

INTRODUCTION

The Scope and Main Argument of This Book

This book is about the evolution of labor and labor institutions in Russia as compared with Europe, Central Asia, and the Indian Ocean region, between the sixteenth and early twentieth centuries. It questions common ideas about the origin of labor institutions and market economies—their evolution and transformation in the early-modern and modern world. Since the eighteenth century, comparative analyses of labor institutions and labor conditions in Russia have been developed as if the boundary between free and unfree labor were universally defined, and thus free labor in the West is frequently contrasted with serf labor in Russia and Eastern Europe. This book intends to call that view into question and show that Russian peasants were much less bound and unfree than usually held. Furthermore, this book also shows that in most Western countries labor was similar to service, and wage conditions resembled those of domestic servants, with numerous constraints imposed on work mobility. In colonies, this situation then gave rise to extreme forms of dependency, not only under slavery, but after it, as well (e.g., indentured labor in the Indian Ocean region and obligatory labor in Africa).

Unfree labor and forms of coercion were perfectly compatible with market development—economic growth between the seventeenth and the mid-nineteenth century in Russia, Europe, and the Indian Ocean region was achieved through the wide use of bondage and legal constraints on labor. This was not so because the population was somehow lacking, but because consistent economic growth took place throughout Eurasia at that time. The growth was labor intensive: family units, landlords, estate owners, proto-industrial and manufacturing employers, and state and public administrations all required labor. The world of bonded

labor did not collapse with the French Revolution or the British Industrial Revolution, but only with the second Industrial Revolution and the rise of the welfare state, between 1870 and 1914. During this time, free contracts gave working people real rights, which emerged in response to the strength of unions, political turmoil, and welfare. Yet this process involved only a minority of workers in the West (mainly workers in large units), while small units, agriculture, and, above all, the European colonies were only marginally affected until the mid-twentieth century at the earliest. Twentieth-century Russia also departed from the Western path, and the “great transformation” there was ultimately achieved through new forms of bondage.

The Legal Status and Rights of Labor in Russia and Europe

From the eighteenth century to our own time, comparisons between the economies of Russia and the major Western European countries have formed part of a wider debate about the term *backwardness*. The goal of such debates has been to create a comparative scale that accounts for both economic growth and so-called blockages. Such comparisons have often highlighted the nature of labor, which has been categorized as “free” in the West and “forced” in Russia and Eastern Europe. Free labor is said to form the basis of capitalist economic growth, whereas forced labor is said to explain the economic backwardness of Russia.¹

The recrudescence of *corvée* in Eastern Europe and Russia from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries (the so-called second serfdom) is usually explained by the increased interest devoted by local landlords to the rising international market for wheat, mostly pumped up by Western European demand and population growth. Liberal, radical, and Marxist historiography and such different authors as Kula, Wallerstein, and North agree on this: in early modern times, Eastern Europe responded to the commercial, agrarian, and, then, the industrial expansion of the West by binding the peasantry to the land and its lords.² According to this view, the enserfment of the peasantry in the East contrasts with the rise of free wage labor in the West. These dynamics are supposed to have accompanied an increasing international division of labor in which the periphery (Asia and Africa) and quasi-periphery (Southern and Eastern Europe) became subordinate to the core (Northern and Western Europe).

The fact that very different authors agree on these arguments confirms the persistent strength of two assumptions common to liberal and Marxist historiographies: first, an ethnocentric assumption, which states that Europe and Britain are the core of modern and contemporary history,

and, second, that there is a clear-cut and ahistorical opposition between free and unfree labor. Only on the basis of these assumptions can the overall economic dynamics of the early modern world be depicted in terms of a periphery, dependence, and the opposition between freedom and unfreedom, markets, and institutions. It is interesting that even new approaches in world history such as Pomeranz's "great divergence," while contesting China backwardness and European ethnocentrism, still consider Russia the paradigm of unfree labor and lack of markets and, as such, as the county that stands in contradistinction to both the Lower Yangtze and Britain.³

Clear-cut distinctions may be analytically useful, but they are not confirmed by an empirical analysis of the categories and practices of early-modern and modern Eurasia. This book firmly contests these issues and provides an alternative global explanation of labor, institutions, and economies of the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries. Part I ("Bondage Imagined") discusses the role of ideas and perceptions in shaping dependency, peripheries, and bondage, challenging both Said's Orientalism and Wallerstein's world-system approach. Chapter 1 shows that the Enlightenment invented an ideal Russian serfdom and a backward Eastern Europe opposed to the modernizing West but that this attitude was much more complex than Orientalism suggests,⁴ insofar as it owes much to a more general debate on forms of labor in the West. Indeed, in eighteenth-century thought, the definition of backwardness and its main element—labor—lay at the nexus of three interrelated debates: over serfdom in Eastern Europe, slavery in the colonies, and guild reform in France. I show that these debates were interrelated and that images of "the Other" were tightly linked to normative ambitions in France and Britain. During much of the eighteenth century, the attitudes of the French *philosophes*, economists, and travelers about forced labor (serfdom and slavery) were influenced by considerations both economic (forced labor is advantageous in certain situations) and political (reforms have to be gradual, and both owners and slaves must be educated before the system is abolished). Only in the 1780s did these positions become radicalized, in connection with the first slave revolts in Antilles. The 1780 edition of Raynal and Diderot's *Histoire des deux Indes* clearly incited the slaves to revolt, and a revolutionary outlook took the place of reformism. During the same years the British abolitionist movement won massive support.⁵

These varied attitudes toward slavery highlight a much more fundamental dilemma in French and British political philosophy about the status of labor and the role of law in relation to the economy.⁶ The economic rationality that issued from the French Revolution and that was further developed over the first half of the nineteenth century had trouble

reconciling these elements. In Britain, the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the first process of industrialization relied upon servants (not wage earners or proletarians) and the poor laws as a system of recruitment. This is why in Great Britain, even more than in Russia, moral and political arguments—rather than strictly economic ones—made the victory of abolitionism possible. It is therefore difficult to speak of a “distortion” of Enlightenment and (later) liberal philosophy by Russian economists and administrators, whose thinking was supposedly still influenced by the management of forced labor. On the contrary, Russian elites shared much of the European ambivalence about freedom and labor.

Chapter 2 integrates these views and studies the historical link between forms of surveillance and organization in labor relations in European representations. The experiences of Jeremy and Samuel Bentham in Russia, where they invented what is universally known as the Panopticon, orient my investigation. Using sources from British and Russian archives, I provide a new interpretation of the Panopticon through its Russian origins. Before and after Foucault,⁷ the Panopticon has been seen as a response to social deviance and has been viewed in relation to prisons and the emergence of a global surveillance system in modern societies.⁸ I challenge this approach by arguing that the Panopticon project was actually a system for controlling wage labor that drew its inspiration from a particular image of Russian serfdom and from the Bentham brothers’ experiences in that country.⁹ Between 1780 and 1787, Samuel and Jeremy Bentham were asked to manage a large Russian estate owned by Prince Grigorii Potemkin, one of the closest advisors of Catherine II. The problem of controlling skilled English workers in Russia (and not the Russian serfs) is what actually led the Bentham brothers to reflect on the relationship between free and forced labor—and then between labor and society. The fact that the Benthams were uncomfortable with wage labor reflects a wider attitude of the British toward the poor and the servant in the broad social order of that time. In other words, liberal approaches to labor did not invent a backward Russia (the Orientalists’ approach) or new categories of “marginal people” (Foucault’s argument), rather it drew inspiration from Russia to solve the long-standing problem of managing wage labor and the poor in Britain.

At the same time, one cannot take for granted the elites’ representations of labor, slavery, and serfdom for implemented policies and socio-economic dynamics. Links, convergences, and disconnections between ideas, policies, and structural dynamics need to be empirically tested. The second part of this book, “The Architecture of Bondage,” contains three chapters, covering slavery and bondage in Russia and Inner Asia, the institutions of serfdom, and labor practices, respectively. Chapter 3 provides

one of the first attempts to identify and quantify slavery and bondage in early-modern Inner Asia, between the fourteenth and the nineteenth century. It also looks for the origins of Russian serfdom and Eurasian labor institutions in the medieval and early-modern slave trade. The import of Russian, Tatar, and Central Asian slaves into the Mediterranean region is usually depicted as an early expression of colonial slavery on the one hand,¹⁰ and of Russian serfdom on the other.¹¹ The few available studies on this topic have focused mostly on imports by Ottoman¹² and European powers but have neglected Russian sources and the existence of forms of bondage and eventually slavery in Russia itself (before serfdom). I develop a fully integrated approach and mobilize Russian sources that have been poorly explored until now (including translations from Persian, Chinese, Turkish, and particularly Genoese archives). I bring together the origin of war captives and their destinations and add to this the study of local forms of bondage and slavery in Russia. I furthermore link the slave trade in Inner Asia to three major networks and routes: the eastern route, from China to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean (the Silk Road); the north-south route, from Muscovy to Persia, Afghanistan, and India; and the north-southwest route, from Muscovy to the Ottoman Empire. I also attempt to quantify this slave trade, neglected by so many historians.

Traditionally, the dismissing of *kholopstvo*, or limited-term slaves, has been linked to the evolution of warfare (with the increasing importance of gunpowder), to the (related) growing importance of artillery, and, therefore, to the constitution of national systems of recruitment. In Russia as elsewhere, this went along with the necessity of reforming the fiscal system. New legal constraints on labor mobility were then imposed, which have been termed as serfdom. Chapter 4 studies the rise and implementation of these new constraints. In this case, as with slavery, I begin with an analysis of words and translations. I show that until the 1840s, Russian official rules, jurisprudence, legal records, and even estate archives never spoke of “serfs” but of “peasants” and “rural population.” The supposed Russian expression for serfdom emerged only in the years before the so-called abolition of serfdom. It seems dubious to assume a collective and spontaneous censorship over centuries, so we must take these sources seriously. But if peasants were not serfs, what were they?

I would argue that they were bonded people with important limitations on mobility who were obligated to provide labor.¹³ Yet these measures were dictated not only by the taxation and military requirements of the rising Russian state,¹⁴ which were linked to Russian territorial expansion,¹⁵ but they also led to a significant redefinition of the relationships between social groups and the state, especially the value of land ownership as a social and political marker. Limitation of peasant mobility was

only a consequence and a tool in this fight, not the main aim of Russian politics.¹⁶ This explains how, in contradiction to common hypotheses and despite supposed serfdom,¹⁷ archives (that until now have been poorly explored) show that peasants never stopped moving from one estate to another or from one region to another—and that the government took measures to ensure this right. In short, serfdom was an attempt to discipline the competition between estate owners, and it was a form of institutional extortion of peasants by landlords whose rights officially consisted of controlling marriages, second jobs, and emigrations. There never was a central institutionalization of serfdom in Russia, but there were local forms of bondage.¹⁸

Further confirmation of this explanation is offered by the huge number of judicial litigations between landlords, landlords and peasants, and landlords and merchants concerning peasants moving without permission or working for another landlord or merchant without paying a fee and compensation to the entitled estate owner.¹⁹ I make wide use of unexplored Russian judicial archives, which gave me access to litigation between estate owners about their titles, between peasants and estate owners about rights and obligations, and, ultimately, between the state and estate owners. I show that in the decades before the official abolition of serfdom, half of the peasantry changed its status and left the category of “private peasants,” while within this last category, only half were still obliged to provide labor services.²⁰ From this perspective, the reforms of 1861 have to be put in the broader context of several reforms implemented over a century and a half. These reforms did not mark a break, because first, serfdom did not previously exist as such, and, second, legal constraints on peasant mobility and peasant labor did not disappear after 1861.

In order to validate these statements, we need to closely consider the interplay between legal rules and their implementation, on the one hand, and economic practices, on the other. Chapter 5 discusses the organization of labor on Russian estates in detail. It addresses the questions: Were Russian peasants obliged to provide *corvées*, and were *corvées* a major obstacle to, if not the antithesis of, market relations?

I explore estate archives and answer no to both questions. Landlords could ask peasants for quitrent or labor services (*corvées*). Western, as well as Russian and Soviet, historiography traditionally argues that quitrent encouraged trade and economic growth, whereas labor service restricted both.²¹ This argument has been widely echoed by historians of serfdom in Western²² and Eastern Europe.²³ Any satisfactory answer to this question requires an assessment of labor productivity and overall demesne efficiency. The question underlying this debate is important:

were historical forms of forced labor compatible with the market, innovation, and capitalism?

I do not intend to provide a general a priori definition of capitalism, but I rely upon its flexible architecture and practices over time. Unlike liberal approaches, I do not link capitalism to the free market and private property; as I have shown in other works,²⁴ in its historical variations capitalism can never be associated with the free market and competition, but only with different forms of regulation. Markets are the very ground of capitalism, but they are never self-regulated. Starting from this, my thinking is close to Braudel and Sombart in linking capitalism to markets, regulated exchange, and the desire for (or attempt at) imperfect competition and forms of monopoly. The practices of property and the complicated definition of what “property” and “private” are in different historical situations suggest avoiding this category to define capitalism. “Corporate governance” and “Chinese regime” are but two names of among many other examples of how complicated the definition of private property can be.

In the present book, I focus on the other side of capitalism—labor. In this case, as well, I intend to take my distance from liberal, as well as Marxist and Weberian, definitions of capitalism. Workers were not other forms of “independent producers” making a free choice; on the contrary, we will see that this association between a worker and an independent artisan was used in nineteenth-century French law to settle a peculiar form of labor market. It was an institutional construction, and there was no free choice by the actors themselves.

I also intend to show that capitalism cannot be associated with wage labor and “proletarians”: first, because proletarians and wage earners became dominant actors only with the second Industrial Revolution, while during the previous centuries—the ones we study here—peasant workers and servants were the leading actors. The second reason I exclude any identification of capitalism with free labor is that “time on the cross” in American slavery and many other regimes up through today’s global economies are considered expressions of capitalism, despite the more or less massive presence of unfree labor. I prove this link by studying intermediate forms between chattel slavery and wage earners, that is: serfs, servants, indentured immigrants, and rural laborers. I show that these actors were not marginal, but rather they were central in the global economic and social dynamics between the seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries.

The chapter further demonstrates that not only were the “agency” problems on Russian estates solved on the basis of abstract economic considerations, but that these considerations responded to the peculiar way

institutions and actors interacted. Peasants' leaders, landlords, and bailiffs were much more in coordination with than in opposition to each other. The attention given to supervision and its organization testifies to the role of intermediary institutions (bailiffs and village elders) and their ability to complement each other. Starting from this, I conclude that there is no evidence for Kula's and Wallerstein's models. According to them, under the second serfdom, Russian demesnes reduced their integration in local markets; peasants became self-sufficient; and landlords extracted a surplus of cereals from the peasants and then sold it mostly abroad and used the income not to invest, but to buy luxury products. In this view, Russian and Eastern European serfdom constituted a contribution from the supposedly backward Russia to the industrializing "advanced" Europe. Instead, I show that an increasing integration of Russian local markets into a national market occurred during the second half of the eighteenth century, when not only landlords, but their peasants, firmly entered the rural agrarian markets. Peasant activity on rural markets even surpassed that of merchants and small urban traders. Therefore, contrary to the traditional arguments, the trade in estate production increased with *barshchina* (corvées), which was compatible not only with exportation and long distances, but with the rise of local and national markets, as well.

Serfdom in a Comparative Perspective

The conclusions this book reaches for Russia are quite similar to those recently advanced for Eastern Europe agriculture under serfdom. As in Russia, seigniorial regulation in many Central and Eastern European areas aimed at integrating subject proto-industries into the system of demesne economy.²⁵ The peasant economy under serfdom corresponded neither to the Chayanovian nor Kula model. Russia and Eastern Europe were not the periphery and quasi-periphery of Western Europe. The case of Russia testifies to a different path on which peasants and noble estate owners took control of agrarian and proto-industrial markets. If this is true, then, is it still correct to associate serfdom with slavery and oppose it to wage labor?

The third part of this book ("Old Bondage, New Practices: A Comparative View") consists of two chapters that put the institutions and practices of Russian serfdom into an entangled and comparative perspective. I attempt here to escape the usual comparisons between wage labor, serfdom, and slavery made on the basis of ideal types rather than historical realities. Conventional approaches provide an ideal definition of each term. Thus slavery and serfdom are defined by the lack of legal rights allotted to slaves and serfs, their hereditary statute, the master's right of ownership, and the coercive extraction of surplus. The major identified

difference is that unlike slaves, serfs were attached to the land.²⁶ This distinction oriented Kolchin's well-known comparison between American slavery and Russian serfdom.²⁷

I adopt a different methodological assumption: rather than comparing ideal types, I examine historical forms of wage labor, serfdom, and slavery. Confino already criticized Kolchin's book for its reliance on a peculiar model, namely, Wallerstein's world economy, in which Russia and the United States are the peripheries of Europe. To this end, according to Confino, Kolchin deliberately ignored important differences between American slavery and Russian serfdom: to start with, the fact that Russian serfs did not come from distant countries and did not belong to a different ethnic group. Thus the master-slave relationship did not find an equivalent in Russia, where the peasant commune and its elders mediated the relationship between the estate owner and the peasants. The Russian master was therefore much more obliged to negotiate peasants' services than was the American slave owner.²⁸

I further develop this argument. The difference between American slavery and Russian serfdom was even greater than Confino and others (Steven Hoch, for example) have stressed. This issue stands upon two main arguments: on the one hand, the circulation of knowledge and practices between Russia, Inner Asia, and Europe (as discussed in chapters 1, 2, and 3) provides a solid ground for entangled historical dynamics and strongly supports the thesis of a commonality of values, notions, and practices in all these areas. On the other hand, as I demonstrate in chapters 4 and 5, unlike American slaves,²⁹ Russian peasants constantly brought judicial litigations and developed their own economic activity (they merely had to pay fees to their masters). Most important, the steppe was colonized (with a million people moving) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Siberia was colonized in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, before the official abolition of serfdom. It is as if American slaves had colonized the western frontier before 1865. In short, it makes no sense to consider American slavery and Russian serfdom to be similar institutions. The Cold War is over, and one need not find in the Russian past an equivalent of American slavery.

Instead, I suggest that revisiting Russian serfdom constitutes a powerful heuristic to discuss wage labor in Europe and forms of bondage in the Afro-Eurasian space. In particular, chapter 6 shows that from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, rules on runaways were adopted not only in Russia and for slaves and indentured workers in the colonies, but also in Great Britain, where fugitive workers, journeymen, and servants in general were submitted to severe criminal punishment under the Master and Servant Acts. Apprenticeship, advances in wages and raw materials,

and also simple master-servant relations were adduced to justify such provisions. From the sixteenth to the end of the nineteenth century in Britain and Europe, free labor, even where a contract existed, was considered the property of the employer and a resource for the whole community to which the individual belonged.³⁰ In Britain, punitive measures accompanied the emphasis placed on contractual free will as a foundation of the labor market. Punitive sanctions in text rules and their implementation increased in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus the long-term movement of labor and its rules in Great Britain hardly confirm the traditional argument that early labor freedom in the country supported the Industrial Revolution. On the contrary, the Industrial Revolution was accompanied by subjecting workers to increasingly tough regulations and punitive sanctions. Increasing legal constraints on labor—not increasing free wage labor—went hand in hand with the Industrial Revolution.³¹

France presents quite a similar story: the notion of a work contract, and hence that of a “wage earner” as we know it today, did not exist until the end of the nineteenth century. Before that, although the French Revolution suppressed lifetime engagement, it did not abolish the notion of labor as service.³²

Of course, institutional dynamics do not tell the whole story. Practices changed over time, and labor contracts, mobility, and organizations evolved throughout the studied period; however, the interplay between rules and practices on the one hand, and between Britain, France, and Russia on the other, causes such conventional breaks as “before and after the Industrial Revolution” and “before and after the French Revolution” to be outmoded. Continuities, not only changes, are important and deserve explanation.

Let us be clear: I do not mean that French or British workers were serfs or that they were the same as Russian peasants. I simply argue that the gap between Russian serfdom and European wage labor is narrower than is usually held and that these were not opposite worlds testifying to the conflict between freedom and unfreedom, but rather two poles of a common world in which masters (not employers!) had far greater rights than servants, working people, and peasants. As such, Russian bondage was one (extreme) expression of a wider notion of labor as service.

These connections look even stronger when one includes European colonies in the overall picture. Indeed, the notions and practices of wage labor in Europe intersected not only with those of serfdom in Russia, but also, and above all, with the evolution of these same notions and practices of labor in the colonies. The gap between Russia and Western Europe closes further when one considers European practices in the colonies. Chapter 7 examines the interrelation between slavery, its abolition,

and post-emancipation forms of labor in a particular context, that of the Indian Ocean. First of all, like the steppe and the Eurasian world studied in chapter 3, the Indian Ocean region constituted a type of overall economy well before the Atlantic Ocean region did. The slave trade in the Indian Ocean was also multidirectional; over time, its direction and principal destinations changed, and it involved not only men, but women, as well. The forms of slavery were therefore multiple and varied—there were palace slaves, soldier slaves, female and child slaves, and slave laborers in agriculture and manufacturing, with diverse statuses.³³ From this point of view, as with slavery in Inner Asia and serfdom in Russia, the meaning of slavery in the Indian Ocean region only becomes intelligible when viewed outside the categories of ancient or North American slavery. It often entailed mutual forms of dependence in which one individual (or a group or caste) of inferior status was under obligation to another with superior status, who in turn was under obligation to a superior. The forms of status obligation, bondage, and temporary slavery (for debt, etc.) coexisted with forms of hereditary slavery similar to that in North America.³⁴ The interaction among the forms of bondage and the notions of indentured labor and its French equivalent (called *engagisme* exported by the Europeans make this an interesting case.³⁵ My argument states that it would have been impossible to develop the indenture contract in the British Empire if the British wage earner had not been a servant, subject to the multiple Master and Servant Acts. Similarly, the *engagés* (equivalent to indentured servants) and bonded laborers in the French colonies would have been inconceivable had there been no hiring for services and domestic service in France. Over the long term, there was interaction within this complex world: the conditions and legal status of servants and indentured people in the colonies and those of wage earners in France and Great Britain influenced each other.

This argument wishes to overcome the two leading interpretations of the history of wage and indentured labor. According to a first approach, the indentured contract resembled forced labor and slavery, and contracts were expressed as legal fiction.³⁶ Such an approach deprives the abolition of slavery of any historical significance³⁷ while neglecting all the efforts indentured immigrants made to fight for their own rights.

Several legal scholars have opposed this view by demonstrating that the indenture contract was not considered an expression of forced labor until the second half of the nineteenth century, whereas until that date, it was viewed as an expression of free will in contract.³⁸ This argument joins recent trends in the history of emigration that also stress the shifting boundary between free and unfree emigration.³⁹ I develop this last view and add a further dimension to it, namely, the link between the

evolution of forms of labor in Europe and in its colonies. I add that all these actors (masters, servants, daily laborers, indentured immigrants) belonged to one and the same world, which comprised legal inequalities between employers (masters) and workers (servants). Within this common world, inequalities between the legal and economic entitlements of working people and those of their masters were far greater in the colonies than in Europe and also differed between colonies of the same empire, as well as between European countries and between different areas of a given country.

On this basis, I examine the relations between Europe and its colonies in a more complex way than the simple dependence of the latter on the former would suggest. I claim the necessity of avoiding any simplistic identification of colonial discourse with colonial practices. Colonial elites expressed quite complex and often divergent aims, which were all the more difficult to translate into practice, as colonized people were far from being merely passive recipients. These arguments are based on the rich sources of the archives in London (Kew), Aix-en-Provence (French colonial archives), and in Mauritius and Reunion Island.

To sum up, between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, forms of bondage and legal constraints were widespread throughout Europe, Russia, Inner Asia, Africa, and the Indian Ocean region. Working people had fewer rights than their employer-masters or estate owners (and sometimes had none). This common world responded to the stabilization of elites and territorial powers, but it also responded to the rise of markets and the market economy. There were important reciprocal influences and a circulation of knowledge, institutions, and practices between Russia and Inner Asia, Russia and Europe, Europe and Islam, Europe and its colonies, and Europe and local powers in Asia and Africa. The so-called commercial, agrarian, and then Industrial Revolutions did not break this world, but enhanced it. This could be so because the process was far from revolutionary: it was part of a long-term evolution,⁴⁰ and it was not limited to the West. The presumed Western domination (so important in the world-system and dependency theories) does not find confirmation first in central Eurasia and the western Mediterranean in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, then in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Eastern Europe and Russia, and finally in the eighteenth- through twentieth-century Indian Ocean region. We will see that these areas were not just the West's dominated peripheries of the West, but active players on the local and international chessboard.

The book's final chapter draws wider implications: it announces the decline of the global world of labor and bondage as studied in the preceding chapters. This world reflected and supported the labor-intensive

growth in Eurasia between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries. The repeal of the Master and Servant Acts (1875), the invention of the “new” labor contract of employment in Britain, France, and most of the Western countries between the 1890s and 1914, the abolition of serfdom in Russia (1861), of slavery in the United States (1865), and ultimately of slavery in French Africa (1904–5) and indenture contract in India (1916), together marked the attempt to put an end to a labor world made up of unequal status and rights between enserfed servants and bonded people on the one hand, and their masters on the other hand. I link this major shift in the history of labor to a set of forces: the rise of the first welfare state, the second Industrial Revolution, the legalization of trade unions and the extension of political rights in Europe, and the evolution of labor in the colonies.⁴¹

At the same time, this process took different forms in different places; even in the West, the first welfare state (between the 1890s and 1945) benefited only a minority of workers, mostly those in large industries, while small units and agriculture stood outside this evolution. Also, in the colonies, the decline of the indenture contracts took several decades and interacted with the expansion of free emigration, decreasing costs of transportation, and mechanization. New forms of forced labor developed, in particular in Africa, where the official abolition of local slavery sustained new disguised forms of coerced labor.⁴² Even worse, Europe renewed bondage under Nazism and Soviet Communism.

Global, Local, Imperial: Scales of Analysis

Between the seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, continuities and links between free and unfree labor prevailed over clear-cut oppositions, such as those between wage earners and serfs and indentured immigrants and servants, in time as well as in space. Thus the historical dynamics of labor must be understood both in a global dimension and in local specificities. Imperial, national, regional, and local features should be taken into consideration in order to understand how the whole system worked. From this perspective, two main variables are worthy of mention: the circulation of economic and legal knowledge and economic and institutional dynamics between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. Economic knowledge and legal models circulated along with people and goods. This circulation led not only to increased homogeneity among systems, but also to differentiation and even hierarchies of areas and countries. The advances of the Enlightenment therefore contributed to the invention of a historiographical break between “enlightened France” and the old France, as well as between Western and Eastern Europe.

At the same time, the circulation of ideas and models is important, but it cannot be taken exclusively as a synonym for dependency, because the center and its peripheries often influenced each other; bondage and slavery did, in fact, exist, although in different forms, before and after colonization; and finally, emancipation did not come about solely under pressure exerted by the “advanced West.” The role of the circulation of knowledge is bound up with economic and social trends as a whole—but on what scale?

This book focuses on Eurasia for a number of reasons. First of all, because studies of the evolution of labor in Western Europe has been excessively dominated by a Eurocentric approach that views the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution as the major breaks. I would like to show that these turning points were merely partial as far as labor institutions were concerned and that the dynamics at work in France, England, Russia, and Europe in general can be grasped only in their interaction with other parts of the world. Researchers, especially in the last few years, have written at length about the interaction between Europe and the Americas and between Europe and Africa, whereas the relationships between Europe and Asia have received less attention. Examining Europe, Russia, Inner Asia, and some European colonies in the Indian Ocean together has the advantage of avoiding retrospective thinking about Europe; labor institutions and practices in Europe were connected to what was happening in its colonies and in Asian empires. The choices of main areas—Russia, France, Britain, Mauritius, and Reunion Islands (and within each area, some specific regions and estates)—has been made not because these regions are statistically representative, but because they are especially relevant to the questions we are asking. Thus the Russian Empire is interesting not because it is “the land of despotism,” but because new data reveal considerable economic and demographic growth at the time of serfdom. Russia will no longer be viewed as an ideological ideal type—land of despotism, land of serfdom—but a real object of historical analysis. Indeed, once second serfdom has recovered its place within the comparative history of forms of labor, we will take another look at the differences from and similarities to other possible configurations of the labor world. The French case is of interest not because it was the land of Colbertism and opposed to liberal England or because nineteenth-century France was the country of free, codified law as compared with Germany, which still lagged behind. On the contrary, France is of interest because its labor norms in the nineteenth century were actually quite well suited both to a capitalist economy and to the heritage of the Old Regime. Highlighting the case of France and comparing it with England leads us to question the differences between liberalism and regulationism—or

between free labor and guilds within the capitalist world—and from there to narrow the distance separating free labor from the varieties of bondage. Contrary to a widespread preconception, common law in England was in fact accompanied by a considerable degree of regulation and state intervention, and labor remained subject to punitive constraints until the end of the nineteenth century.

Among the Western colonies, I have paid special attention to Mauritius and Réunion Island, because the time is ripe for a new analysis of the forms of dependence in the French and British Empires based specifically on labor status. While British and French norms and perceptions translated into various forms of bondage in the Indian Ocean region, thereby helping perpetuate slavery well after its official abolition, slavery nevertheless existed prior to any European intervention. The adopted solution did not result solely from British and French influences, but rather from interaction between those influences and local traditions.

These comparisons on the national and imperial level are valid only as a rough approximation. No doubt, legal rules (civil, tax, and customs laws) refer to the national and imperial dimension of these phenomena; yet those rules were only one component of economic action, along with symbolic, cultural, and political aspects. Hence we cannot ignore the importance of local components and the great differences between the dynamics of different regions. Forms of labor varied from one city to the next and from one place to another. This observation is especially relevant in our case, as the institutions and economic activities of the world we are studying were extremely fluid, multiple, and local, from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Several institutions coexisted on the local level, and even when a process of national unification took place, institutional pluralism continued. Institutional pluralism was more widespread on the level of empires, where legal pluralism was an important instrument of economic and political action.⁴³

Local practices and customs also played an important role, and they were recognized in nineteenth-century Russia with regard to property; these elements account simultaneously for common phenomena (restrictions on labor mobility), the diverse ways they were expressed, and their source (worker's booklet, Russian serfdom, legal punishment in the British Empire). They also explain the differences between the dynamics of Lancashire, the south of France, and western Russia, as well as those between individual areas of England or the Russian steppe. Different solutions were adopted within a few miles of each other, and similarities developed more frequently with estates in distant regions than with those nearby. The labor rules and practices that were ultimately adopted testify to local irreducibility within a space that was, nevertheless, global.

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