



Marcel van der Linden, Leo Lucassen (eds.), ***Working on Labor: Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen*** (Studies in Global Social History 9; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012, 433 pp., ISBN 978 90 04 22952 5).

Jan Lucassen is widely seen in social and economic history circles as one of the most influential scholars of pre-industrial labour migration. Since the publication of his highly-regarded thesis *Naar de kusten van de Noordzee* in 1984, Lucassen has achieved two things. First, he has been able to link up migration with broader subjects in social and economic history such as wage labouring and the organisation of guilds. Second, in the more later phases of his career, he has expanded from the geographical confines of Western Europe to tie up migration with globalization and ‘global history’ (See in particular J. Lucassen and L. Lucassen, ‘The Mobility Transition Revisited, 1500-1900: What the Case of Europe Can Offer to Global History’, *Journal of Global History* 4 (2009) 347-377; ‘From Mobility Transition to Comparative Global Migration History’, *Journal of Global History* 6 (2011) 299-307.) In that fashion, this collection of essays edited by Marcel van der Linden and Leo Lucassen honours a stellar career (after his retirement from academic duties) by explicitly dividing the essays into key ‘Lucassen themes’ and making sure the geographical breath of his work is well covered.

One of the facets of Lucassen’s work has been to revise the focus of ‘labour history’ away from male industrial workers in economically-developed regions of the world to a wider range of social interest groups in a wider range of social contexts. Happily then, this book touches upon women’s and children’s labour contributions, works across the social spectrum from ‘white collar’ workers of the VOC to those lower down the hierarchy such as prostitutes or those operating semi-legally or illegally such as hawkers and peddlers, and addresses contexts as divergent as medieval Western Europe to colonial Bengal and Java. Many of the essays in the same vein as Lucassen also attempt to marry migration studies with broader indicators of ‘economic development’: what was the contribution of migrants in an economic sense and can it be assessed relative to contributions from other parts of society? In effect: how important was migration? Jan Luiten van Zanden and Maarten Prak, for example, use their very short essay to show how significant migration really was in the context of early-modern urbanisation in Holland – cities here from the seventeenth century onwards expanded in population despite high death rates and the lowering of nuptiality caused by the increase in the age

of marriage, all thanks to mass immigration, often from the countryside. The important thing is that Lucassen has stimulated and sparked new research avenues, and accordingly some of the essays in this book can be seen more as research agendas and new paths to explore rather than offering definitive conclusions – Jelle van Lottum concedes as much at the end of his essay on page 266. A good example of this is the essay by Erik-Jan Zürcher who outlines the agenda of an exciting collaborative project at the IISH entitled ‘Fighting for a Living’ but the main results apparently will not be seen until Spring 2014 when his edited volume appears under the same name with Amsterdam University Press.

Something that Lucassen made clear from a very early stage was that politically and jurisdictionally ‘free’ wage labourers, were not always ‘free’ in an economic sense: they did not (at least in the pre-industrial period) always carry with them a free choice of employer. So as iterated in Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly’s essay, the Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century may have been the final death-knell to feudalism in many parts of Western Europe, yet extra-economic coercion connected to serfdom was simply replaced by new forms of coercion restricting mobility and actions of wage labourers. This was met with varying degrees of success, of course, and as Lis and Soly suggest, was generally dependent on the alignment of interests from social groups (central government, rural aristocratic, ecclesiastical, urban government, territorial lord, rural communes, etc.). Similar themes come up in William van Schendel’s essay – notionally free peasant cultivators had through the demands of the colonial economy no choice but to grow indigo – when other crops were much preferred.

A commendable quality of Lucassen’s work has always been his desire to give his study of historical developments real ‘societal relevance’. Migration and labour issues that he discusses for early-modern Europe are just as significant and pressing for modern developing and post-industrialised countries. Thus it is no surprise that the book contains unusual contextual comparisons and innovation. Danielle van den Heuvel approaches peddlers and hawkers of early-modern Europe in light of recent literature on street selling and food vendors in contemporary developing settings. This is the kind of work which brings history and development economics together – particularly given the importance the World Bank has put upon understanding the phenomenon of street selling from the 1970s onwards. As Ulbe Bosma notes (372) in his essay on the crisis of Caribbean sugar production in the 1930s, ‘the making of global labour history and the making of development economics are intimately connected’. It is also the kind of work which shines a light on the side-effects and consequences of important trends still happening today such as mass rural-urban migration in developing countries and the swelling of urban agglomerations. Lex Heerma van Voss notes the close connection of this pattern of migration and rapid urbanisation on the proliferation of prostitution markets in places such as Buenos Aires and Mexico City.

In sum this is a highly readable book covering a diversity of topics, contexts, and chronologies in the general areas of labour and migration history. Almost all social and economic historians will find something of interest here, as well as development

economists and historical demographers. Not all the essays are conclusive or have definitive results, but perhaps that is all the more apt in this book which honours the contribution of Jan Lucassen. Lucassen has laid the foundations for a new labour history with greater relevance for the present and the essays in this book show the exciting new avenues in which his work can be taken in the future – to the betterment of social, economic, demographic, and global history in general.

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