Rye and Iron’ under the Pressure of Globalization: A Reinterpretation of Germany’s Political Economy before 1914”, *Central European History* 43 (2010): 401-427. Classic works include Alexander Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany* [1943] (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Hans Rosenberg, *Große Depression und Bismarckzeit: Wirtschaftsablauf, Gesellschaft und Politik in Mitteleuropa* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1967); Hans-Jürgen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preußischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich 1893-1914* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1975).

markets.²⁰² Kanitz recognized that workers in western Germany earned higher wages but insisted that the interests of agriculture must be weighed against the desires of individual laborers. “I implore you gentlemen not to ignore the considerable economic shift this [emigration] is causing... If, with the aid of this canal the production of coal should grow... then I fear that the labor question will become even more difficult for us. In a sense... we [the agrarians] are the ones who will have to bear the costs of rapid growth in the coal industry, and we do not want that.”²⁰³

Germany’s landlords were not alone in what they regarded as the struggle to contain the corrosive effect of globalization upon agriculture. Across central and eastern Europe, commercial farmers mobilized not only to erect trade barriers, but to obstruct the emigration of rural laborers. In Russia, the aristocracy successfully prevented large-scale emigration from catching on among the peasantry, while tacitly allowing for the departure of millions of Jews and Poles. The Hungarian magnates, meanwhile, imposed bureaucratic hurdles in the path of would-be emigrants, particularly the Magyar peasants central Hungary. This chapter, however, is a case study of the German campaign for emigration restriction. The cause of anti-emigration in Germany is not interesting because it was successful; in fact, it was, compared to Hungary and Russia, an abject failure. No, what makes the German case so compelling is the ferocity of the political conflicts waged against emigration. Russia and Hungary were aristocratic polities through and through. When the nobility decreed that emigration be restricted, it promptly was. But Imperial Germany was a fundamentally liberal polity in which legislation needed to win the approval of a lower chamber elected via universal male suffrage. The Emigration Act which finally passed in 1897 was the culmination of twenty-five years of political struggle on the part of the German agricultural sector. This was a battle fought out in the press, on the floor of legislative chambers, and in ministerial backroom dealings; in other words, it left an ample paper trail.

Between the 1870s and 1890s, German agrarian organizations introduced measures designed to, among other things, legally curtail the right of free movement; reimpose quasi-feudal “servant ordinances”; hike rail fares on trains departing the agricultural districts; and to employ prison inmates as farmhands. The objective that agrarians pursued most doggedly, however, was the passage of a federal emigration law, which succeeded in 1897, with mixed results. The initial draft of the law was of dubious constitutionality, and to make it palatable to a parliamentary majority the agrarian German Conservative Party was forced to abandon key provisions limiting the freedom of the rural population to emigrate. It hardly mattered, however, because the late 1890s witnessed a resurgence in grain prices, which had been heavily depressed since the 1870s. With market conditions more favorable, higher labor costs no longer seemed to pose an existential threat. This was also when German landlords took to importing seasonal laborers from the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, who were both cheaper and more pliable than the Germans whom the agrarians had fought so hard to prevent from emigrating.

²⁰² On emigration and wage growth see O’Rourke and Williamson, *Globalization and History*. On emigration and the transformation of the German labor market, see Klaus J. Bade, *Land oder Arbeit? Transnationale und interne Migration im deutschen Nordosten vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Habilitationsschrift, Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1979).

²⁰³ *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Preußischen Hauses der Abgeordneten*, 1897. Bd. 2, 1132 (February 23rd, 1897).

To anyone following the German press or legislative proceedings during the 1890s, the emigration act is impossible to miss. Yet few historians have taken note of the law. One exception is Sebastian Conrad, who uses the law to frame a key argument in his study of globalization and nation-building in Imperial Germany.²⁰⁴ Conrad masterfully demonstrates how global processes like empire-building and labor migration shaped German national consciousness, but he mistakenly identifies the purpose of the 1897 law as the redirection of German emigrants to Latin America. This was a scheme hatched by nationalist activists who had no connection to the framers of the 1897 law, but fantasized about how it could be weaponized to divert migration away from the United States. In contrast, I draw on original archival sources detailing the conception and passage of the Emigration Act to show that its primary function was to interfere with emigration from the German east. I conclude by demonstrating that, far from fostering German colonialism, the emigration act threw up legal hurdles in the way of successful overseas settlements.

Emigration control was not a novel proposition in nineteenth-century Germany, and indeed it has been far more central to the history of the region than agricultural protectionism. Since the fifteenth century, when Europe was still reeling from the Black Death, the sprawling imperial states east of the Elbe River had exported grain to the dynamic mercantile societies of western Europe. The fields of Prussia and Poland-Lithuania were tilled by serfs long after unfree labor systems had disappeared farther west. In fact, the so-called “second serfdom” did not hark back to some ancient custom but was a response to the commercial opportunities created by the development of the early-modern Atlantic economy.²⁰⁵ The agrarian campaign for emigration restriction which began in the 1870s needs to be understood as part of this longer history of “labor-repressive agriculture” in eastern Europe.²⁰⁶ Landed aristocrats in eastern Europe had first turned to serfdom because it was impossible to profitably export grain while paying a market wage to free laborers. The same strategy was at work from the 1870s onward, when east European commercial farmers turned to extra-market coercion to constrain labor costs. Reappraisals of other unfree labor regimes, like the slave economy of the Antebellum South in the United States, have arrived at similar conclusions. South Carolina planters and Prussian Junkers alike were shrewd capitalists growing cash crops under conditions of labor scarcity. Both groups were likewise ardent defenders of free trade, largely because their businesses were so export dependent.²⁰⁷ This sensitivity to global market conditions meant that anxieties over labor scarcity never really went away. Crises recurred in the 1920s and 1930s, to the point that even the Nazi government was still worrying about “labor flight” from the countryside, some sixty years after German landlords began trying to arrest emigration.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation*.

²⁰⁵ The classic analysis of the “second serfdom” is still Jerome Blum, “The Rise of Serfdom in Eastern Europe”, *American Historical Review* 62, no. 4 (July 1957): 807-836.

²⁰⁶ Perhaps the most famous examination of this pattern of “labor-repressive agriculture” in eastern Europe is Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

²⁰⁷ Hanna Schissler, “The Junkers: Notes on the Social and Historical Significance of the Agrarian Elite in Prussia”, in Robert G. Moeller, ed., *Peasants and Lords in Modern Germany: Recent Studies in Agricultural History* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 34.

²⁰⁸ BArch NS 5/VI 4590. Dr. Griffion Stierling, *Die Landflucht und der Einsatz von Stadtjugend in der Landwirtschaft* (Berlin: Otto Elsner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1937).

Indeed, if mass emigration from Europe produced any losers it was the agricultural sector. Among the winners were the workers who absconded to more profitable employment in the cities. The labor-repressive model of agricultural production failed to meet the challenge of globalized, liberal capitalism. The combination of the right of free movement and the steamship thrust European landlords into direct wage competition with employers overseas, not to mention the industrialists of the Ruhr. With the mobility of (white) laborers unconstrained by political boundaries, wages were permitted to converge across sectors and countries. This mass departure from low-wage employment in the European countryside, in conjunction with the decline in agricultural prices commencing in the 1870s, powerfully undermined the political and economic power of the landed elite in Europe. In Britain the aristocracy was virtually eliminated as a decisive political force.²⁰⁹ It was once *de rigueur* for social scientists to understand the political destruction of the landed aristocracy as a prerequisite for the emergence of liberal and democratic modernity.²¹⁰ While it is true that this line of argument was excessively teleological and relied to a considerable extent on an idealized version of liberalism, refutations have tended to understate the enormity of the social and political transformation that accompanied the downfall of aristocratic elites.²¹¹ This transition to urban, mobile, and individualistic societies was to a significant extent the result of mass migration and by extension the freedom of movement.²¹²

Before proceeding, it is necessary to comment briefly on the “Junkers” around whom a conceptual fog still lingers. Any historian who writes on the machinations of the Prussian landed elite runs the risk of being labeled a *Sonderweg* apologist. For, the historiography of Germany’s agrarian politics has only recently crept from under the shadow of Germany’s “special path”, or *Sonderweg*, in which the protectionist outlook of the Junker class was interpreted as a defense of feudal relations against liberal, capitalist modernization. Analogous arguments have been made about the landed elites across much of central and eastern Europe.²¹³ More recent studies have argued that the Junkers—a group defined primarily by ownership of fungible *Rittergut* estates that was nearly 50% non-noble by 1900²¹⁴—were among the most entrepreneurial of continental Europe’s agrarian capitalists.²¹⁵ But despite modernized cultivation techniques, fertilizers, and diversification into products like beet sugar, the Junkers simply could not compete with America’s massively capitalized farmers nor with rivals in the Russian

²⁰⁹ This is the argument of David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

²¹⁰ For a classic expression of this argument in the German case, see Ralf Dahrendorf, *Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland* (Munich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1965).

²¹¹ David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

²¹² Development economists who study the Global South have long recognized the centrality of human freedom for economic development, as did classical economists like Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo. See Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1999).

²¹³ Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Across much of the twentieth century, landholding patterns were a historical prime mover for Marxist and liberal social scientists alike. Although many of these accounts are hopelessly reductionist, relations of land ownership remain a promising line of inquiry for those who wish to understand patterns of class and sectoral conflict.

²¹⁴ Dominic Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe, 1815-1914* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 89.

²¹⁵ See Grant, “No better farmers in Europe?”

Empire whose labor bills were a fraction of their own. Given their competitive disadvantage, it is clear that Junkers were led to champion protectionism by rational calculation of self-interest and not a desire to preserve feudal structures. Indeed, such structures had long since ceased to exist, although forms of contractual, temporary servitude did persist. To this historiographical note should be added a final qualification. The political, social, and economic landscape of eastern Germany—not to mention eastern Europe—was more diverse than depictions of *Junkerdom* would suggest, encompassing commercial farmers of variegated social origin and political outlook, as well as a multiplicity of administrative arrangements, labor relations, and agricultural techniques.²¹⁶ If the region was host to countless divergent interests and impulses, however, then the issues of trade policy and labor migration nonetheless evinced a remarkable level of policy alignment, verging on unanimity by the 1890s.

Agrarian Anti-Globalization in Comparative Perspective

Although this chapter presents a case study of anti-emigration politics in Germany, emigration restriction was never a strictly or even predominantly German preoccupation, and by the First World War virtually all European states had passed laws regulating the flow of migrants. The first such law appeared in France in 1860, followed by the Netherlands in 1861, Belgium in 1876, Switzerland in 1888, Germany in 1897, Italy in 1901, Hungary in 1903, and Spain in 1907.²¹⁷ The making of emigration laws was often an exercise in imitation, partly because existing early-modern legislation circumscribing emigration offered so little guidance. When Austrian officials went to draft a law in 1907, for example, they compiled a volume surveying all existing emigration legislation to serve as a template.²¹⁸ All of these laws operated in a similar manner, reflecting the development of a common legislative approach to mass migration. For example, they tended to single out for regulation private companies like shippers and emigration agencies, and in this way resembled the occupational safety standards, sanitation rules, and public health initiatives that became commonplace across the European continent in these years. At the core of each law was a licensing system which required shipping lines and, in some cases, emigration agencies to register with the state. France's early and comparatively rudimentary law only required that shippers obtain permits from the Minister of Agriculture, Trade, and Public Works, and levied fines as low as 50 Franks on uncredentialed operations.²¹⁹ The German law in comparison was quite sophisticated, calling for the issuance of permits to shippers and agencies alike in exchange for security deposits of 1,000 and 50,000 Marks respectively. Steamship lines and their agencies were furthermore obliged to keep records on every

²¹⁶ On the diversity of East Elbia in particular, see William W. Hagen, *Ordinary Prussians: Brandenburg Junkers and Villagers, 1500-1840* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Patrick Wagner, *Bauern, Junker und Beamte: Lokale Herrschaft und Partizipation im Ostelbien des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005).

²¹⁷ For the text of these laws, see Franz Ritter von Srbik, *Die Auswanderungsgesetzgebung: Die Grundzüge der Europäischen Auswanderungsgesetze* (Wien: Der k.k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1911). For an overview of European emigration laws, see also James Davenport Whelpley, "Control of Emigration in Europe", *The North American Review* 180:583 (1905): 856-867.

²¹⁸ Srbik, *Die Auswanderungsgesetzgebung*.

²¹⁹ Srbik, *Die Auswanderungsgesetzgebung*, vol. 2, 181-182.

migrant that passed through their care, and to turn over the reports to police for regular inspections. Another near universal provision was a ban on the recruitment of emigrants. European subjects were generally free to migrate anywhere they wished, but any attempt by destination countries to entice or otherwise redirect would-be migrants was strictly forbidden. In 1907 an Australian labor recruitment manual noted that the only places where it remained legal to recruit immigrants were Greece and Turkey.²²⁰ In some cases, laws were designed to combat specific forms of malfeasance. The Spanish law, for example, was a direct response to the growing number of young, single men who accepted seasonal agricultural employment in South America, where, in contrast to North America, semi-coercive labor contracts along with outdated and unsanitary ships were not uncommon.²²¹

The wave of emigration laws promulgated by European legislatures around the turn of the century also imposed a near-uniform set of health and safety requirements on the shipping companies which conveyed migrants to the Americas and beyond. During the 1840s and 1850s migrant ships had acquired a dreadful reputation as incubators of disease and filth, and it was common for a ship to arrive at its destination with fewer passengers than it had set out with.²²² The term “coffin ship”, which is associated with Irish migrants fleeing the Potato Famine during the 1840s, is an apt one, even if the phrase was actually coined much later. It did not help that in the age of sail it took anywhere from forty days to three months to cross the Atlantic; steamships cut the average voyage from the British Isles to New York to just over a week. By the late nineteenth century conditions aboard migrant ships had improved considerably. Regulations governed ventilation and sanitation; every passenger was allotted a certain cubic footage; food quality was closely monitored; and every vessel was required to have at least one doctor on board. There were violations, to be sure, as when a Canadian shipper used the same ships to carry migrants and cattle, but such episodes were the exception.²²³ By 1900 deaths from unnatural causes aboard transatlantic steamships had become a rarity.

Superficial similarities masked important differences among the laws regulating emigration on the European continent, however. Each law reflected the interests of dominant political and economic factions. Some laws were neo-mercantilist, intended to nurture infant shipping industries or simply siphon emigrant traffic from neighboring states. The Belgian and French laws were of the latter type, engineered in part to attract migrants from nearby Bremen and Hamburg.²²⁴ Likewise, after 1888, Italy’s modernizing elite overruled the landlords and local notables—politically much weaker than their German counterparts—and pioneered an emigration policy that financed

²²⁰ BArch R 901/30537. “Report on the Question of European Emigration to Australia”, Intelligence Department New South Wales, 1907.

²²¹ R.A. Gomez, “Spanish Immigration to the United States”, *The Americas* 19:1 (1962): 67-69; Srbik, *Die Auswanderungsgesetzgebung*, vol. 2, 241.

²²² Raymond L. Cohn, “Mortality on Immigrant Voyages to New York, 1836-1853”, *The Journal of Economic History* 44, no. 2 (June, 1984): pp. 289-300.

²²³ TNA MT 9/283/M10961/86. The “Beaver Line of Steamers” was a subsidiary of the Canada Shipping Company Limited, used the same ships to carry migrants westbound and cattle eastbound, offering free passage to livestock tenders. This violated all health and safety standards and was the subject of a British investigation.

²²⁴ Whelpley, “Control of Emigration in Europe”, 860.

merchant fleet expansion with migrant fares,²²⁵ and balanced the Italian trade deficit with remittances from the United States.²²⁶ After 1900 the Italian Emigration Commissariat weaponized the licensing system to restrict access to ports like Genoa and Naples and thus divert migrants away from German and British steamships and onto Italian ones.²²⁷ Hungary's law, in contrast, was typical of eastern Europe, aiming to obstruct the emigration of the Magyar peasantry, who began to depart in large numbers around 1903. The big landlords perceived correctly that emigration exerted upward pressure on wages and improved the bargaining position of laborers and made no secret of their intention to arrest the exodus. In 1906, the Hungarian Royal Commissioner of Emigration flatly conceded that the "aim and purpose" of a recent law was to "hold the subjects of Hungary to their own soil."²²⁸ Around the same time the Minister of Agriculture Ignác Darányi instructed functionaries to "do everything within their legal means to block emigration and act against emigration agents with all possible force of the law."²²⁹ But as with most aspects of Habsburg history, nationalist politics suffused emigration policy. The disproportionate emigration of Slavic minorities convinced Hungarian authorities not to interfere excessively, because emigration was accelerating the Magyarization of the state.²³⁰ The Austrian half of the empire never passed an emigration law, seemingly because the two most dominant and well-organized nationalities, the Germans and the Czechs, emigrated in such modest numbers. As long as the status quo entailed the diminution of rival nationalities like the Poles, the Austrian elite were content not to meddle with emigration.

In sum, the emigration laws in effect across Europe around 1900 served a variety of different interests. In societies where the landed elite was politically predominant, emigration laws were a stalking horse for agrarian interests, harnessing the fashionable language of progressive social reform to discipline the rural labor force. Where the landlords were politically weak or non-existent, it was parliamentary liberals who promulgated emigration laws, which tended to aid commercial interests, and which remained at least nominally tethered to progressive social reform. This latter pattern was characteristic of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy. The bastions of emigration restriction were Hungary and Russia, each of which had long relied upon coercive labor relations in agriculture to produce grain for export to western Europe. St. Petersburg allayed fears of a peasant exodus by banning emigration outright, while turning a blind eye to the departure of countless Jews and Poles. Shackled by a liberal

²²⁵ Marco Soresina, "Italian emigration policy during the Great Migration Age, 1888-1919: the interaction of emigration and foreign policy", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 21:5 (2016): 725. The circumstances of Italian and German unification go a long way in explaining the divergent trajectories of the two countries migration policies. Germany was unified under Prussian hegemony, resulting in a state in which the landed elite played an outsize role in politics. Italy, meanwhile, was unified by Piedmont, which did have a class of prosperous farmers, but excluded the less efficient big estates of the Mezzogiorno.

²²⁶ Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations*, 103.

²²⁷ See StAB A.3.I.2 – 126. Office of the Chancellor to the Senate of the Free and Hanseatic City of Bremen, April 29th, 1900; UoLSCA D42/C1/1/47 A.C.F. Henderson to A.A. Booth, January 31st, 1920.

²²⁸ Baron Louis De Levay, "The Hungarian Emigration Law", *The North American Review* 182:590 (1906): 122.

²²⁹ Quoted from Katalin Straner, "Emigration Agents and the Agency of the Urban Press: Approaches to Transatlantic Migration in Hungary, 1880s-1914", *Journal of Migration History* 2:2 (2016): 353.

²³⁰ István Kornél Vida, "Death of a Nation? Debating the Great Transatlantic Emigration from Hungary, 1900-1914", *Hungarian Cultural Studies* 7 (2015), 128.

constitution, the Magyar landlords were forced to pursue more creative means of halting emigration, relying heavily on bureaucratic harassment and the gendarmerie.

Imperial Germany does not fit neatly into the liberal-mercantile or agrarian-restrictive patterns of emigration legislation. The Imperial German Reich unified in 1871 in fact contained both types of political economy within its borders. The principal industrial region, the Ruhr, lay atop a coal field that swept from Pas-de-Calais in France, through Belgium, and into western Germany—a transnational region that is still today the most densely populated area in western Europe. The provinces of East Prussia, West Prussia, Pomerania, and Posen, in contrast, had social and economic structure more typical of eastern Europe.²³¹ Agriculture dominated the region which was devoid of any major cities or industrial centers apart from Königsberg. This deeply divided political economy became a source of vicious sectoral conflict as Germany became increasingly entangled with global markets at the end of the nineteenth century. Pitting agriculture and heavy manufacturing against shipping and export-oriented chemical and electrical industries, these conflicts over trade at times dominated German politics.²³² Emigration restriction was among the central issues in debates about globalization, which lasted from the 1870s until about 1900, when the price of grain on world markets began to climb and German farmers achieved historic rates of profit. The length and ferocity of this struggle make Germany the optimal case study of agrarian anti-globalization.

The “Rural Labor Question” in Germany and Early Attempts to Resolve It

If one is familiar at all with German agrarian politics, it is no doubt with the protectionist campaigns of the 1870s to the 1890s. Indeed, the premier historiographical debate on Imperial German politics—the *Sonderweg* debate—turned on the issue of tariffs protecting agriculture and heavy industry, the so-called “alliance of iron and rye”.²³³ The emergence of the *Landarbeiterfrage*—the “agricultural labor question”—predated the protectionist turn in German agrarian politics by about ten years, linked as it was to mass emigration rather than grain prices. In fact, until the end of the 1870s when grain prices began to tumble, most German agrarians were still acolytes of Richard Cobden and the doctrine of free trade, but their commitment to economic liberty was practical not principled and did not extend into the labor market. As soon as agricultural laborers began to depart in significant numbers, lured by the post-Civil War industrial boom then underway in the United States, German agrarians moved to arrest the exodus by any means necessary. Although the countryside was never as immobile as chroniclers of traditional society imagined, the new emigration signaled a radical departure from older forms of regional or inter-regional labor circulation.²³⁴ The

²³¹ On how the very different class structures and landholding patterns of western and eastern Europe came to be, see Robert Brenner, “Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe”, *Past & Present* 70 (Feb., 1976): pp. 30-75.

²³² See Torp, *The Challenges of Globalization*.

²³³ For background on this specific facet of the *Sonderweg* debate, see Torp, “The ‘Coalition of Iron and Rye’ under the Pressure of Globalization”.

²³⁴ Steve Hochstadt, “Migration and Industrialization in Germany, 1815-1977,” *Social Science History* 5, no. 4 (Fall 1981): 445-468. On the social transformation affected by emigration from the German east, see Klaus J. Bade, “German Emigration to the United States and Continental Immigration to Germany in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *Central European History* 13, no. 4 (December 1980): 348-377.

migrants were not coming back, and their absence effected a sharp rise in agricultural wages.

For the big commercial farmers, the emigration registered as a labor shortage of dramatic proportions. In actuality, eastern Germany never experienced a labor shortage in the sense of there being too few workers to till the fields and bring in the harvest. But the landlords had become accustomed to paying miserly wages, kept low by coercion, the absence of competing employers, and the surplus population on the land. Mass emigration tipped the scales in favor of the farmhands, and wages consequently shot up. In response, the Prussian Ministry of Agriculture organized a conference to “deliberate on the *Landarbeiterfrage*” between July and September 1873. It was probably no coincidence that the conference took place on the eve of the harvest, when the “labor shortage” would have been felt most acutely. Agrarian organizations were invited to submit proposals in advance of the meeting for the ministry to evaluate in terms of practicality and constitutionality.²³⁵ An excerpt from the preamble of the resulting policy brief gives some sense of the perceived gravity of the agricultural “crisis”:

We see ourselves at the outset of a great movement, which has now gripped the rural laborers; we see a gradual depopulation of numerous rural districts and the steady growth of demands from those who remain behind... which threatens [the landowners] with great losses and could perhaps lead to a complete transformation of the agricultural situation.²³⁶

The proposed remedies were various. A few plans aimed to entice emigrants into returning to East Elbia from the United States by promising higher wages. Ministry officials, unsurprisingly, deemed this approach impractical, speculating that any worker who returned from America must be somehow defective. The great majority of proposals, therefore, aimed to prevent emigration in the first place by laying down legal obstacles to easy departure.

By the time the conference actually took place in the late summer, the problem had solved itself, at least temporarily. The American economy was in the grips of the Great Depression of the 1870s, and international labor mobility ground to a halt. “As a result of the shrinkage of industrial production and the steep decline of emigration after 1873,” wrote Hans Rosenberg, “the rural labor supply was no longer depleted. Agricultural money wages, which under the pressure of industrial demand for labour had risen very intensely in the boom years of the early seventies, now ceased to advance.”²³⁷ For the better part of a decade agrarian demands for emigration-control fell silent. The uproar of the early 1870s is nevertheless essential to understanding what came later, for the 1873 conference resolutions furnished the blueprints for the policy offensives of the 1880s and 1890s. Three recurrent themes are worth singling out.

The first theme is the agrarians’ conception of employment not as an impersonal and contractual relationship, but as an extra-economic bond of loyalty and dependence. Agrarians understood that their farmhands stood to earn more in the mills and manufactories, but nonetheless tended to cast labor grievances as treason. This outlook

²³⁵ BArch 901/29655 “Denkschrift betreffend den Mangel an ländlichen Arbeitern.” May 1873.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Hans Rosenberg, “Political and Social Consequences of the Great Depression of 1873-1896 in Central Europe”, *The Economic History Review* 13, vol. 1/2 (1943): 65.

signified more than a taste for deference. Indeed, to grasp the agrarians' fixation on loyalty, as well as the distinction between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" emigration, one must first understand the multitude of employer-employee relations that persisted in Germany's eastern provinces. To describe these arrangements as "feudal" or "pre-capitalist" would be erroneous, but they were undoubtedly patrimonial and exhibited forms of coercion uncommon in even the most autocratic industrial settings. These included the right to strike and physically restrain some classes of servant. More common still was the *Inste* or *Instleute*, a form of tenancy especially prevalent in the northeast defined by the employment of farmhands' wives and children in the lord's household in exchange for a sliver of land on which to live. Ever a fierce critic of the Junkers, Max Weber wrote approvingly of the disappearance of *Inste* during the 1890s and their replacement by wage labor, a development he regarded as nothing less than the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Prussian agriculture.²³⁸ More precisely, the solidly capitalist landlords of the German east now had to contend with a competitive and interregional labor market. Because agrarians experienced the formation of a national labor market as a loss of control over workers, they directed their efforts at slowing or reversing such integration in order to retrench institutions like the *Inste*.

The second theme was an overriding concern with legality and constitutionalism. Although agrarians were perfectly content to trample over the spirit of the law, violations of its letter were regarded as unworkable within the liberal Imperial German polity. Specifically, the imperial constitution guaranteed the freedom to move about the country as well as to emigrate, the lone exceptions being for men between the ages of 17 and 25 still owing military service to the state, as well as those under criminal investigation.²³⁹ Recognizing the fundamental incompatibility of free movement with coercive labor contracts, the governments' jurists attempted to finesse the constitution, proposing a legal equivalence between public and private obligations. In essence, officials simply asserted that a private agreement like, say, a labor contract lasting several months, was legally equivalent to the public, military service requirement, and had to be completed before a migrant could lawfully depart. To enforce compliance, officials devised a clever means of sidestepping strictures against unlawful detention, while simultaneously shunting the cost of evasion onto shipping companies. The idea was for prospective emigrants to submit a form announcing the intention to leave—emphatically not a request for permission, just a notification—to the local police. Authorities would then publicize upcoming departures, allowing employers and creditors ample time to claim outstanding debts and labor obligations. Only when the mandatory waiting period was up would the police issue the emigrant a voucher—again, not a permit—that was required for embarkation in Hamburg or Bremen. If an emigrant

²³⁸ Max Weber, "Developmental tendencies in the situation of East Elbian rural labourers", trans. Keith Tribe, *Economy and Society* 8, vol. 2 (May 1979): 177-205. See also Cornelius Torp, *Max Weber und die preußischen Junker* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998).

²³⁹ The freedom of movement was long regarded as a fundamental pillar of liberal civilization, akin to free trade or the gold standard. It was only after WWI that the international system of free movement was dismantled. The classic analysis of the novel border and passport regime erected after WWI is John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); on the collapse of free movement within Europe see also Hannah Arendt's "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man", in Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1968).

did manage to slip away without first obtaining a voucher, then the contracting shipping company or emigration agent was financially liable for the outstanding debt. Officials argued that this convoluted system adhered to the constitution because its fundamental purpose was to “ensure legal certainty” rather than to interfere with the freedom to emigrate.²⁴⁰

The third theme was the targeting of shipping companies and their agents on the ground, which proved more tractable objects of regulatory oversight than the notoriously slippery migrants themselves. On practical grounds this was a sensible approach – it was far easier to bog down the conveyors of migrants in red tape than to circumscribe the constitutional liberty of individuals. But it also provided ideological cover for what was, undeniably, a policy of naked self-interest on the part of the agrarians. Going back to the 1840s and 1850s, shippers and their agents had acquired a reputation as grifters accused of enticing the gullible rural masses into emigration against their own best interests. Although largely unearned, negative epithets stuck because the narrative that shippers were responsible for emigration was a convenient diversion for so many of the powers that be. It permitted conservatives, for example, to dismiss liberal and socialist criticisms of German society by arguing that emigration was not a symptom of social conditions but instead resulted from the machinations of shippers. This narrative appears to have been particularly widespread in the United States after the turn of the century, where it underpinned nativist assertions that the arrival of millions of supposedly unassimilable Slavs and Catholics was engineered artificially, thus legitimating discriminatory restrictions. And, of course, it suited German landlords who could thereby absolve themselves of blame for the emigration while directing fire upon the hated shipping companies, which were, at the very least, integral to the processes of market integration that agrarians so detested. It is not always easy to distinguish between true believers in shippers’ guilt and opportunists, chiefly because there were so many of both, but agrarians were nevertheless committed to maintaining the veracity of the narrative.

These three themes—the equivalence of public and private commitments, the use of circuitous but constitutional legal instruments, and the accusation that shippers caused emigration—would resurface as soon as emigration from the countryside once again became a contentious issue during the 1880s.

The Winding Road to the Emigration Act, 1882-1897

Fifteen years separated the drafting of the first emigration bill in the early 1880s and its final passage in 1897. The first iteration of the bill that became the 1897 Emigration Act was born in the Interior Ministry in 1882. At this time no secret was made of the law’s purpose. As one official explained, what prompted the government to act was a renewed surge in emigration combined with “a lively agitation that has arisen, especially in agricultural circles, which has come to light in petitions, in the resolutions of economic associations and congresses as well as in the press, against any such regulation of the emigration system as could indirectly encourage emigration, and in

²⁴⁰ BArch 901/29655. “Denkschrift”, 17-18.

favor of the enactment of prohibitive legislative measures against the so-called illegitimate emigration.”²⁴¹

How policy might indirectly encourage emigration, the official did not elaborate, but there was no doubt that combating “illegitimate emigration” meant introducing the public-private equivalence which Prussian lawyers had identified in the early 1870s as the most constitutionally sound method of labor retention. But fast-tracking legislation through the imperial German state was no easy task, and bills could languish in committees until the legislative session ended and they fell off the docket. In fact, this process had killed an emigration bill just a few years before, in 1878. That proposal was the brainchild of the National Liberal Reichstag deputy Friedrich Kapp, a veteran of 1848 who had spent his long exile in the United States familiarizing himself with the perils faced by overwhelmingly Catholic German immigrants.²⁴² His rudimentary draft had undergone several rounds of committee work that fleshed it out into a potent tool for licensing and supervising shipping companies and emigration agents. Since a completed bill was ready at hand, officials simply spliced the public-private equivalence onto the existing liberal proposal. In short order a finished bill was ready for parliamentary approval.

The German Reich established in 1871 by Otto von Bismarck, himself a landed magnate, proved a significant impediment to the passage of an emigration law. Founding the Reich upon federalist rather than unitary principles, as the Italians had done, produced unforeseen consequences. In Prussia, where the landed elite dominated the political system, a highly restrictive emigration law had been in place since the 1850s. Unification in 1871 as good as repealed this law. As it turned out, the federal structure of the German Empire powerfully undercut the ability of individual states to regulate migration.²⁴³ There was no question of agrarian supremacy in the Prussian Chamber of Deputies, where the infamous three-class franchise kept representation of more numerically weighty social groups to a minimum. And the landed nobility positively dominated the ministerial bureaucracy both in Prussia and the Reich at large, with only some quarters of the Foreign Ministry excepted.²⁴⁴ Agrarians used this power to contrive a staggering array of novel legal principles and to reinforce older instruments of labor discipline in Prussia; but none of this mattered because Prussian law simply did not apply once an emigrant had absconded to Hamburg or Bremen. In 1884 one landlord vented his frustrations with this legal impotence in a letter to the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*. A number of workers had violated the Prussian Emigration Act of 1854, abandoning their contracts and evading arrest on the journey to Hamburg or Bremen. In each case the Prussian police had requested the “preliminary arrest” of the fugitives by the authorities in the port cities. “That the provisional arrest by the police of rural servants and workers is permitted by the aforementioned law... is of little doubt.” Yet as soon as the fugitives appeared before a judge, they were generally set free because

²⁴¹ BArch R/901/29656. Office of the State Secretary of the Interior to State Secretary of the Foreign Ministry, Graf von Hatzfeldt zu Wildenburg, Berlin, September 4th, 1882, p. 65.

²⁴² Better known is Kapp’s son, Wolfgang, who lent his name to the right-wing Kapp Putsch attempt of 1920.

²⁴³ On the constitutional structure of the German Empire, see Oliver F.R. Haardt, *Bismarcks ewiger Bund: Eine neue Geschichte des Deutschen Kaiserreichs* (Darmstadt: wbg, 2020).

²⁴⁴ Eckert Conze, *Schatten des Kaiserreichs: Die Reichsgründung von 1871 und ihr schwieriger Erbe* (München: dtv Verlag, 2020), 110-121.

their arrest had been based on a law that did not apply locally.²⁴⁵ It was this legal impotence that prompted German agrarians to seek legislation at the federal level.

Why, then, did fifteen years pass between the drafting of the Emigration Act in 1882 and its final passage in 1897? During this time the price of grain on international markets continued to slide, giving German farmers no respite. The holdup was a consequence of yet another institutional legacy of German unification—namely, the Reichstag. Bismarck had wagered that a lower chamber elected by universal male suffrage would deliver conservative majorities, hemming in the influence of pesky liberals.²⁴⁶ As the Iron Chancellor had predicted, the liberals never won an outright majority, but what Bismarck did not foresee was that the universal suffrage would spur the mobilization of repressed Catholics and working-class voters. The resulting Catholic Center Party and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) were soon the largest political parties in Imperial Germany, and the SPD in particular proved a significant impediment to conservative legislation. It was the inability of agrarian and conservatives to capture a majority in the Reichstag which made the passage of the emigration law impossible until the late 1890s.

To pass the Emigration Act, the German agricultural sector had to create a mass political movement as the Catholics and the workers had. It was not until the 1890s that the Conservatives succeeded in uniting all the disparate farmers and factions of the rural population under a single banner. The German Conservative Party—the mouthpiece of the Junkers—had long struggled to break out of its traditional stronghold in East-Elbian Prussia. The Conservatives were in effect a sectional party, with more than 80% of their parliamentary districts located in eastern Prussia.²⁴⁷ Elsewhere in Germany farmers tended to elect local notables, usually running as National Liberals or Free Conservatives, or, if the area was Catholic, the Center. But in the 1880s and 1890s, small and medium farmers outside of eastern Prussia began to mobilize on behalf of their own economic interests, corresponding to a proliferation of antisemitic protest parties and regional movements like the Bavarian Farmers' Union.²⁴⁸ Conservative elites seized the opportunity proffered by this decentralized and fragmented mobilization to forge a national agrarian organization, which came to be known as the Agrarian League [*Bund der Landwirte*, or BdL].²⁴⁹ The impact of the BdL on German politics was immediate and polarizing, setting the stage for conservatism's electoral triumph in the 1893 Reichstag elections. Only the overwhelmingly urban and explicitly anti-agrarian SPD escaped unscathed. Uneasily straddling urban and rural constituencies, the National Liberals fared worst, slipping by more than 20% in the 1893 election. In some regions, like Hesse, the National Liberals had to join forces with the BdL to survive, resulting in

²⁴⁵ BArch R 901/29657. *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 21st, 1884.

²⁴⁶ See Jonathan Sperber, *The Kaiser's Voters: Electors and Elections in Imperial Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁴⁷ Hans Booms, *Die Deutschkonservative Partei: preußischer Charakter, Reichsauffassung, Nationalbegriff* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1954), 6.

²⁴⁸ See David Blackburn, *Populists and Patricians: Essays in Modern German History* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), esp. Ch. 6.

²⁴⁹ See Geoff Eley, "Anti-Semitism, Agrarian Mobilization, and the Conservative Party: Radicalism and Containment in the Founding of the Agrarian League, 1890-93", in *Between Reform, Reaction, and Resistance: Studies in the History of German Conservatism from 1789 to 1945*, eds. Larry Eugene Jones and James Retallack (Providence: Berg, 1993): 187-228.

the “agrarianization’ of their economic policy platform.”²⁵⁰ Irreconcilable economic conflicts likewise cut across the Center Party, helping to shear off Catholic workers in favor of social democracy.

The German Empire boasted an enormous agricultural sector, even after the second industrial revolution of the 1880s and 1890s had transformed the country into Europe’s leading industrial powerhouse. By uniting virtually all German farmers behind a single political banner, the BdL fundamentally transformed the nation’s politics. Historians once argued that the League’s demagogic appeal compelled small farmers to vote against their own interests and for those of the Junkers.²⁵¹ Reappraisals have shown that the League benefitted all of its diverse constituencies, temporarily united by the severity of the 1890s slump, but have confirmed that Junkers stood at the helm of the organization.²⁵² In sum, the League acted as a lever for east Prussian conservatives to exert national electoral influence well beyond their territorial base. Agrarian elites emerged from the 1893 elections with a strong hand, backed by antisemitic and agrarian-interest parties, and with the National Liberal and Center parties disciplined by their politically activated, rural constituents.

Until the rise of the BdL during the 1890s, legislative proposals that narrowly benefited agriculture had been a hard sell in the Reichstag, never more so than between 1890 and 1893 when an anti-agrarian majority controlled the chamber. For reasons that remain unclear, it was to this hostile majority that officials first submitted the emigration bill in early 1892. One possible explanation is sheer desperation; it was during the first half of the 1890s that agricultural prices sunk furthest. Or perhaps conservative officials hoped that the bill’s liberal provenance would compensate for the agrarian modifications. Recall that most of the bill had been authored by Friedrich Kapp, who put the proposal forward in the spirit of liberal social reform. A text appended to the 1892 version weakly justified the agrarian modifications, stating that “The present draft adheres in principle to the freedom to emigrate. However, it is among the primary tasks of the law to prevent the abuses for which the total freedom to emigrate can be used. It is above all a matter of preventing clandestine emigration, through which emigrants seek to escape their existing obligations.”²⁵³

From the moment it arrived in the Reichstag the bill faced withering attacks from liberal and socialist deputies. Julius Bruhns of the SPD, for example, denounced the heavy-handedness and injustice of the bill:

We know that the lords want such a law so that the field hands don’t run off in droves to emigrate as they do now, because they can hardly subsist on their pathetic wages. We are not prepared to help the big landowners at the expense of their workers; and I believe, as I have already acknowledged, that legal regulation [of emigration] is necessary, but we must deplore coercive, police laws in this case and in general. We must only ask ourselves: what are the first and most powerful causes of the emigration? And I believe I can safely say that the causes are the political and economic evils under which we suffer...²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ Torp, *The Challenges of Globalization*, 128.

²⁵¹ In particular, see Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik*.

²⁵² Eley, “Anti-Semitism, Agrarian Mobilization, and the Conservative Party”.

²⁵³ GStAPK, I. HA Rep. 84a, Nr. 10051. “Entwurf eines Gesetzes über das Auswanderungswesen,” 28-31.

²⁵⁴ *StenBerRT*, 1890-92, Bd. 2, 1078 (January 20th, 1891).

Implicitly and explicitly, deputies compared the German agrarian program to the English Corn Laws, which had until 1846 placed tariffs on grain imported into the United Kingdom. When implemented in 1815, the purpose of the Laws had been to shield British agriculture from a deluge of continental grain following the end of the Napoleonic blockade. But as England industrialized and urbanized, the high price of bread became pitted workers and industrialists against the big landowners. Observers in both the Marxist and liberal traditions had denounced the Corn Laws as an attempt to shield the feudal elite from the forces of international capitalism and heralded their repeal in 1846 by the Conservative government of Sir Robert Peel. Likewise, German liberals and socialists viewed the agrarian campaign for an emigration law as an attempt to erect a bulwark against capitalist development in the countryside, and, in keeping with the Corn Laws analogy, predicted that international markets would dissolve east Prussia's ostensibly feudal social structure.²⁵⁵ The SPD leader August Bebel saw this process as inevitable, arguing that "the freedom of movement is a product of modern capitalist development" without which the proletariat would be insufficiently numerous to meet the labor needs of capital. No emigration law, Bebel declared, could long delay capitalist development or the growth of the industrial proletariat.²⁵⁶ In 1892, the emigration bill had no chance of passage, and the Reichstag president never even bothered to schedule a vote. Looking back on the bill a few years later, the impeccably liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung* reported that the law had been "a sad agrarian concoction... a stillborn child, cast into the void without serious contemplation."²⁵⁷

Just weeks after these words appeared in late 1896, emigration reform was back on the Reichstag's agenda, and this time passage seemed inevitable. As already noted, the 1893 election was a crushing victory for the right, fueled by an insurgent agrarian movement and directed by the BdL. Yet the window had closed for an overweening crackdown on emigration. The 1897 version of the bill did not feature the public-private equivalence clause, though it remained a potent tool for harassing shippers and disrupting the logistics of emigration. There is no way to be certain why the government dropped the public-private clause from the bill, but constitutional worries probably had something to do with it. In the years around 1900 tremendous reformist pressure built up in Germany society. Although the fundamentally authoritarian structure of the imperial state survived unaltered, public opinion increasingly limited the government's capacity to act in arbitrary ways and placed a greater emphasis on the rights of citizens.²⁵⁸ For example, the promulgation of the new civil code, the *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*, in 1900 stripped Prussian landlords of the right to strike disobedient servants. Against this backdrop old heavy-handed practices might be defended, but the imposition of fresh limits to individual liberty was politically out of step with the times. The absence of the old bill's most objectionable elements made it no more palatable to

²⁵⁵ As we have seen, the agricultural sector in east Prussia was neither feudal nor pre-capitalist. It was thoroughly capitalist. It is quite striking how the analyses of nineteenth-century liberal and Marxist thinkers were passed down to post-World War II social scientists, who likewise insisted that the German Junkers were a feudal and anti-capitalist political force.

²⁵⁶ *StenBerRT*, 1892-93, Bd. 1, 118 (December 2nd, 1892).

²⁵⁷ BArch 1501 / 101483. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, October 28th, 1896.

²⁵⁸ See Hedwig Richter, *Reform und Massenpolitisierung im Kaiserreich* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2021).

its opponents, however. Even if the 1897 draft more closely resembled Kapp's liberal proposal of 1878, the law had become indelibly associated with the agrarian cause.

Unfolding across four sessions in the spring of 1897, the deliberations in the Reichstag exhibited a rancor undiminished since 1892. The best of the anti-agrarian speeches was delivered by Julius Lenzmann, a Left Liberal deputy and member of the chamber's emigration committee. Lenzmann declared that

Agrarian egoism has cooked up this dish and wants to make it more delectable with talk of 'uplifting the national sentiment' of the Germans. It is clear that a reduction in emigration is in the interests of agriculture; and if we follow the demands of the Agricultural Council to ban emigration, even if we still have civil rights standards to uphold, yes, gentlemen, then we will place the power of the state in the service of interest groups, which are not able to keep their workers on the land through adequate wages, and as a consequence want to harness the power of the police to artificially and violently keep on the land workers who are departing for America...²⁵⁹

Conservative deputies retorted that the law reflected public opinion perfectly, and that it was in fact the shipping companies that undermined the public good for private gain. Indeed, Conservatives cast themselves as protectors of downtrodden workers exploited by rapacious shippers. A representative of the Bundesrat who attended the deliberation even made the assertion, not entirely false as it turned out, that shippers had coordinated the opposition to the law, stating that "the campaign against the law has been waged by one factor in our economy... Public opinion on emigration has remained unchanged for a half century; what has changed is the opinion of the Hamburg shippers."²⁶⁰ One by one, Conservative deputies stepped forward to denounce shippers' greed. A leading conservative, the Graf von Arnim, delivered a typical speech in which he accused shippers of valuing the "payment of dividends" over the welfare of emigrants. They hid, he alleged, behind a "mask of freedom"—the freedom of movement, the freedom of enterprise—that concealed nothing but profit-taking contrary to the public good.²⁶¹ Of shippers' greed there can be little doubt, but demand for emigration services was real and most migrants were more than happy to leave behind the abysmal social conditions of eastern Germany.

As debate raged, petitions from afflicted parties spilled into Berlin. Although beseeching legislators at the eleventh-hour was probably futile, the petitions and the identities of their authors reveal much about the organization of the interests clashing over the law. For example, the objections issuing from the Hanseatic cities reflected a highly coordinated lobbying apparatus. Lines of communication ran from business interests embodied in chambers of commerce, through specific public officials, and out to diplomats and Bundesrat representatives. In February, businessmen located in Bremen had even organized meetings with counterparts in Hamburg to synchronize messaging against the emigration bill.²⁶² The result was an impressive if ineffective flurry of appeals from the Hamburg and Bremen chambers of commerce, from the

²⁵⁹ *StenBerRT*, 1895-97, Bd. 8, 5741 (May 5th, 1897).

²⁶⁰ *StenBerRT*, 1895-97, Bd. 8, 5743 (May 5th, 1897).

²⁶¹ *StenBerRT*, 1895-97, Bd. 8, 5749 (May 5th, 1897).

²⁶² StAB 2-M.6.e.9.a. "Akta, betreffend Erlass des Reichs-Auswanderungsgesetzes 1891-1897."

Hamburg Shipping Association, and from the Bundesrat delegates of Hamburg, Bremen, and Lübeck. On the eve of the final vote the chairmen of the Hamburg-America-Line and the North German Lloyd, Albert Ballin and Heinrich Wiegand, personally rushed to Berlin, presumably to try their luck with the ministerial backchannels through which they customarily did business.²⁶³

On the agrarian side, petitions were a symptom of dissatisfaction with the bill delivered by the government, particularly over the absence of the constitutionally dubious public-private equivalence. Foremost among these petitioners was the Agricultural Council, which argued that “because the vast majority of German emigrants belong to the agricultural population, the emigration more deeply affects the interests of agriculture than those of other branches of industry.” To compensate, the law should stipulate that “persons who, in addition to their military service, have not fulfilled their public and private legal obligations should be forbidden to emigrate.”²⁶⁴ No local farmers’ association, the Council was a semi-official advisory body made up of representatives of agriculture from across the Reich, and as such its pronouncements can be taken to reflect the views of leading agrarians. Yet the Council’s petition was no exception and went unheeded. For the sort of men who sat on the Council, publicly appealing to the popularly elected Reichstag was undoubtedly a last resort, indicating that pleas through elite networks had been to no avail. The Council’s petition underscores the nature of the relationship between the Reich executive and the agricultural sector. Officials were uniquely responsive to the needs of agriculture, and indeed most senior officials were themselves proprietors of landed estates, but the government was never entirely beholden to the landlords, nor indeed to any particular interest group.

The 1897 Emigration Act passed on May 19th, at the conclusion of the fourth and final round of deliberations. Passage was so certain that the president of the chamber did not even bother to record the votes, and the law was carried by a large majority on a voice vote.²⁶⁵ How individual deputies cast their votes is thus unknowable, but observers reported that only the Social Democrats and Left Liberals rejected the bill.²⁶⁶

Although enormous hopes and fears had been invested in the law, its real consequences were highly ambiguous. After decades in the making, agrarians had won an emigration act just as Germans ceased to relocate overseas in significant numbers. The subsequent internal migration from eastern to western Germany dwarfed the transatlantic migration in scale, with departures from the provinces of West Prussia, East Prussia, and Posen totaling around 450,000 per year by 1910.²⁶⁷ When it came to restricting labor mobility and slowing the industrial development of western Germany, therefore, the anti-globalization program of the German agrarians was an abject failure. Serendipitous economic circumstances granted German agrarians a respite, however. The epochal deflation known as the “Great Depression” of 1873-1896 at last let up, while

²⁶³ Birgit Öttmüller-Wetzel, *Auswanderung über Hamburg: die HAPAG und die Auswanderung nach Nordamerika, 1870-1914* (M.A. Thesis, Freie Universität, Berlin, 1986), 93.

²⁶⁴ GStAPK, I. HA Rep. 84a, Nr. 10052. “Deutscher Landwirtschaftsrath: Dem Hohen Reichstag“, April 21st, 1897.

²⁶⁵ *StenBerRT*, 1895-97, Bd. 8, 5938 (May 19th, 1897).

²⁶⁶ Ernst Francke, “Das deutsche Auswanderungsgesetz,” *Archiv für Soziale Gesetzgebung und Statistik* 11 (1897): 183.

²⁶⁷ Bade, “German Emigration,” 357.

population and wage growth buoyed agricultural prices and profits to an acceptable level. Of course, the challenge of procuring sufficient laborers during harvest time persisted, but was increasingly resolved by the importation of seasonal, contracted laborers from Russian Poland and Habsburg Galicia. The geographical mobility of German citizens had meant that landlords had to compete against employers from Chicago to Bochum in an increasingly internationalized labor market. But because these early “guest workers” were neither legal immigrants nor citizens they lacked the right to settle permanently or to seek out new employers inside of Germany.²⁶⁸ At the cost of their old claim to be stewards of the *Volk*, the agrarians got what they had long wished for: an intensely policed and geographically immobile workforce.

In Bremen and Hamburg, increased overhead costs for shippers and emigration agencies were met with consternation, but also with relief that truly crippling regulations had been avoided. The Hamburg-America-Line’s annual report for 1898 stated that “On April 1st [1898] the new Emigration Act came into effect. Although it is fortunate that the affected shipping companies have been involved in the implementation of the regulations, reducing or eliminating its difficulties, the overall effect is not an inconsiderable impediment to our business operations.”²⁶⁹ In sweeping terms, the law tasked the imperial bureaucracy with setting health and safety standards aboard migrant vessels operating from German ports, regardless of the nationality of the emigrants themselves. Published shortly after the passage of the law, the guidelines for outfitting ships spared no detail, specifying, for example, the exact weight of butter to be allotted each passenger. For vessels traversing the north Atlantic margarine was an acceptable substitute, provided the ration was increased 25%; on the other hand, ships bound for South America were permitted to stock marmalade instead.²⁷⁰ Imperial bureaucrats furthermore oversaw the licensing of shippers and emigration agents. Just to be eligible for a permit, shippers and agencies needed to make security deposits in the sum of 1,500 Marks for agencies and 50,000 for shippers, to be held by the government in escrow. These were relatively modest sums compared to the logistical challenge of keeping a tight rein on the agencies, whose migrant recruitment methods had been subject to limited oversight, especially in eastern Europe. This was no small task, for the Hamburg-America-Line and North German Lloyd contracted no fewer than 900 agencies, with many thousands of subagents scattered across the continent.²⁷¹

Although a quantitative analysis would better capture the dimensions of the altered regulatory landscape, even a haphazard reading of the archival materials suggests some provisional conclusions. After the law came into effect in 1898 the number of official inquiries into lax safety standards and accusations of malfeasance surged. In one instance, a report on faulty door latches on migrant trains that had resulted in several deaths led to mass repairs and replacements.²⁷² Even an accusation of dangerous overcrowding leveled against the Hamburg-America-Line by socialists, which turned out in the end to have been spurious, warranted an extensive

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 373.

²⁶⁹ StAHH 621-1/95_178 Band 7: Protokolle der Generalversammlungen, 1888-1899.

²⁷⁰ Srbik, *Die Auswanderungsgesetzgebung*, 178.

²⁷¹ BArch 1501 / 101495. “Verzeichnis der Auswanderungsunternehmer und -agenten...”, December 1906.

²⁷² BArch 1501 / 101454. Emigrant Information Office, Bremen [Nachweisungs-Bureau für Auswanderer] to the Imperial Commissioner for Emigration, December 8th, 1911.

investigation.²⁷³ Similar examples abound and not one dates from before 1898. This is the great irony of the 1897 Emigration Act. Its dominant characteristics were inherited from the liberal migration reform bill of 1878 onto which conservatives had spliced their anti-emigration designs. Marked indelibly by agrarian machinations, Left Liberals and Social Democrats rejected the bill even when the most galling provisions were stricken, making the 1897 Emigration Act perhaps the only piece of reformist consumer protection legislation in Imperial Germany to be passed by exclusively right-wing legislators.

The 1897 Emigration Act: A Colonial Instrument?

There is very little doubt that the agrarian sponsors of the 1897 Emigration Act intended it to be a brake on emigration from the countryside. However, other historians have examined the Act and arrived at different conclusions regarding its purpose. Most notably, Sebastian Conrad has argued that the 1897 law was first and foremost intended to advance German settler colonialism.²⁷⁴ Conrad argues that after about 1870 German policymakers became increasingly alarmed by emigration, the depopulating effects of which threatened to leave Germany ill-equipped in the event of a war. As they saw it, every departure not only signified a net loss of manpower at the disposal of the German state, but also a credit to Germany's geopolitical rivals, not least the United States, the population of which included millions of assimilated Germans and their descendants.²⁷⁵ In response, German policymakers sought to "redirect" emigration to the sparsely populated, southernmost regions of Brazil, where it was believed that, unlike in the United States, Germans would remain culturally and economically dependent on the Fatherland.²⁷⁶ This, concludes Conrad, was the true purpose of the 1897 law: "The most important provisions of the 1897 Emigration Act... focused on redirecting emigration, and its main, if unspoken, aim was to direct to South America the outflows that were now seen as unavoidable."²⁷⁷

Conrad does not point to any specific passages in the text of the law to substantiate this claim, nor to any phase in the conception or passage of the law. In fact, there is no evidence whatsoever that the 1897 Emigration Act was intended to promote colonial settlement; to the contrary, its articles were so antagonistic to colonialism that the law made the promotion of German settlement overseas almost impossible. Article 22 forbade emigration contracts stipulating that migrants work off the cost of passage after arrival in the destination country, which eliminated a common financing strategy for private colonization projects. Article 23 further stated that no "colonization society or similar undertaking" could pay or advance the cost of passage to any citizen of the

²⁷³ BArch 1501 / 101454. Senate Commission for Imperial and Foreign Affairs, Hamburg, to the Office of the Chancellor, September 1st, 1906.

²⁷⁴ See Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation*, esp. Ch. 5; Cornelia Pohlmann, *Die Auswanderung aus dem Herzogtum Braunschweig im Kräftespiel staatliche Einflussnahme und öffentlicher Resonanz 1720-1897* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2002), 192; Öttmüller-Wetzel, *Auswanderung über Hamburg*.

²⁷⁵ Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation*, 276.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 277-278.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 282.

Reich.²⁷⁸ This was a death blow. Settling somewhere like southern Brazil involved considerable hardship; even if the climate was favorable, infrastructure was virtually nonexistent and basic consumer goods were expensive, when available at all. Subsidies were essential to make such colonial undertakings economically viable.

The net result of articles 22 and 23 was to foreclose the possibility of significant German settlement in places like Brazil, where the sort of plentiful and lucrative employment opportunities that would induce migrants to pay their own way were absent. Following the passage of the law, the “Correspondence Journal” of the pro-colonial Association for Emigration Questions in Hanover reported sourly that “through the provisions of articles 22 and 23 every practical national emigration policy has been made impossible, unless exceptions are permitted. While the Imperial Chancellor is free to make exceptions with regard to §23, the same does not apply to §22.”²⁷⁹ The article went on to express hope that “exceptions” might one day undermine the anti-colonial thrust of the law. Such exceptions, it turned out, were not forthcoming, and the government proved reluctant to issue licenses even in cases where the migrants were paying their own fares.

Even the North German Lloyd and Hamburg-America Line shipping companies, ever favorites in Berlin, faced administrative obstacles in setting up colonial enterprises. Both companies were keen to promote settlement in Brazil and to exploit the commercial opportunities that were expected to follow. To this end both lines went about establishing their own colonies, with the Lloyd dispatching surveyors to South America in 1894-95 to identify regions suitable for German settlement. The surveyors reported that Chile, Argentina, and Brazil all possessed suitably fertile and sparsely populated regions that could one day support numerous immigrants.²⁸⁰ By 1898 the Hanseatic Colonization Society, a joint venture of the Hapag and Lloyd, had put the plan into motion by acquiring 650,000 hectares (2,500 square miles) of land from the Brazilian state of Santa Catherina. The land had belonged to a Brazilian prince, expropriated following the revolution of 1888, and the government had been happy to find a buyer. Most of the territory was to be divided into 25,000 lots of 25 hectares apiece, supposed an optimal plot for a German farming family.²⁸¹ All that remained was to obtain a permit from the imperial authorities, per the requirements of the 1897 Emigration Act.

This turned out to be easier said than done. Shortly after the Hanseatic Colonization Society requested a permit in the spring of 1898, a Foreign Ministry official dispatched a memo marked “Urgent!” to a counterpart at the Interior Ministry.²⁸² The author stated that in light of the prevailing labor shortage in agriculture, the issuance of a license to such an “emigration enterprise” would seem inadvisable. “However, I do not believe,” he continued, “that the granting of a license to the Hanseatic Colonization

²⁷⁸ “Gesetz über das Auswanderungswesen”, 1897

(https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Gesetz_%C3%BCber_das_Auswanderungswesen)

²⁷⁹ BArch 901 / 29674. „Korrespondenzblatt der Vereinigung für Auswanderungsfragen zu Hannover,” May 16th, 1898.

²⁸⁰ Heinrich Wiegand, *Denkschrift betreffend Deutsche Kolonisation in Südamerika* (Bremen, 1895), 1, 29-30.

²⁸¹ GStAPK, I. HA Rep. 90 A, Nr. 230. Meeting of the Royal Ministry of State, Berlin, June 8th, 1898. See also Franz Giesebrecht, *Die deutsche Kolonie Hansa in Südbrasilien* (Berlin: H. Paetel, 1899).

²⁸² GStAPK, I. HA Rep. 90 A, Nr. 230. “Eilt! Auf das Schreiben vom 2. d. M. III A. 2583, betr. des Konzessionsgesuch der Hanseatischen Kolonisationsgesellschafts.”

Society will by necessity lead to a considerable increase in the emigration of German farmers and day-laborers.” This was no demographic insight. Instead, the functionary confidently declared that through “the imposition of special conditions upon the issuance of the permit” the number of departures could be limited, before going on to sketch possible restrictions. In the event, the convened ministers opted for a numerical cap of 500-1,000 migrants per year, while the Chancellor retained the authority to set exact annual limits. HAPAG and Lloyd had envisioned settling 50,000 Germans over the following ten years; at the permitted rate it could take as long as a century. Yet even these modest figures were too high for the agriculture minister, who complained that “the people are enticed by the agents [of shippers] into emigrating, thus sharpening the labor shortage. For Brazil, Argentina, and Canada, there have already been similar [colonization] societies that have tried to introduce German agricultural labor.” He nonetheless acceded to his fellow ministers and the permit was granted with the stipulated restrictions.²⁸³ The denial of the permit was never seriously considered, with the justice minister himself stating that the government had no choice but to issue the permit, because “the [Colonization] Society is prepared to fulfill all the requirements of the law”.²⁸⁴ As we have seen, formal legality and constitutionalism mixed easily with this sort of malicious enforcement, which hewed to the letter of the law if not always to its impartial spirit. This exchange also makes clear that Berlin did not wish to encourage German emigration to Brazil, and in fact much preferred to inhibit migration altogether. In light of the findings present above, it is impossible to maintain that the primary function of the 1897 Emigration Act was to redirect German emigrants toward Latin America.

Conrad’s interpretation of the 1897 Emigration Act badly misses the mark. But he is right to point out that there were many in the German elite who saw the channeling of migrants to Brazil, or else German Southwest Africa, as the best solution to the emigration “problem”. Consisting largely of pro-colonial journalists, jurists, and even some Reichstag deputies, such figures argued that the Chancellor could and should instrumentalize the 1897 Emigration Act to foster the movement of Germans to Brazil. It is the views of such figures that Conrad has reconstructed and through which he has interpreted the purpose of the law.

Perhaps no figure exhibits this more clearly than Ernst Francke, a liberal journalist and former pupil of Lujo Brentano, who, shortly after the law’s passage, published an essay assessing its utility for the German colonial project.²⁸⁵ Francke insisted that “the law is Janus-faced, and one cannot fault those who see in it not a law meant primarily for the protection of emigrants, but as an attempt to settle German emigrants in non-European countries, which, for national and economic reasons, are acceptable to the Imperial government.”²⁸⁶ How was the law to accomplish this? The absurd hope of Francke and other colonialists was that the chancellor would wield his newfound licensing powers to ban emigration to North America. This theory was premised on language in the law stipulating that the permits issued to shipping companies were only valid for certain destinations. Hence it was technically possible for

²⁸³ GStAPK, I. HA Rep. 90 A, Nr. 230. “Auszug aus dem Bundesraths-Protokoll über die Sitzung vom 3. November 1898.”

²⁸⁴ GStAPK, I. HA Rep. 90 A, Nr. 230. Meeting of the Royal Ministry of State, Berlin, June 8th, 1898.

²⁸⁵ Francke, “Das deutsche Auswanderungsgesetz”.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 189-190.

the chancellor to ban shippers from transporting emigrants to North America, leaving South America or Southwest Africa as the only permissible destinations. Although insistent upon the law's potential for redirecting emigration, Francke was not optimistic. After the 1893 emigration bill had gone down in defeat, he wrote, "the newly formed Colonial Council [*Kolonialrat*] was approached [by the government] for its opinion; however, its wishes regarding a variety of important points seem to have been given no consideration."²⁸⁷ Presumably unbeknownst to Francke, a preliminary draft of the 1897 bill did contain an article exempting "colonization societies" from the regulations placed upon enterprises like shipping companies.²⁸⁸ Unsurprisingly, this provision was cut from the final version of the bill. Francke concluded his essay by sketching out the requirements for a less deficient law, one which would "curtail the principle of freedom to emigrate" and "transform the shippers—entirely against their will, as their protests have shown—into an instrument for the government's policy."²⁸⁹

The idea of a German chancellor banning emigration to the United States was preposterous. Authoritarian though the Imperial German state undoubtedly was, it never pursued racial or biopolitical imperatives with the zeal that characterized later regimes. The source of this restraint was, in large part, the agricultural elite, whose interests were starkly opposed to the colonial fantasies promulgated by the bourgeois ideological forerunners of National Socialism. Perhaps the clearest example of agrarian obstructionism was the sabotage of anti-Polonization measures around 1900. As ethnic Germans departed by the millions from the eastern provinces, many settling permanently abroad, the substantial Polish minority appeared increasingly threatening to German nationalists. It was amidst this "crisis" that Germany's infamous *ius sanguinis* citizenship law was first conceived. Passed in 1913, the law was a triumph for pan-Germans. More obscure is the fact that the law first appeared in the Reichstag in 1894 but was killed repeatedly by "labor-hungry agricultural barons" fearing the expulsion of Polish labor.²⁹⁰ Likewise, internal-colonization projects, aimed to repopulate the eastern provinces with ethnically German smallholders, ran aground on the intransigence of the landlords. Believing that homesteaders would cut further into the labor supply, estate-owners conspired with Polish banks to manipulate land prices; and the Prussian Diet capped the requisite land grants at a mere 70,000 hectares apiece.²⁹¹ Wherever the perceived needs of the German nation cut across the economic interests of big landowners, it was usually the latter that prevailed. And despite the rising ideological temperature of late Imperial politics, the levers of ministerial authority remained insulated from democratic inputs and, in Prussia, predominantly in the hands of agrarians.²⁹²

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 183.

²⁸⁸ GStAPK, I. HA Rep. 84a, Nr. 10052. "Entwurf eines Gesetzes über das Auswanderungswesen", 1896. The relevant article is §23.

²⁸⁹ Francke, "Das deutsche Auswanderungsgesetz", 191-192.

²⁹⁰ Annemarie H. Sammartino, *The Impossible Border: Germany and the East, 1914-1922* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 22.

²⁹¹ Frieda Wunderlich, *Farm Labor in Germany, 1810-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 26-27.

²⁹² Torp, *Challenges of Globalization*, 135.

A Failed Counterrevolution

The Emigration Act of 1897 was part of a larger legislative movement in eastern Europe aimed at reining in emigration from the region. The departure of millions of agricultural laborers from eastern Europe drove up wages at the same time as the price of grain was plummeting on international markets. Both of these processes were the result of global market integration, meaning not only that east European grain producers were forced to compete with American and Argentinian farmers, but that employers on both sides of the Atlantic faced an increasingly unified labor market, which included relatively well-paid positions in industry. There was simply no way for an estate in East Prussia or Hungary to offer competitive wages and remain solvent.²⁹³ Farmers across eastern Europe mobilized to defend the profitability of the sector. Only German and other western European landowners sought tariffs; in Hungary and Russia, production costs were low and huge quantities of grain were in fact exported to countries like Germany. What united all east European agrarians was the fear of rising labor costs and consequent attempts to keep wages down by restricting emigration.

It is undeniable that globalization and international migration have historically been closely linked. The part of these processes that garners the most scholarly attention are attempts to prevent *immigration*, to exclude. Equally significant, however, were attempts to prevent *emigration*, which meant that labor power was leaving to seek more profitable employment somewhere else. Debates about migration are often framed in terms of belonging and exclusion, identity, and the nation. Undoubtedly these ideas are central to migration discourse the world over. But what this fixation on inclusion/exclusion often obscures is that migration is most fundamentally an economic process, one that is structured by conflicts between employers over the supply of labor. Prior to the imposition of immigration restrictions across much of the globe following the First World War, it is hard to deny that migration policy in most countries was driven primarily by the need to secure labor power, and not by ideological considerations like identity or by the preferences of voters.

²⁹³ On sectoral wage variation, see Stephen Broadberry and Carsten Burhop, "Real Wages and Labor Productivity in Britain and Germany, 1871-1938: A Unified Approach to the International Comparison of Living Standards", *Journal of Economic History* 70, no. 2 (June 2010): 400-427.

Conclusion: Globalization, Migration, and the Making of the Global Color Line

Between 1846 and 1940 some 60 million Europeans emigrated to the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, and Africa. It is impossible to make sense of this unprecedented burst of human mobility without examining the private businesses that sold the tickets, paid out the recruitment incentives, set the routes, and operated the steamships, not to mention interests that fought to obstruct migration altogether. Shipping companies strove to maximize passenger numbers by any means necessary, slashing rates, boosting capacity by laying down ever larger vessels, and allying with governments to outmaneuver rivals and secure privileged access to national markets. In essence, the provision of migration services was subject to the laws of capitalist competition, which supercharged the European exodus and made possible the emigration of close to 0.5% of the continent's population in 1913 alone.²⁹⁴ If shippers were largely indifferent to the direction migration took, the multinational army of labor recruiters deployed to Europe were not. Agents of the Brazilian and Australian state, in addition to hundreds of private firms, used propaganda and hard-cash incentives to reshape the course of international migration. Such recruiters played a major role in driving migration to every receiving country other than the United States. Mounting emigration drew the ire of European commercial farmers, who relied on the exploitation of the rural proletariat to remain solvent amid falling crop prices. Agrarians in Germany and Hungary launched a legislative counteroffensive aimed at imposing emigration restrictions and thus safeguarding the labor supply. Although the landlords did succeed in throwing up administrative hurdles to departure, arresting mass emigration altogether proved impossible. Taken together, the shippers, labor recruiters, and landlords were crucial in setting the terms of global economic integration around 1900.

One of the most striking features of the cases examined in this dissertation is the degree to which international migration was orchestrated almost entirely by the private sector. Today, we regard the regulation of international mobility as a fundamental task of the modern state, accomplished through the erection of borders and the issuance (or non-issuance) of passports and visas. But prior to the First World War, the state played only a marginal role in overseeing the flow of millions of proletarians around the globe. As we saw in Chapter 3, even borders were privatized in some cases. Indeed, it is not clear whether the nineteenth-century state could have seized control over migration even if it had wanted to. Governments appeared helpless in the face of the deluge of illicit labor recruiters, while shipping companies evaded departure rules and emigration restrictions with impunity. The sense one gets from reading government reports on the "problem" of migration is that the expansion of the global capitalist economy, and with it multinational businesses, simply overwhelmed the administrative capacities of the European state. This era of private control over international migration came abruptly to an end with the outbreak of the First World War. From the turmoil of imperial collapse and revolution emerged a supercharged state apparatus, far more committed than its multinational predecessors to enforcing ethnic homogeneity and thus controlling migration. Although we once again live in an era of supposedly unbridled

²⁹⁴ Dickinson, *The World in the Long Twentieth Century*, 32.

global capitalism, the state has not relinquished its grip on migration policy. In this light, the mass migrations of the nineteenth century appear not only as a thing of the past, but as the product of a more cosmopolitan civilization, not yet conquered by the radical nationalist politics of the twentieth century.

The foregoing dissertation dramatically reframes the history of European migration. Classic accounts of the European exodus have left readers with the impression that emigrants were the mythical “huddled masses”, yearning to breathe the free air of the New World and gaining admission to the United States and other destination countries almost as an act of charity. Migrants undoubtedly relished the superior opportunities for employment and social mobility available beyond Europe’s shores. But what the above chapters make clear is that migrants were a hot commodity, with employers across the globe scrambling to attract them. Recasting the European exodus as a world-wide battle over the labor supply requires a fresh interpretation of global migration around 1900. A full exploration of the implications of this reframing is the task of another book. What follows is a limited attempt to sketch out the ramifications of this dissertation for the history of global migration, with reference to the methods laid out in the introduction.

In 1900 the world’s most sought-after commodity was not gold, wheat, or steel—it was labor. Classical economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo held that labor was, along with land and capital, one corner of the holy trinity of production. At the turn of the twentieth century, land and capital were abundant, at least in regions of Euro-American white settlement. From the Americas to the Antipodes, governments and private speculators were quite literally giving away prime land to anyone willing to build, farm, mine, or log on it. Meanwhile, the financial centers of the North Atlantic poured money into these rapidly developing regions, which promised the highest rates of return anywhere. Across white settler states from Canada and Argentina to South Africa and Australia, the chief constraint on economic expansion was a shortage of labor. No settler state was untouched: owing to the shortage, wages in Melbourne were so high that tradesmen could afford multi-room homes in the proto-suburbs; in Cuba crops were reportedly rotting in the fields due to a shortage of fieldhands; in South Africa, prospectors hatched wild labor importation schemes to mine the abundant gold; in Brazil, planters could expand coffee cultivation endlessly into the depths of the Amazon rainforest, but could never get enough workers to harvest the beans; and in the United States, the industrial sprawl of towns like Pittsburgh and Chicago struggled to sate a near limitless thirst for workers. To ameliorate the shortage, government agencies and private companies alike dispatched labor recruiters to Europe to entice immigrants, showering them with blandishments of free and subsidized tickets or land. Europe itself was a key battleground in the international struggle for labor power. As lucrative employment opportunities in the settler states drew Europeans away from the factories and fields of the Old World, wages in Europe began to climb. Significant obstacles of distance and time remained, to be sure, but a unified international labor market was taking shape, forcing employers from Sydney and Rio de Janeiro to Manchester and Essen to compete for workers. Market integration bid up the price of labor while

simultaneously precipitating steep declines in the price of foodstuffs like grain. In response, European employers, particularly in the agricultural sector, organized to thwart foreign labor recruiters by throwing up legal barriers to emigration and criminalizing “emigration propaganda”.

This story leaves critical questions unanswered, however. If labor was in such short supply, why not recruit non-Europeans? It should come as no surprise that the scramble for labor was not a purely market phenomenon. The most conspicuous feature of migration policymaking around 1900 was racial exclusion. At the very same time as politicians from Australia to Brazil and Canada were clamoring to attract European migrants, they were imposing prohibitions on immigration from Asia. To justify such exclusion, contemporaries juxtaposed the manly and independent white laborer with the Asiatic “coolie”, who undermined the social order by working on a contractual basis, a status akin to indentured servitude. It is in fact a misconception that Chinese and Japanese migrants in places like the United States and Australia were contract laborers, or “coolies”. The Chinese workers who built the Central Pacific Railroad or toiled in the gold fields of New South Wales were free men (and some women) in every sense of the word, differing in no meaningful way from the Irishmen or Germans who answered the same call. Why, then, were Chinese and Japanese workers so forcefully excluded from the great labor rush? Racial prejudice is a parsimonious and compelling, but not entirely satisfactory, answer. For example, the arrival on American shores of millions of Catholic Italians was greeted with horror and no small number of grisly lynchings, and yet forty years separated Chinese exclusion in 1882 from the effective barring of Italian immigration in 1923. Nor can a single independent variable account for why settler societies from the Americas to the Antipodes cracked down on immigration at similar times. What is needed is an account of global migration which incorporates the unprecedented dynamism of global politics and economics around the turn of the twentieth century. In other words, only an approach like historical institutionalism, which emphasizes factors like the synchronicity and sequencing of transformative historical processes can provide a satisfactory answer.

The great labor rush and the consolidation of the global color line around 1900 were both consequences of a joint process—the co-evolution of global capitalism on one hand and political democracy on the other.²⁹⁵ Capitalist investment in the white settler states of North and South America, Oceania, and Africa—lands rich in natural endowments like fertile soil and valuable minerals—fueled demand for labor and prompted governments to initiate immigrant recruitment programs. Yet the social and economic conditions of settler societies militated toward the development of democracy. The frontier ethos of independence and equality combined with the absence of an *ancien regime* helped to birth a host of precocious democracies in places like Australia and the United States. And as the historical sociologists David Scott FitzGerald and David Cook-Martín have convincingly argued, the imposition of racist immigration

²⁹⁵ That capitalist development facilitates political democratization was once taken for granted in the social sciences. The history of European fascism in addition to the more recent rise of China have called into question whether any such necessary linkage exists. It seems undeniable that the formation of a single national or working-class culture, in conjunction with worker control over key chokepoints in industrial economies, like coal mines, enabled mass democracy, but did not make it inevitable. See, for example, Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (New York: Verso, 2011).

restrictions virtually everywhere followed on the heels of democratization, driven by the tendency of voters to see immigrants as a threat to their economic security.²⁹⁶ The electorate did not always and everywhere oppose immigration—in the United States, large ethnic blocks like the Italians and the Poles voted against restrictionist politicians who would prefer to see their Old-World co-nationals barred from immigrating. But in general, the combination of political democracy and an organized working class led to the passage of stringent immigration restrictions. Viewed in this way, policies like Chinese Exclusion in the United States were not just expressions of racial animus but were also the beginning of a process of escalating restriction that would culminate in effective bans even on European immigration. In times of economic distress, for example, it was impossible even for Englishmen to migrate to Australia.

Racial exclusion and the rush for white, European labor were thus two aspects of a single process. Organized, working-class political movements in places like California and New South Wales led to policies like the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act in the United States or the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 in Australia. Big business had in many cases opposed such restrictions, rightly viewing them as an attempt to slash the labor supply and sustain exceptionally high wages. In this way, the exclusion of non-white immigrants from the settler states drove the recruiting of white Europeans as the only politically acceptable source of migrant labor. And with virtually every settler state from the Americas to the Antipodes slamming the door on mass Asian immigration, competition quickly heated up to secure a sufficient number of laborers from Europe, turning racial exclusion and white recruitment into a self-reinforcing feedback loop.

Historians of Asian migration have often linked migratory processes to developments in the global economy and international politics. In contrast to these Asia scholars, historians of Euro-American migration have tended to address the subject more narrowly as a topic of social and cultural history, ceding the work of actually explaining migration to political scientists, economists, and even legal scholars.²⁹⁷ The ambitious works of Asia historians thus serve as a blueprint for this analysis. The late Adam McKeown's *magnum opus* is exemplary, demonstrating how the modern border and passport regime arose from policies of Asian exclusion during the 1880s.²⁹⁸ Previously, the historian John Torpey had dated modern passports to the First World War, but McKeown makes clear that this was merely the universalization of a system imposed upon Asians and other non-whites decades earlier.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ FitzGerald and Cook-Martin, *Culling the Masses*.

²⁹⁷ Some excellent works of migration history written by political scientists include Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation By Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008). The legal scholar Bill Ong Hing has written a number of influential books on American migration policy, including Bill Ong Hing, *Defining America Through Immigration Policy* (Chicago: Temple University Press, 2004). Among economists, migration has long been a popular object of study, not least because the phenomenon lends itself so easily to quantification. The leading migration economist today is George J. Borjas, whose works include, in addition to an enormous corpus of econometric papers, the books George J. Borjas, *Heaven's Door: Immigration Policy and the American Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) and George J. Borjas, *We Wanted Workers: Unraveling the Immigration Narrative* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016).

²⁹⁸ Adam M. McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

²⁹⁹ Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*.

Likewise, Mae Ngai's recent study of Chinese migration in the context of the gold rushes in California, Australia, and South Africa examines the formation of Chinese communities across the Anglophone world. From Sydney to San Francisco a common narrative took hold which both explained the origin of Chinese immigration and justified its eventual prohibition. Beginning in California, nativist labor leaders like the Irishman Denis Kearney argued that Chinese immigrants were in fact "coolies", or contract workers, imported by capitalists to undercut the wages of decent, white working men. The "coolie trade" was, in the eyes of Kearney and his allies, little different from the slave trade, and thus a debasement of liberal civilization. Indeed, anti-Chinese politicians like Kearney conceived of slavery and the coolie trade not as instruments for oppressing Black and Chinese people, but as an attack on white workers.³⁰⁰ This "coolie-slave" narrative took root across the Anglosphere, providing the justification for exclusionary immigration policies and shaping perceptions of Chinese migration to this day. As Ngai points out, even professional historians still regularly refer to free Chinese immigrants who arrived in the United States or Australia around 1900 as "contract laborers" (the term "coolie" having fallen out of fashion, and rightfully so).³⁰¹ As Ngai puts it, Chinese migration was part and parcel of...

"...a broad reorganization of global migration in the early twentieth century: British settler emigration to the white dominions; eastern and southern European emigration to the industrializing centers of the West; and Asian migration to the colonial economies of Southeast and North Asia. The new ethno-racial patterns of migration were not simply spontaneous responses to labor and capital market demands. Rather, they resulted from a confluence of political and economic measures that directed labor and commercial energies in certain directions and not others."³⁰²

In other words, Chinese migrants came to the goldfields of California and Australia for the same self-interested reasons that countless Europeans and Americans did. But the very frontier conditions that helped to make these places nascent democracies also made them pioneers of racial exclusion in migration policy. Indeed, what made California and Australia so alike was the combination of fabulous natural wealth with dire labor scarcity. This potent mix encouraged the formation of an unusually well-organized and militant working class, whose grievances with employers, who were in fact importing (mostly white) labor in an effort to drive down wages, were displaced onto foreign groups of working, predominantly Asians. This was the basis of the feedback loop which fueled both the labor rush and the exclusion of non-white immigrants.

According to Sebastian Conrad, the objective of global history is to examine "processes of structural transformation" that are world-wide in scope.³⁰³ The scramble

³⁰⁰ The best account of anti-Chinese agitation in California is still Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

³⁰¹ On Chinese workers in South Africa, see Ngai, *The Gold Rushes*, Part III.

³⁰² Mae Ngai, *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes, Chinese Migration, and Global Politics* (New York: Norton, 2022), 278.

³⁰³ Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 64-65.

for European workers was part of just such a process. During the second half of the nineteenth century, European capital surpluses poured into the settler states of the Americas and the Antipodes, fueling an insatiable demand for labor. In response, employers in the settler states dispatched labor recruiters to Europe or paid into national immigration sponsorship programs. Prevailing high wages amid enduring labor scarcity in places like Australia and California fueled a pattern of industrial conflict that centered on the demonization and eventual exclusion of racial Others, above all the Chinese. In this way, the development of global capitalism intersected the foundation of democratic political institutions and entrenched the global color line.

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