

# Creating Perfect Immigrants: Guestworkers of the World in Historical Perspective<sup>1</sup>

CINDY HAHAMOVITCH

Peter Russell knew he had a hard day ahead of him as he surveyed the cane fields. This was not his first year harvesting sugar cane in Florida, and he understood with a glance that this field would be a particularly bad one. Had the stalks been standing upright, they would have been almost twice his height, but the wind had blown them over and the cane had grown bent and tangled. As usual, the cane was covered with black, sticky, sweet-smelling soot, left by fires set the previous day to burn the fields clear of leaves. He hoped the flames had also purged the fields of snakes and rats but there was no way to be sure. In Jamaica, Russell's home country, a row of sugar cane was a row of sugar cane. But in Florida, where cane grew thicker and taller than almost anywhere else in the world, his job each day was to harvest a "cut row," or two rows side-by-side, each two football fields in length. Once he severed the cane just above the ground with his cane-knife or "bill," he had to cut off its leafy tops because they were low in sucrose and the leaves gummed up the machines. He would pile the cane and the "trash" neatly in separate heaps or a "pusher" might "check him out," depriving him of a full day's earnings. Failure to cut the cane close enough to the ground, thus wasting the part of the stalk where the sucrose was most concentrated, would also get him sent back to the barracks. If the pushers checked him out three times, the company would send him back to Jamaica. Walking to the start of a row, he cut a piece of cane in half and jammed the end of the cut piece into the ground. Skewering his time card onto the tip of the upright stalk, he began to work.<sup>2</sup>

Though on that day in 1968 Russell might have felt alone in a sea of sugar cane, there were, in fact, many others like him. In the U.S. in the 1960s, some 15,000 other "H2 workers" from the British West Indies, most of them Jamaicans, came annually to American fields on temporary, no-strike contracts. Today, there are 40,000 mostly Mexican temporary contract workers (now called "H2-A workers") in the U.S. annu-

---

<sup>1</sup>The author would like to thank the following people and organizations for moral, intellectual, and financial support: Lindsey Allen, Eric Arnesen, Evan Bennett, Henry Bernstein, Rohan D'Souza, Leon Fink, Donna Gabaccia, Gaston Gordillo, Rick Halpern, Tobias Higbie, Jeanette Keith, Laurie Koloski, Leo Lucassen, Kay Mansfield, Gary Mormino, Scott R. Nelson, Jim Scott, the College of William & Mary, the Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University, and the Breakfast Club.

<sup>2</sup>Deposition of Peter Russell, Kingston, Jamaica, August 7, 1968, Clement Cole et al. v. William Heidtman, Sheriff of Palm Beach County et al., in the U.S. District Court in and for the Southern District of Florida, Miami Division, case no. 68-245-Civ-TC. See also, Peter Kramer, *The Offshores: A Study of Foreign Farm Labor in Florida* (Petersburg: Community Action Fund, 1966); David Griffith, "Peasants in Reserve: Temporary West Indian Labor in the U.S. Farm Labor Market," *International Migration Review* 20, 4 (1986): 875-898; T. McCoy and C. Wood, *Caribbean Workers in the Florida Sugar Cane Industry*, Occasional Paper No. 2 of the Caribbean Migration Program (Gainesville: Center for Latin American Studies, University of Florida, 1982); Alec Wilkinson, *Big Sugar: Seasons in the Cane Fields of Florida* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989).

ally as well as another 400,000 non-agricultural (or “H2-B”) workers, who labor in hotels, theme parks, high-tech firms and universities.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere in the world, there are millions more international temps, men and women whose right to work and remain abroad rests on the whim of their employer or that of the government that sanctioned their stay. Turkish auto workers in Germany, Mozambiquan diamond miners in South Africa, Indonesian nannies in Malaysia and many others have shared—and still share—Russell’s limbo status, though their particular circumstances have differed and they have been called by different names. Some have had license to choose among employers or even industries; others were bound to the particular employers who imported them. Some could find housing wherever they could afford it, while others were locked in closed compounds. Some worked in groups of hundreds or even thousands; many labored alone in private households. Millions of foreign workers were permitted to renew their visas year after year; millions of others were forced to return home at the expiration of their contracts. They have been called offshores, H2 workers, *braceros*, European voluntary labourers, foreign workers, or simply “our maid,” yet all were authorized by governments to cross borders to work for wages on a temporary basis.<sup>4</sup>

In the last 40 years, state-authorized, temporary foreign workers have come to be known collectively as “guestworkers,” a translation of the German *Gastarbeiter*. The term makes clear that such immigrant workers are guests of the state, not “illegal aliens,” but it also conveys their temporary status. Guests sometimes overstay their welcome, after all, but, ultimately, they can be expected to leave. Germans had previously called foreign workers *Fremdarbeiter*—“alien workers”—but in the insidious lexicon of the Third Reich the term had come to connote “sub-humans.” In an effort to distinguish West Germany’s massive foreign worker programs in the 1950s and 1960s from its slave labor program just two decades earlier, Germans latched onto the “more hospitable” term. The euphemism soon gained currency elsewhere in the world, as the trend toward admitting labor migrants on fixed-term visas or contracts shifted from Europe, South Africa, and the U.S. to the Middle East and then to the so-called “economic tigers” of the Pacific.<sup>5</sup>

But what precisely are guestworkers and how long have they existed? I set out to answer those questions two years ago in the course of my research on H2 workers, expecting to find a book or two on guestworkers around the world. I found many books and articles on guestworkers in particular countries or from particular regions—Turks in Germany, Indians in the Middle East, Mexicans in the U.S., Filipinos everywhere—but, to my dismay, no one study considered the history of guestworkers globally, let alone guestworker programs over time.<sup>6</sup> Thus I set out to read the English-language

---

<sup>3</sup>*Migration News* 9, 9 (September 2002): [http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/sep\\_2002-03.html](http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/sep_2002-03.html).

<sup>4</sup>H2 workers got their name from Section H2 of the Immigration Act of 1952, which institutionalized the importation of agricultural guestworkers from the Caribbean. *Braceros*, the word most often used to describe Mexican guestworkers to the U.S., simple means “strong arms.”

<sup>5</sup>For a brief discussion of the term *Gastarbeiter*, see Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), 13.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Suzanne Paine, *Exporting Workers: The Turkish Case*, University of Cambridge, Department of Applied Economics, Occasional Paper 41 (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Başgöz İlhan and Norman Furniss, eds., *Turkish Workers in Europe: An Interdisciplinary Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1985); Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); and Haruo Shimada, *Japan’s “Guest Workers”: Issues and Public Policies* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1994). Most of the comparative works compare guestworker policies and the experiences of guestworkers in European countries. See, for example, Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, *Immigrant Workers and Class*

literature on the subject, cognizant of the fact that any conclusions I might draw would be tentative, given the extensive literature in other languages. Because the bulk of the literature concerns the previous 20 years, I searched for works that would permit me to take on the topic historically. The result of my survey is thus not a comparison of what conditions are like for temporary foreign workers in different places today, but rather a cautious inquiry into the origins, nature, and meaning of this distinctively modern form of transnational migration.

Some critics of guestworker programs, and guestworkers themselves, have likened their status to slavery, but the anachronistic image of a time card stuck onto the end of a stalk of cane should signal that Peter Russell's workplace, at least, was not simply a throwback to the early 19th century. Certainly Jamaican cane cutters could not have missed the many reminders of the "peculiar institution." Besides the obvious fact that sugar cane had been Jamaica's principal "slave crop," Russell and his compatriots had been hired by white men who examined them physically in much the same way that slaves had been examined for sale. Recruiters checked their teeth, felt the muscles in their arms and back, turned over their hands to look for the calluses on their palms that signaled familiarity with hard, manual work, and looked for signs of injury and disease. Separated from their families and living entirely among men, "H2 workers" like Russell were required to stay with the employers who imported them. If they tried to leave to find other work, they could be pursued, not by slave "patrollers," but by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Even the "pushers" who urged Russell to cut faster had much in common with the slave foremen who had performed the same task centuries earlier. West Indians too, they would have been promoted as a reward for their speed as cane cutters. But if they failed to get the men under them to cut fast and carefully enough, they would have found themselves "back at the knife."<sup>7</sup>

Still, Russell was not a slave. He earned a wage, though he never knew what it would be from one day to the next. He had not been kidnapped and forced into the hold of a ship bound for Florida. Rather, he had applied for a "ticket," waited in line for an interview, subjected himself to a medical exam, prepared to leave with only a day's notice, and arrived in Miami on a chartered plane. Unlike a slave, moreover, he could return home at any time, though, if he did, he would have to pay his own way back to Kingston.

Elsewhere in the world, guestworkers have sometimes been reduced to a slave-like status: they have been locked in compounds or even chained to keep them from escaping; they have been whipped or beaten; and have had their passports confiscated to keep them from returning home. Yet we can still state, though not without some trepidation, that these were the exceptions not the rule. Though slavery is alive and well

---

Footnote 6 continued

*Structure in Western Europe*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) and Mark J. Miller, *Foreign Workers in Western Europe* (New York: Praeger, 1981). Philip L. Martin, *Guestworker Programs: Lessons from Europe*, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Monograph No. 5 (Washington: GPO, 1980) compares the European programs with the U.S. *bracero* program, as does James F. Hollifield, *Immigrants, Markets, and States: The Political Economy of Postwar Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). There are many studies of international labor migration that include useful sections on guestworkers, though few take an historical approach. See, for example, Peter Stalker, *The Work of Strangers: A Survey of International Labour Migration* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1994); Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Books, 1998); and Saskia Sassen, *Guests and Aliens* (New York: New Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup>Video recording of "Recruitment—Rockie Point, Kingston, Jamaica," in author's possession.

in the global economy of the 21st century—women are regularly sold into prostitution and children are sacrificed to satisfy family debts, to name just two examples—guestworkers are generally volunteers. Expecting to return, cash in hand, in just a few months or a few years, they sign up for dirty, dangerous, or difficult work abroad, though they may not know where on the spectrum between slavery and freedom they will end up.<sup>8</sup>

As voluntary labor migrants, guestworkers have had far more in common with the indentured servants who traversed the globe in the 19th and early 20th centuries than they have had with slaves. Indentured servitude rose like a phoenix from near extinction in the 1830s as a means to replace or supplement emancipated slaves in the British Empire. As the French, Dutch, and lastly the Spanish Empire followed Great Britain in abolishing slavery in their territories, indentured servitude—or the “coolie trade” as it became known—became the chief method by which plantations, mines, and construction companies in the tropics secured labor.<sup>9</sup>

Like slaves, the mostly Indian and Chinese indentured servants of the 19th and early 20th centuries faced deadly ocean voyages and abysmal working and living conditions, but unlike slaves, according to David Northrup, most probably departed their homelands willingly, albeit with poor or deceptive information about the circumstances that awaited them. They signed contracts that bound them to a particular employer for a period of years—usually five but sometimes more—after which they were free to remain or return to the place from whence they had come.<sup>10</sup>

Though the earliest “guestworker” programs overlapped with the international trade in indentured servitude, guestworkers like Peter Russell were not simply coolies with time cards. For there was an essential fact that separated guestworker from indentured servants: indentured servants were generally encouraged to stay after the expiration of their contracts, while guestworkers were, by definition, expected to leave.

The idea of creating an immigrant who could be made to leave was a state response to the growing hostility to the millions who moved, both bound and free. Migration was likely always controversial, but migrants and the people who recruited them faced organized opposition by the end of the 19th century. Labor organizations and labor parties from Australia to Montreal protested against the importation of contract workers who had little choice but to break strikes, depress conditions, and work for relatively low wages. Likewise, nativists of all classes feared that “aliens,” whether free or unfree, would undermine national identity and racial purity. By the late 19th century, groups such as these threatened employers’ free access to immigrant labor and to indentured servants and contract workers in particular.

Temporary labor schemes were thus state-brokered compromises designed to main-

---

<sup>8</sup>On the persistence of slavery in the late 20th century, see Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup>For excellent discussions of indentured servitude and other 19th-century labor supply systems, see Lydia Potts, *The World Labour Market: A History of Migration* (London: Zed Books, 1940); Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Kay Saunders, ed., *Indentured Labor in the British Empire, 1834–1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); Jan Lucassen, “Free and Unfree Labour Before the Twentieth Century: A Brief Overview,” in *Free and Unfree Labor*, ed. Tom Brass, Marcel van der Linder, and Jan Lucassen (Amsterdam: International Institute for Social History, 1993), 7–18.

<sup>10</sup>While Hugh Tinker’s famous study of Indian labor overseas concluded that indentured servitude was “a new system of slavery,” David Northrup argues that it was for most a voluntary system of labor supply. *Ibid.*

tain high levels of migration while placating anti-immigrant movements. They offered employers foreign workers who could still be bound like indentured servants but who could also be disciplined by the threat of deportation. They placated trade unionists who feared foreign competition by promising to restrict guestworkers to the most onerous work and to expel them during economic downturns. And they assuaged nativists by isolating guestworkers from the general population. Finally, states got development aid from poor countries in the form of ready workers, without the responsibility of having to integrate those workers or provide for their welfare. The perfect immigrant was born.

States were not new to the labor supply business in the late 19th century. On the contrary, European powers had licensed slave traders in the 17th century and authorized, funded, exploited, and helped reform the worst excesses of indentured labor in the 19th century. Yet men and women had been crossing borders in search of sustenance since there were borders and, for most of human history, European states at least had done little to impede their movements. Labor migrants might be turned away as vagrants or “foreigners” by local communities but, at the highest levels, governments were more likely to encourage than discourage the arrival of willing workers. Moreover, in the 19th century, as capitalism loosened the ties that bound Europeans to particular land and lords, 60 to 70 million Europeans emigrated in search of work or land, and millions more went on the tramp within Europe in search of permanent or seasonal work. Little but their own poverty impeded their movements.<sup>11</sup>

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, however, state actors began to assert the authority to regulate or limit the admission of immigrants into their home territories as never before. The creation of temporary immigrants was part and parcel of that process. By the late 19th century, the rising tide of international migration and nationalism combined to produce a rush of restrictive immigration legislation around the world. As John Torpey argues in *The Invention of the Passport*, “[t]he institutionalization of the idea of the ‘nation-state’ as a prospectively homogeneous ethnocultural unit” led “necessarily” to efforts to regulate people’s movements. Part of the process of states’ becoming, he argues, is their assertion of a monopoly of “the legitimate means of movement.” This involved documenting through passports, birth certificates and other means who was and who was not a full member of the nation-state, and in legislative and administrative efforts to control who could cross a nation-state’s borders. The more states promised their citizenry in terms of services—workers’ compensation, old-age and mothers’ pensions, public education—the more incentive state officials had to identify who was and who was not eligible for such services. Thus the rise of welfare states fostered the hardening of borders and, by extension, the criminalization of border crossing. By the end of the 19th century, industrialized nation-states around the world had enacted legislation requiring immigrants to register, to be literate, to pay head-taxes, or to stay out altogether.<sup>12</sup> Yet immigration restrictions did not just come from

---

<sup>11</sup>Jan Lucassen, *Migrant Labour in Europe, 1600–1900: The Drift to the North Sea* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); Leslie Page Moch, *Moving Europeans: Migration in Western Europe Since 1650* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 77–78, 121; Saskia Sassen, *Guests and Aliens* (New York: New Press, 1999, originally published in German, 1996), 12–13; Castles and Kosack, 16–20. See also, Richard Plender, *International Migration Law* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), who argues that the idea that states had the right to prevent foreigners from crossing their borders was a distinctly modern concept.

<sup>12</sup>John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–20 and see especially, 21–56.

on high. Restrictionism found supporters among nativists and trade unions. And as democratic political systems proliferated, those who might have once expressed their views through personal attacks on immigrants could make themselves heard through the ballot box.

The result was a concentration of restrictive legislation around the turn-of-the-century, some of which threatened employers quite directly. Some governments simply asserted their “sovereign right” to exclude immigrants for any reason, whether or not they had the means or inclination to do so. The Netherlands passed such a law in 1887, as did Sweden in 1894, Argentina in 1902, and Chile in 1918. Some required that immigrants register as they crossed land borders as in France after 1893 and the U.S. after 1891. Others asserted their monopoly rights over movement by singling out particular immigrant groups, particularly those most likely to emigrate in bondage to an employer or labor recruiter. The state of Victoria and the U.S. were the first to ban Chinese laborers (in 1881 and 1882 respectively), though by the end of the 1890s many other nations had followed suit. In 1897, Natal restricted Indian immigration by means of a dictation test in a European language and by imposing a head tax of £25. Venezuela banned all non-Europeans, while Colombia in 1914 simply restricted the immigration of “dangerous aliens.” Haiti, Costa Rica and Panama all denied admission to Syrians among others.<sup>13</sup>

Many of these restriction campaigns seemed more public fiction than practical policy. In 1891, for example, the U.S. Congress assigned federal officials to police the nation’s land borders, but, by 1893, there was only one inspector assigned to patrol the 2000-mile border that separated the U.S. from Mexico, and just a few more policing the 5500-mile U.S.–Canadian border.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, French officials made little effort to enforce the law that required immigrants to register with local police each time they moved. Yet the global trend toward immigration restriction suggests that international migration bolstered nationalism rather than undermining it.<sup>15</sup>

The first temporary worker programs were products of this period of growing intolerance toward immigrant workers and of nation-states under construction. Thus the first phase in the history of guestworker programs began in the 1880s and continued until the Great Depression. Prussia’s turn to state-sanctioned temporary migration began in 1890, less than 20 years after German unification, and the migrant labor system which supplied the diamond and gold mines of southern Africa came in the midst of the effort to unify British colonies, Boer Republics and African kingdoms under British rule. Against this backdrop of state formation, temporary labor schemes appear to represent collaborative efforts on the part of state-builders and employers to provide stable workforces to developing industries, while at the same time placating

---

<sup>13</sup>Plender; Freda Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991); Carl Solber, *Immigration and Nationalism: Argentina and Chile, 1890–1914* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970); Roger Daniels, “The Growth of Restrictive Immigration Policies in the Colonies of Settlement,” in *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration*, ed. Robin Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 39–44. On Chinese exclusion globally, see Aristide Zolberg, “The Great Wall Against China: Responses to the First Immigration Crisis, 1885–1925,” in *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives*, ed. Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 291–315.

<sup>14</sup>Bruno Ramirez, *Crossing the 49th Parallel: Migration from Canada to the United States, 1900–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 44.

<sup>15</sup>David Jacobson argues the opposite in *Rights Across Borders* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4.

popular demands for clear-cut distinctions between citizens and non-citizens, insiders and outsiders, whites and non-whites.

As was the case in many other parts of the world, the countryside in late 19th-century Prussia was undergoing rapid commercialization, mechanization, and the consolidation of farms into large holdings, instigated at least in part by a crisis caused by competition from American-grown grain. Because planters needed fewer year-round farm hands and more short-term seasonal laborers, these changes led simultaneously and paradoxically to the displacement of rural people and to growing complaints of labor shortages. The problem was not, in fact, a lack of potential workers—the Reich's population increased by 25% between 1873 and 1895—the problem was in attracting and keeping short-term seasonal laborers at a time when year-round jobs in factories and coal mines beckoned.<sup>16</sup>

To secure a short-term labor force without raising wages for farmworkers, Ulrich Herbert writes, Prussian farm owners in the 1880s did what many other 19th-century employers around the world were doing: they recruited workers from abroad, in this case, tens of thousands of Poles from Russia and Austria (Poland itself had been disassembled by its neighbors in the late 18th century). Many thousands of ethnic Poles already lived and worked in Prussian provinces due to earlier annexations of Polish territory, but in the 1880s, landowners drove the rapid development of mining and the commercialization of agriculture by importing tens of thousands more.<sup>17</sup>

Though the new arrivals were relatively small in number, compared to the numbers of Poles already in Prussia and to the Prussian population as a whole, the presence of new Slavic immigrants fed the rising tide of German nationalism. By the mid-1880s, the hue and cry over the so-called “Polanization” of Prussia reached a fever-pitch, forcing Bismark to choose between placating nativists, on the one hand, and placating landed capitalists, on the other. “[W]e could not concede,” Bismark wrote to the Prussian interior minister in February of 1885,

that the need for manpower in the border regions was of greater importance than the political dangers and threat to the state potentially posed by a Polonization of a large segment of the Prussian population. Though recognizing agriculture as the most important of all trades, we deem it a lesser evil for individual regions to suffer from a shortage of manpower than for the state—and its future—to suffer any impairment.

To repel “the Slavic influence,” Herbert reveals, Prussia deported some 40,000 unnaturalized Poles in 1885, and enacted harsh measures to block further immigration.<sup>18</sup>

However, owners of large estates in eastern Prussia continued to protest the deportation of Polish workers, and their appeals became all the more strident as labor-intensive beet cultivation spread in the east, exacerbating their seasonal labor problems. By petitioning for the right to import agricultural labor on a *temporary* basis and by promising that the recruitment effort would be subject to government controls,

---

<sup>16</sup>Ulrich Herbert, *A History of Foreign Labor in Germany, 1880–1980: Seasonal Workers/Forced Laborers/Guest Workers* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990; German language edition published 1986), 18–34.

<sup>17</sup>Herbert, 18–34; David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>18</sup>Castles and Kosack date the expulsion of Poles to 1907, but Ulrich Herbert clearly shows that tens of thousands of Poles were deported in 1885. Herbert, 12–13; Castles and Kosack, 19–20.

landowners won a compromise five years later. In 1890, despite “patriotic” objections, the government reopened the eastern provinces of Prussia to Polish migrants.<sup>19</sup>

The new policy restored employers’ access to Polish migrants but discouraged the migrants’ permanent settlement by excluding all but single men and by requiring the migrants to leave every winter. According to Herbert, the readmitted migrants were issued German identification cards, color-coded to indicate their nation of origin. They were banned from speaking German, and to make sure they did not organize for their mutual benefit, the government decreed that they could not hold meetings in Polish either. The policy’s object, according to Herbert, was to “repeatedly impress upon both the Polish farmworkers and the local German population that such workers were merely aliens whose presence was tolerated and that their permanent settlement in Prussia was out of the question.”<sup>20</sup>

The Prussian example perfectly captures the essence of the guestworker programs that would dot the globe over the next 100 years. First, the program served the owners of an industry undergoing rapid change, which, without an influx of foreign workers, would have faced the prospect of rising wages. Second, the state became involved not so much because of employers’ demands for foreign workers—they already had them—but because of rising public opposition to that foreign presence. The state-sponsored migration staved off, or in this case undermined, more draconian immigration restrictions by promising that state power could be employed to make immigration temporary. Third, though guestworker programs represented the intrusion of the state into the affairs of employers of foreign workers, employers had little cause to complain. By segregating foreign workers from the general population, in this case through an ID system, language restrictions, and, significantly, by limiting the migration to men, Prussia’s system pitted foreigners against domestic workers and intimidated Poles who might have formed or joined labor organizations. If foreign workers did organize, employers could now threaten them with deportation, with the force of the state under-girding the threat. Variations on these themes would reappear as other states attempted to exert similar authority over foreign workers within their borders.

South Africa’s history reveals a similar transition to a temporary or “oscillating” system of labor supply. As in the case of the 1890 Prussian compromise that mediated between Germans who wanted to hire Poles and those who wanted to banish them, South Africa’s labor supply system placated whites who wanted to isolate themselves from non-whites, while serving white employers who sought a large and more controllable labor force. Moreover, like the Prussian example, it reveals an intimate relationship between labor migration and state formation.

After the annexation of Natal in 1842, Britain’s colonial government responded to the rising number of Africans in the territory by removing about half of them to “locations,” also called “reserves.” This policy drew criticism from producers of wine and wool who complained that they could not get sufficient labor as a result. Complaints increased after the creation of sugar cane plantations in 1860. Having petitioned unsuccessfully for the release of labor from the reserves, in 1860 planters turned to British India as a source of labor, importing 6000 people on five-year contracts between 1860 and 1866. This was clearly meant to be permanent immigration: at least one-quarter of the migrants were required by policy to be women; and, after their

---

<sup>19</sup>Herbert, 14–19.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 19–20.



indentures were up, laborers could choose between free passage home or a small land grant in Natal. Nearly all elected to stay.<sup>21</sup>

The use of foreign workers might have remained limited had not diamonds been discovered in the Cape Colony and gold in the Transvaal (in 1870 and 1871, respectively). The simultaneous expansion of commercial agriculture and mining led employers to complain bitterly to colonial officials of rising wages. Moreover, because mine owners demanded a far more stable workforce than sugar planters, whose labor needs were seasonal, they were frustrated by local Africans who resisted signing long contracts, preferring to remain free to return at will to subsistence farming or hunting. Mine managers' problem, in other words, was not so much a shortage of labor as it was a shortage of tractable labor.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, in 1881, the Kimberly Central diamond complex began importing miners on contracts from Portuguese East Africa (now Mozambique), pitting them against local workers in a competition for work and wages. Four years later, the mine managers instituted a policy of "closed compounds," locking the men in for the duration of their contracts. At the same time, Kimberly began demanding that workers sign year-long agreements and, to ensure that men did not try to leave prematurely, the companies paid the miners every six months, instead of weekly. Unlike the South Asians who had been encouraged to settle in Natal, foreign miners who would not renew their contracts were shuttled out of the mining region or out of the territory entirely to guarantee against permanent settlement.<sup>23</sup>

This oscillating labor supply soon spread to other mines and regions, and, according to Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves, and David Yudelman, it enabled South Africa's gold mining companies to keep miners' real wages flat for some 50 years. In turn, the low cost of labor allowed the industry to expand rapidly, despite the fact that gold prices were fixed by international agreements.<sup>24</sup>

As in Prussia, South Africa's temporary labor scheme was a creation of employers with the sanction and active support of state authorities. Even South Africa's pass laws originated in the Kimberley diamond mines in 1872, as the diamond industry resurrected old slave pass laws to restrict the movements of diamond miners. Yet British colonial authorities and later the government of the Union of South Africa were very much active partners in the effort to restrict the mobility of black labor and to segregate black residents from South Africa's white minority. Indeed, perhaps nowhere else in the world did a state take its very identity from a migrant labor system. Shortly after the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the government enacted the Native Labour Regulation Act, which required all male African workers, including foreigners, to carry passes. Two years later, the 1913 Land Act created overcrowded "reserves," much like the old "locations," which could be mined for cheap labor. And a decade after that, the Natives Act amended the pass laws to keep blacks out of urban areas, except when they had to be there "to minister to the needs of the white man." Thus South Africa's apartheid system mirrored Prussia's efforts to import *and* segregate

---

<sup>21</sup>David Welsh, *The Roots of Segregation: Native Policy in Colonial Natal, 1845–1910* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1971), 1–30; Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 64–100.

<sup>22</sup>Rick Halpern makes this point in a study forthcoming in *Journal of Southern African Studies*.

<sup>23</sup>Rob Turrell, "Kimberley's Model Compounds," *Journal of African History* 25 (1984): 59–75.

<sup>24</sup>Francis Wilson, *Labour in the South African Gold Mines, 1911–1969* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 1, 3–5, 10–14; Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves, and David Yudelman, *South Africa's Labor Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 1–32.

Poles, but with an insidious twist: while Prussia's foreign worker program helped distinguish "foreigners" from "Germans," South Africa's plan helped reduce black South Africans to the status of foreigners in their own land.<sup>25</sup>

State-sanctioned temporary labor migration schemes do not seem to have spread beyond Prussia and South Africa until World War I. Because guestworker programs were products of an uncomfortable marriage between those who desired and those who resented foreign workers, such schemes tended not to appear in countries where mass immigration met with relatively little opposition. In frigid Canada, for example, keeping immigrants in was a bigger problem than keeping them out, as Europeans used Canada as a way-station on their journey to the U.S. As a result, Canadian officials discouraged the importation of immigrants on temporary contracts.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, in France, which was the largest importer of foreign labor after the U.S., Jeanne Singer-Kérel argues, "immigrants were seen not only as cheap labor but also as potential cannon fodder, though for that they had to become French." As a result, French policies toward immigrants tended toward assimilation not exclusion, with only occasional bursts of legislative xenophobia. In the U.S. working class voters used the ballot box to ban the importation of contract laborers altogether, although this prohibition proved easy to circumvent. Those who were admitted to the U.S. entered with no restrictions on where, for whom, and for how long they could work.<sup>27</sup>

The outbreak of World War I sounded the death knell of liberal immigration policies such as these. As Nigel Harris puts it, "War itself provided a crescendo of hysteria on the issue, sufficient to reverse long-standing commitments and practices related to the freedom to move. By the 1920s, most governments had taken powers to control movements." Yet the war generated contradictory impulses. On one hand, it heightened xenophobia and exacerbated fears of seditious and radical foreigners. On the other hand, inspired belligerents to throw open their arms to immigrants in the name of maximizing war production. On the other hand, it heightened xenophobia and exacerbated fears of seditious and radical foreigners. These contradictory sentiments—the desire to admit immigrant workers and the desire to control them—encouraged even the most liberal states to get into the business of recruiting *and* policing immigrants, using the very sort of methods pioneered by Prussia and South Africa.<sup>28</sup>

The need to replace 7 million workers ended the French state's *laissez-faire* approach to immigration. As Gary Cross shows, the government stepped in to recruit colonial labor from North Africa, Indochina, and Madagascar as well as Chinese men for docks

<sup>25</sup>Crush et al.; Christopher Saunders and Nicholas Southey, *Historical Dictionary of South Africa*, 2nd ed. (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 202–203; Wilson, 2–5.

<sup>26</sup>According to Bruno Ramirez, some 2.8 million people migrated from Canada to the U.S. between 1840 and 1940. "Time after time," Irving Abella writes, Canadian officials "refused to allow industrial workers into the country on temporary permits," though they reserved the right to deport those who had not yet established domicile or achieved citizenship. Abella calls this a "concealed guestworker system," but that would depend on whether officials really exercised their "right to deport" often enough to make permanent immigrants temporary. Ramirez, ix; Irving Abella, "Foreword," in *Whence They Came: Deportation from Canada 1900–1935*, ed. Barbara Roberts (University of Ottawa Press, 1988), vii–x.

<sup>27</sup>Immigration to France increased dramatically in the half century before World War I (from under 380,000 in 1851 to more than a million in 1911). Jeanne Singer-Kérel, "Foreign Workers in France, 1891–1936," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 14, 3 (July 1991): 279–282; Gary S. Cross, *Immigrant Workers in Industrial France: The Making of a New Laboring Class* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 21. On contract laborers in the U.S., see Gunther Peck, *Inventing Free Labor: Padrone and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880–1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>28</sup>Nigel Harris, *The New Untouchables: Immigration and the New World Worker* (New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1995), 6.

and military construction sites. French farmers joined forces to import Iberian and Italian workers, and the French government actively assisted industrialists in securing southern Europeans for mines and factories. Government officials soon discovered, however, that state-sponsored labor supply was more complicated than expected. While French workers seemed to accept the necessity of immigration during the war, Cross argues, they responded virulently and even violently to the presence of non-white workers, who were regularly paid half as much as French workers for the same jobs. While socialists called for “equal pay for equal work” and tried to organize foreign workers, more conservative trade unions insisted that French workers be given priority for all jobs and that non-white workers be directed only to the most onerous, unattractive work. For their part, agricultural and mine owners complained that European immigrants, who enjoyed greater freedom of movement than the non-white workers, tended to break their six-month contracts and migrate to cities in search of better paying and less difficult work.<sup>29</sup>

French officials responded by collaborating with employers and trade unions to direct non-white foreigners to jobs and lodging deemed “unsuitable for Frenchmen” and to guard them closely to keep them from looking for better work. With European migrants, the French Foreign Labor Service employed a carrot and stick approach, giving bonuses to workers who completed their contracts and threatening “troublemakers” with expulsion. Like the South Africans and Prussians, the French devised a pass system, issuing identification cards, which “designated the geographical limits within which [immigrant workers] could travel and whether they were farm or industrial workers.” Copies of the cards were sent to local police departments, which were instructed to “threaten to expel workers who broke their contracts.”<sup>30</sup>

Though immigrants had no legal right to remain in France once their contracts expired, this was not technically a temporary labor system from the start. But for the non-white colonial laborers and Chinese workers it became a temporary labor system retroactively, as the government summarily repatriated non-white workers as soon as the armistice was signed. In contrast, European immigrants were allowed and, indeed, encouraged to remain to help clear rubble and aid in the country’s reconstruction, and their increasing numbers led in the 1920s to calls for measures that would speed their assimilation. Likewise, when Polish farmworkers, recruited after the war, proved equally amenable to jumping their contracts in search of better work, French officials first tried using the police to apprehend them, but later discouraged their mobility by urging them to bring their family members. To the same end, French mine owners provided company housing. In other words, European workers were offered what John Torpey would call the “embrace” of the French state; non-white workers, who had been effectively transformed from immigrants into guestworkers, got nothing but a cold shoulder and a long boat-ride home.<sup>31</sup>

The war instigated a similar change of direction in U.S. immigration policy. The outbreak of war in 1914 cut off European migration to the U.S., even as American industry expanded in the interests of war mobilization. The result was a mass migration of white and black southerners to cities north and south, and the reduction of the nation’s rural population by about 1.5 million. Federal officials responded to growers’ complaints of labor scarcity in a variety of ways. The Labor Department tried to

---

<sup>29</sup>Cross, 18–44.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 38–41.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 45–98.

organize a labor distribution system that would relocate workers from pockets of surplus to areas of scarcity and recruited a Woman's Land Army to supply farmers with workers. The Department of Agriculture encouraged southern legislatures to pass "work-or-fight" ordinances that would compel black workers to return to white people's fields and kitchens or face arrest or the draft. When neither proposition satisfied the owners of large farms, the Department of Labor's Immigration Service encouraged the migration of agricultural workers from Mexico, Canada, Puerto Rico, and the West Indies.<sup>32</sup>

What made this policy a rudimentary "guestworker" program was the state's effort to ensure that immigrants admitted "for the duration" would leave when it was over, and that they would remain bound to a particular employer while still in the U.S. The wartime regulations not only reversed the 30-year-old congressional ban on importing contract labor, they *required* that aliens entering for temporary farmwork sign contracts for the duration of their stay. They also required that growers sign performance bonds in which they promised to personally deport their employees at the expiration of their contracts.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the extensive measures taken to suggest that imported war workers were only entering the U.S. "for the duration," there is no evidence that U.S. officials repatriated foreign farmworkers immediately after the war, despite the virulent anti-immigrant sentiment of the 1920s. Indeed, the number of Mexican migrants in the U.S. rose, as Mexicans fled the turmoil of the Revolution for safety and as employers in the southwest eagerly hired them. Congress organized the handful of federal immigration inspectors into a "Border Patrol" in 1924 but, according to Bruno Ramirez, its purpose was to keep unwanted southern and eastern Europeans from entering the U.S. though Mexico and Canada, not to stem the flow of low-wage agricultural workers from across the border. Likewise, the National Origins Act (also passed in 1924) drastically reduced permanent immigration from Europe, but left immigration from Western Hemisphere countries unaffected. It was not until the Great Depression that officials of the Hoover administration deemed Mexican immigrants (and just the Mexicans) temporary again, deporting some 450,000 of them in a short period of time.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, it was the Great Depression that brought the first wave of temporary labor recruitment to an end (except in South Africa where the doubling of gold prices and the discovery of new seams led to a large-scale expansion of the migrant labor program). In settler countries worldwide, returning migrants outnumbered new immigrants during the Depression, a process that some governments, like the U.S., helped along by actively expelling the foreign workers they had actively sought earlier. Germany, which had transformed its migrant workers into forced laborers during the war, closed its German-Polish frontier to migrant workers in 1932. And in 1937, the Dominican Republic's army massacred several thousand Haitian sugar cane cutters, which was

---

<sup>32</sup>Cindy Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of Their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 79-97.

<sup>33</sup>Between 1917 and 1921, immigration inspectors recorded the migration of 70,000 Mexican farmworkers (how many more entered unofficially is unknown). *Ibid.*; Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 44, 61-63; Philip L. Martin and David A. Martin, *The Endless Quest: Helping America's Farm Workers* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 17.

<sup>34</sup>Ramirez, 35-66; Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

more than enough encouragement for those who survived to return to the Haitian side of the border on their own.<sup>35</sup>

In the long run, however, these reversals turned out to be only a temporary interruption in the overall trend toward state-sponsored temporary labor migration. What we might call the second phase in the history of guestworker programs began in the late 1930s as the demands of war mobilization led to rising wages and thus to the rekindling of interest in temporary foreign workers. Outlasting the war by over 30 years, this phase involved far more nations and migrants, and far greater state involvement in labor supply schemes.

War mobilization spawned new temporary labor schemes as quickly as the Depression had killed the first ones. By 1936, just four years after closing its eastern border for a second time, the German government began negotiating with Polish authorities to revive the controlled importation of farmworkers. In another three years, Germany had signed similar agreements with five other European nations from Holland to Bulgaria. South Africa, which had by this time been importing migrant workers for almost 50 years, doubled its workforce in the mining industry during the war and expanded the migrant labor program to funnel workers to farms as well. Likewise, in 1936, the U.S., which had expelled hundreds of thousands of Mexican residents just five years earlier, allowed farmers to begin importing them again, though this time officials attempted to screen out those who had been involved in farmworker strikes earlier. Japan fueled its military buildup by recruiting workers from its “co-prosperity sphere,” facilitating this labor migration by issuing Japanese passports in the countries it colonized. But the fact that foreign workers in Japan and Germany entered with authorization proved to be of little comfort when World War II began in earnest. Once again foreign labor schemes mutated rapidly into forced labor systems. By August of 1944, according to Ulrich Herbert, there were 5.7 million civilian conscripts working in Germany and its occupied territories, including every second agricultural worker and every third worker in mining, construction, and metals.<sup>36</sup>

Though World War II transformed state-sponsored guestworker schemes into the most deadly forms of forced labor in Germany and Japan, elsewhere sending and receiving governments played a far more active role in negotiating and in trying to enforce the terms under which guestworkers worked and lived. In 1942 the U.S. government signed its first formal labor agreement with Mexico, allowing for the temporary migration of an unspecified number of Mexicans for work on American farms. Perhaps because Mexican officials had harsh memories of having to rescue countrymen who had been abandoned by Americans in the desert during the Great Depression or because the U.S. officials who set up the World War II program were New Deal liberals not quite convinced that what they were about to do was a good idea, Mexican and U.S. officials attached to the program an unprecedented list of conditions

---

<sup>35</sup>Crush et al., *South Africa's Labor Empire*, 33–54; Herbert, 127.

<sup>36</sup>After 1938, Germany required non-German workers to register with the police, who reserved the right to deport or take into “protective custody” anyone who refused to work, engaged in political activity, or who was deemed “hostile to the state.” Following the invasion of Poland, the treatment of foreign workers deteriorated further, but their numbers grew, as Germany expanded its labor force by impressing civilians in the countries it occupied. Herbert, 128–129, 153. Wayne A. Cornelius, “Japan: The Illusion of Immigration Control,” in *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*, ed. Wayne A. Cornelius, Philip L. Martin, and James F. Hollifield (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 381; Takashi, Oka, *Prying Open the Door: Foreign Workers in Japan* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994); Crush et al., *South Africa's Labor Empire*, 50; Guerin-Gonzales, 114–116.

designed to protect Mexican men working in the U.S. Officially named the “Emergency Farm Labor Supply Program,” the federally run labor supply system began importing *braceros* almost immediately. A few months later, in the spring of 1943, British Colonial officials made similar arrangements for British West Indian men. Mexican and Caribbean contract workers were guaranteed a minimum wage, or prevailing wages if they were higher; work or wages for at least three-quarters of the term specified in their contracts; housing that met certain minimum standards; and free transportation to and from the U.S. Moreover, unlike earlier guestworker programs, which were basically private arrangements with state authorization, these agreements made U.S. officials responsible for the care of Mexican and West Indian visitors. From 1942 to 1947, the year the federal role was scaled back, federal officials did everything but employ and pay foreign farmworkers. Sending and receiving countries had regulated the terms of indentured servants’ contracts in the 19th century, but never to this extent. In the name of the war effort, U.S. officials helped recruit and screen foreign workers; they had them examined by doctors; transported them on navy ships and later on chartered planes; housed them in federal labor camps; fed them; and treated them when they were sick or injured. Moreover, in cases in which these protections failed to eliminate abuses, Mexico sent “consuls” and the British West Indies sent colonial officials to serve as “liaisons.” Both were authorized to intervene when workers complained of mistreatment and they could deny workers to abusive employers. By 1945, the U.S. government was acting as *padrone* or crew leader to over 100,000 foreign farmworkers.<sup>37</sup>

Despite sporadic and sometimes serious mistreatment on American farms, this five-year period was one of the few times in the history of guestworker programs when foreign workers were treated somewhat like guests. Jamaican pea pickers were offered the use of a country club in Wisconsin; they were picked up and taken to church by curious white parishioners in Iowa; a group in New York received “the keys” to New York City. In California, the Farm Security Administration organized fiestas for Mexicans. Yet neither the protections spelled out in the workers’ contracts nor the intervention of liaisons and consuls prevented working and living conditions from deteriorating rapidly in the years that followed.

Some of the problems were a result of local conditions. As early as the fall of 1943 West Indians sent to work for planters in Florida protested the fact that, despite non-discrimination clauses in their contracts, they were expected to adapt to the norms of the Jim Crow South (where crew leaders carried bull whips and labor camp managers sometimes shot at workers who offended them).<sup>38</sup> Complaints also multiplied as the two U.S. programs outgrew the capabilities of the liaison staffs. The chief liaison from Jamaica noted in 1945 that “the men write home or go home and say they have never seen me.” Yet by his own estimate, it would have taken him nearly four years to visit every West Indian contract worker.<sup>39</sup>

But the key problem then and in the years that followed was that both the *bracero* program in the west and the West Indian program in the east left the power to repatriate workers in the hands of employers. In 1943, for example, 700 Jamaicans refused work within two weeks of their arrival in Florida. But instead of negotiating

---

<sup>37</sup>Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of Their Labor*, 164–181.

<sup>38</sup>Hahamovitch, “In America Life is Given Away”: Jamaican Farmworkers and the Making of Agricultural Immigration Policy,” 134–160, in *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State: Political Histories of Rural America*, ed. Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert D. Johnston (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 156.

some sort of compromise through their liaisons, they found themselves in jail and then on their way home. Unlike indentured servants or slaves, U.S. guestworkers could quit any time they liked but, when they did, they faced immediate repatriation at their own expense. Thus while indentured servants had been disciplined by the threat of the whip, guestworkers were disciplined by the threat of deportation.

The deterioration of the American programs also highlighted a problem that has beset all guestworker programs, however well intended the officials in the receiving or sending countries. Officials in sending countries might have been sincerely concerned for their countrymen (and later women) working abroad, but they also feared that, if they intervened too much on their behalf, they risked jeopardizing those foreign work opportunities and the remittances they generated. Ultimately the prospect of millions of foreign dollars and the lure of thousands of jobs in the U.S., for example, proved more important than complaints of trigger-happy labor camp managers and foul drinking water in the fields. Even when officials in the sending countries tried to improve conditions by threatening to withdraw their citizens from particular states—Jamaicans were pulled out of Florida and Mexicans denied to Texas in 1946 to protest abusive treatment, for example—their efforts were undermined by those even more desperate to secure overseas jobs. The government of Barbados offered to break the Jamaican “strike” against Florida, for example, and many Mexicans ignored their government’s prohibition against taking jobs in Texas. As a result, the wartime guestworker programs succeeded in creating an international competition for foreign jobs, and if one nation’s workers failed to climb on to the back of employers’ trucks, another nation’s would.<sup>40</sup>

Far from putting an end to guestworker programs created in the name of the war “emergency,” the end of World War II resulted in the expansion of the American programs and the rebirth of temporary labor programs in postwar Europe. At first, postwar movements of guestworkers were lost in a mass of moving people: demobilizing soldiers, liberated forced laborers and prisoners of war, refugees, colonial subjects seeking work in the metropole or colonizers seeking refuge from armies of liberation. But once the dust settled, it became increasingly clear that temporary labor migration was transforming American agriculture and the face of Europe.

It is not surprising that Great Britain was first off the mark in Europe, given the fact that British officials had long experience moving colonial subjects from one place to another and that they had helped create the program that supplied U.S. farmers with West Indians during the war. Between 1945 and 1951, under the auspices of its European voluntary worker program, Great Britain imported 190,000 mostly male “DPs”—or displaced persons—from refugee camps in Europe. Indeed, the Home Office permitted the mass admission of refugees for work in England, at the same time that it was actively discouraging “the migration and settlement of British subjects from the colonies.” In other words, Britain’s Labor government favored white temporary workers over permanent non-white British subjects, though both groups were eventually allowed to remain.<sup>41</sup>

Soon after England began its voluntary worker program, governments on the conti-

---

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 157–158. For more information on the *bracero* program, see Henry P. Anderson, *The Bracero Program in California*, Chicano Heritage Series (New York: Arno Press, 1976); Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration and the INS* (New York: Routledge Press, 1992); and Wayne D. Rasmussen, *A History of the Emergency Farm Labor Supply Program, 1943–1947*, BAE Monograph III (Washington: GAO, September 1951).

<sup>41</sup>Diana Kay and Robert Miles, *Refugees or Migrant Workers: European Volunteer Workers in Great Britain, 1946–1951* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 1–11.

ment followed suit, encouraging migration from Europe's periphery to its industrial center. Belgium imported mostly Italian men for work in coal mines and in the iron and steel industry, and France's Office National d'Immigration coordinated the annual recruitment of up to 150,000 mostly Spanish agricultural workers in the postwar period and placed thousands more in other kinds of jobs. Germany's guestworker program started a bit later than the others had because Germany absorbed hundreds of thousands of refugees from the east after 1945. When those workers were no longer sufficient to propel West Germany's "economic miracle," the Federal Labor Office opened recruitment branches in Mediterranean countries and signed bilateral agreements with labor-exporting nations, first Italy in 1955 and then Spain and Greece in 1960. After 1968, residents of European Economic Community (EEC) member countries enjoyed complete freedom of movement and the right to work anywhere in the EEC, though, interestingly, migration from EEC countries then declined, perhaps because employers preferred guestworkers to free laborers. Indeed, that same year, West Germany signed guestworker treaties with Turkey, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia, and Yugoslavia. Switzerland, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Sweden also recruited guestworkers in the 1960s and early 1970s. France and Germany accounted for two-thirds of the total, although at 30%, Switzerland had the highest proportion of guestworkers in its labor force.<sup>42</sup>

Back in the U.S., the emergency farm labor supply schemes created during the war grew much larger after it ended. The U.S. government dropped out as the official manager of the guestworker programs in 1947, but federal officials continued to allow employers to import temporary workers privately if the Labor Department "certified" their need, which it invariably did. And if temporary workers jumped their contracts and joined the ranks of illegal immigrants, the INS could be called on to pursue them. The INS also transformed thousands of unauthorized immigrants into legal contract workers through a process called "drying out the wetbacks."<sup>43</sup>

The guestworker programs in Europe and the U.S., and the ongoing program in South Africa, were all variations on a theme: each program stabilized (or depressed) wages by enlarging the workforce available to certain target industries. However, the programs differed in terms of their admission policies and in the amount of control employers were permitted to exert over the workers they recruited. All countries limited new recruits to particular jobs and even particular employers, but some policies, like that of the Swiss, allowed workers to switch employers but not occupations. H2 workers could request a reassignment to a different employer, but they risked being identified as a troublemaker. European voluntary workers in England were restricted to particular jobs and could also be deported for "indiscipline." No doubt the worst off of all, South

---

<sup>42</sup>The major exporters of labor were Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Finland, Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Algeria, Sudan, and Morocco. In 1973, the 6.7 million guestworkers in Europe sent home remittances totaling \$6 billion. Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 68–71; John Bendix, "On the Rights of Foreign Workers in West Germany," in *Turkish Workers in Europe: An Interdisciplinary Study*, ed. İlhan Başgöz and Norman Furniss (Bloomington: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1985), 27–28; Philip L. Martin, *Guestworker Programs: Lessons from Europe*, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Monograph No. 5 (Washington: GPO, 1980), 1, 7–10; Peter Stalker, *The Work of Strangers: A Survey of International Labour Migration* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1994), 16–17; Gary P. Freeman, *Immigration Labor and Racial Conflict in Industrial Societies: The French and British Experience, 1945–1975* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Castles and Kosack, 27–44.

<sup>43</sup>Martin and Martin, 17–18.



African miners still lived in closed, overcrowded compounds, far from their families; they suffered catastrophic death rates from disease and accidents.<sup>44</sup>

Though conditions varied from country to country and even within countries, guestworkers in Europe still enjoyed more protection than they did elsewhere, in large part because states, not employers, controlled who could come and who could be made to leave. In most European countries guestworkers received separate work and residence permits, so losing one's job did not necessarily mean losing one's right to remain in the country. Guestworkers in Switzerland were usually bound to particular employers, for example, but the government, not employers, decided whether workers recruited would be admitted and where they would be housed. Likewise, in West Germany, government officials, not employers, maintained the registry (or blacklist) of foreign workers who broke their contracts, and to employers' chagrin, officials would only include workers' names when it was clear that the worker was to blame. The German Employers' Federation strongly supported expelling foreigners who broke their contracts, but the German government had the final say. In the U.S., in contrast, employers advanced the cost of guestworkers' transportation, paid their return fare if they lasted the season, housed them in company-owned labor camps or compounds, and tried valiantly to deny them access to lawyers, trade unionists, or journalists who might have acted on their behalf. Workers labored under "no-strike" contracts and faced repatriation for "indiscipline." Because employers wielded the right to repatriate, guestworkers in the U.S. had little recourse when conditions were intolerable, despite the protections guaranteed in their contracts or the presence of "liaisons." As James Paulk, a foreman for a Florida sugar cane growers' cooperative, put it in 1966, "We bring the Jamaican here under contract. If he violates his contract we can send him home. So we've got leverage over that West Indian that we don't have over American workers. When that offshore comes in here, he's either going to cut cane or get sent home—or if he violates his immigration status and runs away from his employer, the law will get him."<sup>45</sup>

Conditions also improved over time for guestworkers in Europe for two reasons. First, European states competed among themselves for guestworkers in the 1960s. For example, according to Nigel Harris, Turkish miners imported by Belgium "were wooed by German employers to desert for the Ruhr," and, although Luxembourg officials did not originally grant Italians the right to settle, they eventually had to in order to keep them. Eventually, most European governments issued one-year work permits, which were automatically renewable unless revoked by either the sending or receiving government (a rare occurrence).<sup>46</sup>

Second, since in Europe guestworkers labored in highly organized industries—auto, textiles, metal fabrication, construction—Europe's labor unions found it was in their interest to fight to ensure that foreign workers earned equal pay for equal work and enjoyed the right to organize and strike.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, in the U.S., where all farmworkers lacked the right of collective bargaining, leaders of the fledgling agricultural workers'

---

<sup>44</sup>Kay and Miles, 95–119; Rob Turrell, "Kimberley's Model Compounds," *Journal of African History* 25 (1984): 59–75; Castles and Miller, 68–73.

<sup>45</sup>Peter Kramer, 39.

<sup>46</sup>Harris, 9–10; Castles and Miller, 71.

<sup>47</sup>Castles and Kosack contains a detailed discussion of trade unions' various responses to guestworkers in France, Germany, England, and Switzerland. Unions in all four countries eventually recognized the necessity of organizing foreign workers. They opened offices where to address foreign workers' legal, social, and personal problems; published foreign language labor newspapers; and even offered language and

union, the United Farm Workers, failed to make headway organizing *braceros*. Instead, with the help of allies in the AFL-CIO, they successfully mobilized to end the *bracero* program altogether. But in Florida, where sugar cane companies hired no one but guestworkers to harvest sugar cane, labor unions were largely oblivious to their presence.

Besides variations in guestworkers' rights, postwar governments also went to different lengths to ensure that temporary workers remained only temporarily. South Africa and the U.S. cycled workers in and out of the country, while in Europe guestworkers could generally renew their temporary visas year after year, and the longer they stayed, the more rights they tended to gain. If a guestworker in West Germany succeeded in having his work permit renewed five years in a row, for example, he could then apply for a three-year permit and apply to change jobs. Guestworkers in Switzerland could apply to change jobs after five years. After 10 years they gained the right to take work wherever they could find it.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, Mexican and West Indian guestworkers admitted for work on American farms were sent home at the end of their contracts, which lasted no more than a year, though growers often requested the same men again and again. To ensure that foreign workers really returned home, the workers' contracts required them to participate in "voluntary" savings plans that set aside 20% of their pay in home country banks. Permanent residence in the U.S. could usually be obtained only by marrying an American or by jumping one's contract and disappearing into the nation's ever-growing force of undocumented or fraudulently documented workers.

The most important factor affecting whether guestworkers settled permanently, however, was each program's policy on family reunification, and on this issue there were marked differences. For those governments determined to prevent foreign workers from staying permanently, female migrants represented a serious threat because they could both produce and reproduce. Thus the U.S., South Africa, and Great Britain all took pains to exclude women. U.S. immigration officials learned this lesson the hard way. Bahamian women had been included in the World War II program that brought farmworkers to Florida. When women became pregnant, the managers of federal labor camps had to arrange for their deportation "because of their inability to perform heavy agricultural work, the hazardous conditions under which the infant would be reared and the question of [the] citizenship of the infant." Much to the dismay of camp managers, this resulted in "a considerable number of induced abortions," according to the East Coast Field Medical Officer. Thus when the larger West Indian and Mexican programs were created a few months later, they were restricted to men only; guestworkers were not allowed to bring family members to the U.S. with them. And, as in South Africa, the men would be sent home at the end of the season. All-male migration also allowed employers to pay lower wages because workers' families bore the cost of their survival back home.<sup>49</sup>

West Germany also tried importing unmarried workers initially, but later reversed course in order to attract and keep foreign workers, much as French farmers had encouraged Polish migrants to bring their relatives in the 1920s. Only Turkish workers were excluded from this shift in policy, until protests forced the government to include

---

*Footnote 47 continued*

literacy classes. West Germany had the highest percentage of foreign union members—30—by 1970. See 116–179.

<sup>48</sup>Hahamovitch, "In America Life is Given Away," 134–160; Castles and Kosack, 100–103.

<sup>49</sup>Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of Their Labor*, 179–180.

them as well. In any case, West Germany's government appeared to have less cause to be concerned about children born to guestworkers because, until January 1, 2000, German citizenship was based on the ethnic origin of one's parents not on one's place of birth. Thus a child of Turks born in Germany remained a Turk by German law. By 1976 fully half of Germany's guestworkers had been in residence for more than six years and only five out of every ten Yugoslavs and three out of every ten Turks returned home.<sup>50</sup> By the early 1990s, Germany had a Turkish population of 400,000. Only gradually as their numbers grew did the children of migrants come to be perceived as a national problem. All European states that imported guestworkers allowed eventually for family reunification. The U.S. and South Africa never did.<sup>51</sup>

Guestworker programs were always controversial, but they became politically intolerable as the postwar boom faded in the 1960s and early 1970s. The more European guestworkers got the right to settle and to move around, the more antagonism they engendered, and presumably the less attractive they were to low-wage employers. Movements to end guestworker programs came from both sides at once: from immigrant rights advocates who argued that the programs created an underclass of super-exploitable workers and from anti-immigration advocates who argued that guestworkers were competing with citizens for jobs and public resources.

Opponents of the *bracero* program were emboldened by the movements for civil rights and social justice that were sweeping the nation by the 1960s. By the mid-1960s, American employers were importing 400,000 Mexican contract workers a year, and according to the United Farm Workers, depressing wages and living conditions for farmworkers throughout California. After a long and bitter fight, the Secretary of Labor refused to "certify" west coast growers' need for foreign workers in 1964, and Congress declined to renew the program. The H2 or Caribbean farmworker program continued on, however, because Florida sugar producers convinced Secretary Wirtz that Americans would never harvest sugar cane under any circumstances. After a brief hiatus, however, the "golden age for farmworkers," made possible by the absence of competition from *braceros* ended. The migration from Mexico soon resumed, though this time *braceros* came without authorization.<sup>52</sup>

Within 10 years of the *bracero* program's fall from grace, European guestworker programs were also brought to an abrupt end. Pressure to expel foreign workers began building in the late 1960s as it became clear that Europe's reconstruction was complete and West Germany's "economic miracle" was looking rather less miraculous. Yet despite rising unemployment, perhaps half of all temporary workers still remained. Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands all held referenda on expulsion even before the oil crisis of 1973 made the "problem" of foreign workers seem urgent. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' decision to raise oil prices was simply the final nail in the coffin of Europe's guestworker programs. Germany stopped further recruitment of guestworkers in November 1973. France and Switzerland did the same in 1974.<sup>53</sup>

The suspension of recruiting did not mean that the numbers of foreign workers fell,

---

<sup>50</sup>Bendix, 23–55.

<sup>51</sup>Martin, 17; Bendix, 28; Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Suzanne Paine, *Exporting Workers: The Turkish Case*, University of Cambridge, Department of Applied Economics, Occasional Paper 41 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

<sup>52</sup>Martin and Martin.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 1–2, 10, 17–18.

however.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps because forced expulsions had a new and far more insidious connotation after the still recent experience of the Third Reich or because the more foreigners do a job the more native-born people will disdain it, European governments lacked the will or the inclination to revoke work permits for some 10 to 12 million foreign workers, many of whom had been in residence for years. Indeed, the number of foreigners rose after the cessation of recruiting, both because unemployed guestworkers were less likely to leave when they had little hope of returning at a later date and because those already admitted were still allowed to bring their families.

Guestworker programs led to higher rates of unauthorized migration whether or not they cycled workers out of the country at the end of each season or year because guestworkers who stayed on—with or without state sanction—often sent for relatives and friends once they were established. Workers forced to leave at the end of their contracts often returned illegally to employers who were quite willing to rehire them and thus save the expense of complying with the terms of their government's temporary workers program. France's Office National d'Immigration estimated that, by 1970, 85% of the nation's 2 million foreign workers had entered the country illegally. Likewise, the cancellation of the *bracero* program in 1964 led to a large chain migration of unauthorized workers, which resulted in an "illegal" population perhaps three-quarters as large as the total number of *braceros* who entered the U.S. over the life of the program's 22 years.<sup>55</sup>

As early as 1975, policy-makers in European host nations were launching "two-pronged" policies that encouraged migrants to return home (some even offered bounties to those willing to leave) while at the same time better integrating those who remained. After one year in residence, for example, all foreigners in Sweden were entitled to a permanent-residence permit. After three years, they could vote and hold office at the regional and municipal level.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, within a few years this integrationist sentiment had waned and, by 1976, host nations started to put the breaks on family reunification policies.<sup>57</sup> While European governments have reopened their borders to Europeans, as they were for most of the 19th century, they have criminalized all other labor migrants as never before, transforming people seeking work into smuggled commodities.

The only guestworker programs to survive the onslaught of criticism in the 1960s and 1970s were the H2 program in the eastern U.S. and the program that still brought foreign workers to South African mines (though the H2 program shrunk dramatically and the mine labor program declined in the 1970s after peaking at over 400,000 foreign workers a decade earlier). In the 1970s, South Africa's mining companies bowed to pressure to stabilize their workforce by using migrants in combination with a larger local workforce. The result was a "two-tiered" labor force in which one group lived isolated in company compounds, accepted longer contracts, and could be assigned to more difficult and dangerous mines. However, just as the cancellation of the *bracero* program made it possible for the United Farm Workers to organize migrant farmwork-

---

<sup>54</sup>As of 1981 Germany had over 4.5 million resident foreigners (6–7% of its population), with Turks, Yugoslavs, and Italians adding up to half the total. Bendix, 25.

<sup>55</sup>Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Martin and Martin; Douglas Massey, Rafael Alarcón, Jorge Durand, and Humberto González, *Return to Aztlan: The Social Process of International Migration From Western Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>56</sup>Martin, *Guestworker Programs*, 11–13.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 16–17.

ers in California, the relative stabilization of South Africa's domestic mine labor force allowed miners to organize much more effectively. In the 1970s, the mines experienced almost continuous outbreaks of violence, rioting, strikes, and slow-downs, despite (or inspired by) rising wages and improving conditions. By 1979, South Africa had 50 mineworkers' unions that were much better placed to demand limits on the number of guestworkers in the mining industry.<sup>58</sup>

The corrosive effects of guestworker programs on organizing efforts cannot be overemphasized. In South Africa, where foreign and domestic miners worked for the same companies, labor organization was possible. But in Florida, where only guestworkers cut sugar cane, employers could easily squelch the H2 workers' collective actions, which goes a long way toward explaining why the program survived as long as it did. When Caribbean men tried to protest their wages, as they did *en masse* in Florida in 1943, 1968, 1981, and 1986, if not in other years as well, they found themselves in jail or on planes back to the Caribbean within days or even hours of their decision to strike.

The economic slump in Europe and the U.S. may have spelled the end of most postwar guestworker programs, but it did not put a stop to temporary labor schemes in other parts of the world. Indeed, the oil crisis of 1973 launched the third phase in the history of guestworker schemes: the movement of temporary labor migrants from Asian countries to booming economies elsewhere in Asia and in the Middle East. Much of this movement, Christine Chin notes, has been from oil importing nations in Asia—especially the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka—to oil exporting nations—especially in the Middle East.<sup>59</sup> These were not the only guestworker programs—the H2 program continued, as did South Africa's migrant labor system, and Canada began importing temporary workers under a “bonded forced-rotational system” in 1973. But these programs were insignificant compared to the Middle Eastern programs, which resulted in majority foreign workforces in at least four countries.<sup>60</sup>

These late 20th-century guestworker programs have much in common with earlier schemes, but they have introduced several important innovations as well. First, while still supplying workers for dirty, dangerous, and difficult work, recent guestworker programs have also recruited highly skilled workers and professionals, such as engineers, nurses, doctors, mechanics, and, more recently, computer systems analysts. Indeed, in the Middle East and more recently in Japan, guestworker programs were the means by which almost all immigrants were admitted. Second, recent guestworker programs have become increasingly feminized as “the Maid Trade” overtook the traditional trade in miners, agricultural laborers, and construction workers.<sup>61</sup> And third, sending governments have exhibited far greater enthusiasm for the idea of exporting their citizens as contract workers; some even actively marketed their citizens abroad.

---

<sup>58</sup>Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves, and David Yudelman, *South Africa's Labor Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 10–31.

<sup>59</sup>Christine B. N. Chin, *In Service and Servitude: Foreign Female Domestic Workers and the Malaysian “Modernity” Project* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 97–102.

<sup>60</sup>On Canada's temporary labor program, see Ricardo Trumper and Lloyd L. Wong, “Racialization and Genderization: The Canadian State, Immigrants, and Temporary Workers,” 153–191, in *International Labour Migrations*, ed. B. Singh Bolaria and Rosemary von Elling Bolaria (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>61</sup>In the 1970s, for example, Malaysia admitted a few hundred Filipina and Indonesian domestic workers; by 1994 the official count had risen to 70,000. Chin, 93–124; Benjamin V. Cariño, ed., *Filipino Workers on the Move: Trends, Dilemmas and Policy Options* (Philippine Migration Research Network, 1998), 1.

Paradoxically, even as sending nations played a larger role in charting the paths labor migrants follow, they exerted less influence on the conditions under which their nationals live and work.

Large-scale migration to the Middle East—especially to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Oman—developed rapidly after 1973, as oil rich nations recruited mostly male construction workers, mechanics, engineers for work on large construction projects. The oil industry itself demanded little labor, but the construction projects built with oil revenues required labor that could not be supplied internally without the rapid development of an educational infrastructure capable of producing skilled tradesmen and professionals. The first oil boom migrants were Arabs from poorer regions—Palestinians, Yemenese, Egyptians and others. Instead of integrating their large foreign populations, however, the receiving states “minimized opportunities for permanent residence” by isolating migrant workers from natives and by rotating them in and out of the country as much as possible.<sup>62</sup>

Migrants from South and Southeast Asia later became the workers of choice, in part, according to Michael Humphrey, because they were regarded as “more politically compliant” and “removed from the currents of Arab nationalism and Islamism.” Moreover, culturally distinct migrants were less likely to join class-based organizations, though there is evidence of strikes by Korean and Indian contract workers in the Middle East. In any case, by 1975, 360,000 South and Southeast Asians worked in the region. By 1983, there were 3.6 million (out of a total workforce of about 7 million). Two years later, four Gulf states had majority foreign workforces. The United Arab Emirates workforce was almost 91% non-nationals; Kuwait and Qatar’s workforces were over 80% non-nationals; and Saudi Arabia—which had by far the largest population of the Gulf states—reached 71% foreign workers. Four more nations had workforces that were more than 40% foreign. Moreover, by 1985 South Asians represented 63% of the migrant workers in the Gulf.

These migrants worked under the rubric of labor supply agreements that mimicked earlier contracts: workers were segregated in labor compounds, strictly prohibited from bringing their families, and subject to deportation for misconduct. White-collar workers were less constrained, but only Iraq offered the same social services to migrants and citizens, and migrants had no legal or political rights in any of these nations. According to Fred Halliday, in the early 1980s the Saudi press was “replete with advertisements by contractors publishing the details of migrant laborers who have fled from their place of work.”<sup>63</sup>

Relatively quickly, however, oil dollars and ambitious construction projects grew harder to come by and opportunities for male migrants began to dry up. To keep the remittance dollars flowing, the governments of the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand,

---

<sup>62</sup>Fred Halliday, “Labor Migration in the Arab World,” *Merip Reports* 14, 4 (May 1984): 3–10. According to Halliday, the oil boom and the turn to foreign workers resulted in “a dangerous neglect of agriculture” and the restriction of industrial development “to a few capital-intensive enterprises”; Michael Humphrey, “Migrants, Workers and Refugees: The Political Economy of Population Movements in the Middle East,” *Merip* 23, 2 (March/April 1993): 2–9; Hassan N. Gardezi, “Asian Workers in the Gulf States of the Middle East,” in *International Labour Migrations*, ed. B. Singh Bolaria and Rosemary von Elling Bolaria (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 99–120; J. S. Birks, I. J. Seccombe, and C. A. Sinclair, “Labour Migration in the Arab Gulf States: Patterns, Trends and Prospects,” *International Migration* (Geneva, Switzerland) 26, 3 (1998): 267–286. See also various essays in F. Eelens, T. Schampers, and J. D. Speckmann, eds., *Labour Migration to the Middle East: From Sri Lanka to the Gulf* (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1992).

<sup>63</sup>Humphrey, 4–9; Halliday, 6–7.

Korea, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka began marketing women as domestic servants. This marketing of maids paid off: while the number of male migrants fell, demand for foreign workers, especially domestic servants, remained constant in the Middle East, despite the deportation of over 400,000 guestworkers during the Gulf War. In this third phase of guestworker history, labor migrants did not flow along natural streams; they followed the canals dug for them by home governments desperate to relieve unemployment and attract remittance dollars.<sup>64</sup>

At about the same time that demand for guestworkers reached a plateau in the Gulf states, labor demand intensified in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Brunei, and Malaysia. The Malaysian example, as discussed by Christine Chin, reveals clearly just how dramatic these changes have been. The discovery of offshore oil combined with high commodity prices for oil, tin, rubber, and timber allowed for rapid state-led development. As industrial jobs multiplied, Malays abandoned the countryside for industrial work. In 1970, 73% of Malays worked in agriculture in some capacity. A decade later that number had fallen to less than 47%, and foreign workers were imported to replace natives. Malaysian employers also cited shortages in other industries. As a result, Malaysia signed labor supply agreements with the Philippines and Indonesia, though perhaps half of the 2 million migrants who arrived came outside official channels.<sup>65</sup> “We are a nation that cannot even construct a building with our own hands any more,” observed Sheryll Stothard, a Malaysian writer and social critic. “We have become a nation of subcontractors depending almost totally on foreign labor, money and expertise.” As in the Gulf states, guestworkers in Malaysia enjoyed little in the way of civil or human rights. Some 90% lived in employer-owned housing and few were entitled to bring their families with them.<sup>66</sup>

In Malaysia too the ranks of foreign workers became increasingly feminized as Malays demonstrated their upward mobility by hiring Filipina or Indonesian maids. As in the Middle East, domestic servants were particularly vulnerable to abuse because each woman worked alone in the home of the employer who imported her. As the executive secretary of a Malaysian shelter for battered women and children put it, “[t]he home is the most dangerous place because it is private.” Thus guestworkers who participated in the international “Maid Trade” found themselves in a situation akin to that of migrant miners in South Africa or H2 workers in Florida, only even more extreme. Many were no doubt glad for the work and the wages, but domestic workers who faced employers who underpaid them, refused them time off, beat or sexually abused were on their own.<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, the diffusion of guestworkers into individual homes made it even harder for home governments to help enforce the protective language in workers’ contracts. In 1993 the Philippines’ Overseas Workers Welfare Administration had just 31 labor attachés, 20 welfare officers, and 20 coordinators to deal with the complaints of 4.2 million migrant workers in 120 countries.<sup>68</sup> Competition among labor-exporting

---

<sup>64</sup>Chin, 97–102; Castles and Miller, 147–148.

<sup>65</sup>Chin, 45–63.

<sup>66</sup>*New York Times*, February 20, 2000, Section 1, p. 10, col. 1; Ahm Zehadul Karim, Moha Asri Abdullah, and Mohd Isa Haji Bakar, *Foreign Workers in Malaysia: Issues and Implications* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications, 1999), 62.

<sup>67</sup>*New York Times*, February 20, 2000, Section 1, p. 10, col. 1; Ahm Zehadul Karim, Moha Asri Abdullah, and Mohd Isa Haji Bakar, *Foreign Workers in Malaysia: Issues and Implications* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications, 1999), 52–55.

<sup>68</sup>Castles and Miller, 149.

nations for the same jobs also undermined standards. Just as Barbados broke Jamaica's 1946 "strike" against Florida, in 1983, when Bangladesh and Pakistan banned the out-migration of female servants in response to reports of abusive employers, Indonesian women took up the slack with the encouragement of their government. Moreover, in 1986, Pakistan and Bangladesh actually recommended lowering the wages of their nationals in the Middle East in order to keep their nationals competitive.<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, the more remittances pour into banks, the less inclined sending governments have been to protest too much. Southern African states charged South African mining companies for each worker exported and insisted that a large part of each worker's wages be sent home to guarantee that part of the workers' wages would be spent in their home countries. "Continually short of funds," the authors of *South Africa's Labor Empire* argue, "neighboring colonial governments depended on the income from migrancy and viewed the workers as a commodity, but one to be rented rather than sold."<sup>70</sup> The amount of remittance income generated by overseas migrants has, in fact, been astounding. In 1992, for example, the *Asian Migrant Forum* estimated that remittances to the Philippines in that year alone totaled US\$4.3 billion, which was more than the country's US\$3 billion foreign debt. As Christine Chin notes, the more the U.S., the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund have responded to the Asian and Latin American debt crisis by demanding austerity measures, currency devaluation, and the removal of trade barriers, the more important remittances have become. "Today, the temporary labor export industry has become permanently temporary," she quotes a Filipino senator as saying. "Moreover it has grown ... from being a stop-gap measure to being a vital life-line for the nation ... [T]he labor export industry is really the biggest economic story for the country."<sup>71</sup>

Despite the popularity of foreign maids, the Asian financial crisis generated resentment against guestworkers, just as the oil crisis had done in Europe in the 1970s. In 1998, the Malaysian government launched "Operation Go Away," under which it deported tens of thousands of foreign workers.

Yet "operations" like these seem to be little more than gestures to anti-immigration forces. Guestworker programs are alive and well, and are becoming more popular as states try to open their markets without opening their borders. In 2000, after a long hiatus, Germany issued 212,000 seasonal work permits and admitted an additional 87,000 people on longer-term contracts. France also began readmitting guestworkers in recent years. Germany is now exporting guestworkers too, as recruiters come to the former East Germany looking for workers to build walls in the Netherlands, answer phones for Lufthansa in Ireland, or harvest crops in Iceland. Hungary's Prime Minister announced in 2001 that Hungary needed a million guestworkers, and the same year, Vietnam's Ministry of Labor announced that 300,000 Vietnamese guestworkers were already at work in 40 countries, and that it would export 40,000–45,000 more the following year.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup>Chin, 102; Hassan N. Gardezi, "Asian Workers in the Gulf States of the Middle East," in *International Labour Migrations*, ed. B. Singh Bolaria and Rosemary von Elling Bolaria (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 99–120.

<sup>70</sup>Crush, 6.

<sup>71</sup>Chin, 98–100.

<sup>72</sup>*Business Week*, December 10, 2001; *New York Times*, February 20, 2000, Section 1, p. 10, col. 1; *International Herald Tribune*, May 22, 2001; *Interfax News Agency, Hungary Business Report*, April 17, 2001; *Asia Pulse*, December 27, 2001; Peter Stalker, *The Work of Strangers: A Survey of International Labour Migration* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1994), 193–196.



In an era in which governments seem to be racing each other to throw up obstacles to free movement across borders, guestworker programs have been promoted as an alternative to illegal immigration. In 1990, for example, Japan responded simultaneously to rising concerns about illegal immigration and to demands for foreign workers to supplement Japan's aging workforce by importing guestworkers, though the government limited the migration to Brazilians of Japanese descent. And in the U.S., the H2 program doubled in size after the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act made it illegal to knowingly hire an undocumented worker. More recently, U.S. farmworker advocates and growers' lobbyists have been debating several bills that would replace the H2 program with a bigger and less rule-bound scheme. In September of 2001, the newly elected Presidents of the U.S. and Mexico joined that debate, announcing during their first meeting as heads of state that they were discussing the idea of creating a large guestworker program that would "regularize" migration across the border.

The idea of promoting guestworker programs as a way to control illegal immigration is ironic, as Phillip Martin and Michael Teitelbaum point out, as there is ample evidence that guestworker programs have paved the way for chain migrations of "illegal" immigrants. Indeed, just as the *bracero* program led to an increase in illegal immigration, even before the program ended in 1964, Malaysia's guestworker program has led to increases in unauthorized foreign workers, most of whom simply stayed beyond the expiration of their work permits. By the summer of 2002, almost 800,000 foreigners worked with authorization in Malaysia, but so did about half as many others, usually from the same countries (Indonesia, Bangladesh, and the Philippines). In August, Malaysia's government announced that it would jail and cane foreign workers who had overstayed their visas, triggering a mass out-migration. But just two weeks after the mass expulsion of some 320,000 foreigners, the government reversed its position, reauthorizing the admission of Indonesian construction workers, because the repatriation of foreigners had brought construction projects to a screeching halt. Guestworker programs lead to illegal immigration, which leads to guestworker programs.<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, in the long run, native workers are not better off as a result of beefed up border controls. Walls, dogs, searchlights and more border guards have proved incapable of preventing unauthorized border crossings. All they succeed in doing is making such crossings more dangerous and expensive and thus in making illegal immigrants more fearful of exposure and repatriation, more vulnerable to exploitation, and less likely to speak up for themselves.<sup>74</sup>

As efforts to make immigration temporary or to "regularize" illegal immigration, guestworker programs have failed. Yet as labor supply systems designed to "regularize" wages, to hold down the cost of sugar cane harvesting in Florida, diamond mining in South Africa, construction work in Europe, and child care in Montreal, and to keep foreign workers segregated in low-wage industries, these programs have been unmitigated success stories. This was, indeed, their purpose and their legacy. In the process, they have drawn nations together in a new sort of dependency, in which the world's

---

<sup>73</sup>Philip L. Martin and Michael S. Teitelbaum, "The Mirage of Mexican Guest Workers," *Foreign Affairs* 80, 6 (November–December 2001): 117–131; *Inter Press Service*, August 16, 2002; *Business Times Singapore*, September 3, 2002.

<sup>74</sup>On the failure of governments to control immigration, see Wayne A. Cornelius, Philip L. Martin, and James F. Hollifield, *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

wealthy nations rely on foreigners to do their hardest and dirtiest work, and in which poorer nations depend on earnings abroad for their very survival. Guestworkers seem to accept this lot most of the time, glad to have the work and anxious not to lose it, but when they have demanded more, they have discovered that a few well-placed deportations is the surest way to squelch a strike.

Peter Russell learned this the hard way. On New Year's Day, 1968, Russell's crew and one other challenged the row prices in two fields. When the company refused to raise the price the next day, the men sat down. The liaison assigned to represent them reiterated the company's position: they could accept the going rate or return home. The men returned to camp, ready to leave, but they demanded money they thought they were owed. Arguing that they had not earned "by the row" the minimum wage that they were guaranteed in their contracts, the men demanded \$500 each. With their cane knives still in hand, a small group of men surrounded the payroll hut, insisting that they would not leave until they were paid or until their Prime Minister told them to go. Not surprisingly, he never called. After a tense standoff between 70 sheriff's deputies, armed with rifles, and the strikers, who had collected bottles and rocks, the strikers capitulated, agreeing to leave without the \$500 they thought they were owed. Four buses pulled up, and the 250 men in the camp started boarding. The first three buses went straight to the airport, but 50 "troublemakers" were loaded instead onto a bus that said "Department of Corrections" on the back. Instead of heading to the Miami airport, those 50 men went to the Palm Beach County jail, from where they were taken to court in leg-irons and charged with inciting riot and unlawful assembly, whether or not they had participated in the brief siege of the payroll office. Bail was set at \$1100 each. However, that afternoon the sheriff made the men a deal: if they left for Kingston immediately and never came back, he would set them free. By the end of the day, Russell and the others were on their way home, and the employer association that had imported them deducted their airfare from their "voluntary" savings.<sup>75</sup>

No amount of contractual guarantees and federal oversight would have helped Peter Russell, so long as he lacked the freedom to walk down the road in search of other work or the freedom to organize and protest without fear of deportation. Until the right to organize, to protest, to work, and to move transcends national boundaries, guestworker programs will remain what they have always been: the means to create a class of perfect immigrants who live in a no-man's land, outside the bounds of nationhood and the house of labor.

---

<sup>75</sup>Depositions of Peter Russell, Irving Francis and Kenneth Williams, Kingston, Jamaica, August 7, 1968, Kingston, Jamaica, Clement Cole et al. v. William Heidtman, Sheriff of Palm Beach County, et al., in the U.S. District Court in and for the Southern District of Florida, Miami Division, case no. 68-245-Civ-TC.