

non-literate groups. One may need to test further the contention that exile blurred “lines between prince, convict laborer and slave” (1). These quibbles apart, *Exile in Colonial Asia* is an excellent and thought-provoking volume that deserves to be widely read by anyone interested in empire, forced migration and transnational history.

doi:10.1017/S0165115319000160

Nira Wickramasinghe, *Leiden University*

Matthias van Rossum and Jeanette Kamp, eds. *Desertion in the Early Modern World: A Comparative History*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. 213 pp. ISBN: 9781474216005. \$112.00.

How does one know when one has had enough of one’s job? And what can one do about it? However difficult it is to answer these questions about one’s work, it is even harder to analyse how—and why—other people left or tried to leave jobs in the past, and whether European expansion enhanced or curtailed global labour opportunities in the 1600s and 1700s. “Desertion” is a flexible rubric which permits the eight essays in this collection, written by prominent and promising scholars, to attempt quite convincing answers to these questions. They give equal attention to how desertion played a role in employees seeking jobs, employers trying to hire and keep workers, and intermediaries seeking to profit from brokering recruitment of labourers abandoning their posts—not just soldiers and sailors, but also contracted, bonded, and indentured persons, including various types of slaves. It is a challenging brief these scholars set themselves; one made more complex by their desire to track early modern globalization’s effects on desertions through the study of mostly Netherlands archival evidence. Nevertheless, the challenge is successfully met and suggests clear avenues for further research.

The essays began as conference papers presented at the 2014 European Congress on World and Global History session titled “Leaving Work Across the World”. Three excellent introductory essays link the collection, the first co-authored by Jeanette Kamp and Matthias van Rossum and the other two by Alessandro Stanziani and Marcel van der Linden. These essays constitute an evocative *mise-en-scène* focused on several key phenomena: “work-related grievancy” (10) as the ever-present motivation; the consistent lack of “opposition between the market and coercion” (16), a confirmation of Stanziani’s well-known thesis in *Bondage: Labor and Rights in Eurasia from the Sixteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries*; and the overwhelming evidence for the “often highly authoritarian conditions” (34) faced by the labourers who did the work of stitching the early modern world together. These are themes familiar to *Itinerario* readers—one thinks of research by Richard Allen, Farley Grubb, and Edward Cavanagh—but this is a crucial contribution to our understanding of the degree to which labourers had free will within processes and projects of European expansion.

The rest of the essays are organised into three groups: “Europe” (Kamp and Brandon on German and Dutch military desertion); “Atlantic and Maritime Asia” (Fatah-Black on “Sailors, Slaves and Soldiers in the Dutch Atlantic” and Rossum on “Desertion in the Eurasian Empire of the VOC”); and “Between Worlds” (Ekama on VOC slave desertion and another Rossum essay arguing that mobility controls evolved “From Contracts to Labour Camps”). Each essay tackles “six research variables”, namely, the quantification of desertion, its definitions, patterns, and “mechanisms of control” (preventative, job-incentivizing, and punitive), “desertion as an economic act”, and finally “desertion as a socio-political act” (6). A sophisticated mix of archive-based quantitative and

qualitative analysis, this volume has the bonus of informing non-Dutch-reading scholars about key Dutch-language sources, databases, and cutting-edge historiography.

Desertion had multiple causes, from workers' frustration with a lack of redress for perceived exploitation to their use of desertion as a form of migration to places with perceived employment opportunities. A key factor, European expansion's fragmented nature, influenced how deserters exploited the job possibilities offered by crossing boundaries between states, empires, and legal regimes (what I explore as "transliminality" in a forthcoming book), a point brought home particularly well in Karwan-Black's essay. By revealing the deep fissures in European expansion, the volume corroborates that Europeans had no joint project for "European expansion", but instead, multiple contradictory private and public projects experienced by most workers and even practitioners less as projects they could guide and more as processes which they faced contingently. This fact is reflected in how punitive leniency or harshness to a specific individual or group deserting in one place did not necessarily translate elsewhere into similar actions, and in how workers and investors often upturned their hegemonic principles "out there" in the world, whether ethnic/racial, class, or even ideological/political. Deserters' and enforcers' anxious struggles in the field, reveal the "epistemic politics" of "colonial common sense" talked about by Ann Laura Stoler.

Two dominant conclusions emerge: employees' "mobility"—their ability to deny their labour to employers and to seek new work—are not to be underestimated; and employers' ability to control, prevent, and punish workers' "unlicensed" or "illegal" absences—their "running away"—was often contested by employees, despite increasingly draconian statutory efforts. An immediate terminological, and thus hermeneutic, matter faced by these scholars (with varying degrees of success) is the accurate characterization of deserters' agency. Prosecutors, for instance, not perpetrators, determined whether acts appear in documents as "desertion" or just "absence" (for instance, a Bengali sailor away from work for three years got convicted of absence [148]). Ekama and Rossum tackle this issue particularly well, the latter noting that the VOC's use of "*absentee*" (137) shows the word shifted in meaning not just in terms of whose social perspective we privilege—revealing vertical distinctions—but also whether the same act happened in the metropole or Asia—revealing horizontal differences. Rightly (I think), and in consonance with the volume's theme, Fatah-Black states that the bundle of actions which we may want to differentiate as absence, escape, or desertion may not be worth "fixing" taxonomically (105). The point, of course, is one which maritime historians like Rosemary Ommer, Skip Fischer, and David J. Starkey have made before: terms like "desertion" axiomatically reflect employers' perspectives, a vision of the world "from above".

At stake, in such heuristic challenges, is a deeper Geertzian understanding of the paper trails left by the play of employers' and employees' struggles in a highly competitive global labour market, beyond facile images of the mutually beneficial obligations of paid labor (and thus beyond traditional historiography's emphasis on accumulated capital). What these essays point to is the need to delve more deeply into a phenomenologically reliable "taxonomy of wage labour conflicts" (borrowing Sjaak van der Velden's phrase in a different set of essays). This approach would allow us to gauge participants' real sense of reasonable labour versus exploitation (something along the lines of Rossum's deft excursus, in *Werkers van de Wereld* [2014], on how to read employers' and labourers' performative strategies à-la Charles Tilly and Pierre Bourdieu). This fact seems evident in how the volume unpacks coercion's critical role in desertions, notwithstanding its putatively voluntary nature. Workers experienced coercion in surprisingly complex ways: as harsh labour conditions motivating them to desert but also as forced recruitment away from one employer to another. The coercive strategies of middlemen (whether military recruiters or sailor town "crimps") preying on both employers and employees, created a significant global network of labour trafficking reminiscent of today's instances of force, fraud,

and deception. As such, it makes judging the voluntary or involuntary nature of desertion “difficult” (145). Paradoxically, this confirms what Fischer once said of maritime deserters in a ground-breaking 1980 essay, that they were rational individuals “who were very much in control of their destinies” and made “extremely astute judgments about the benefits of ‘deviant’ behaviour such as desertion” but it also contradicts Fischer’s theory that deserters were not “pawns of forces beyond their control”. Governments and companies, as well as workers, were often pawns of middlemen. This fact comes home strikingly in Kamp’s analysis of eighteenth-century Frankfurt, a walled city with an international “military labour market”. Deserting soldiers played into the hands of middlemen “on a scale between voluntary and involuntary recruitment”, frustrating city council’s repeated efforts over the centuries to regulate or monopolize military recruitment (52).

Not surprisingly, then, some workers came to think of all labour—bonded or “free” wage, term-limited service or open contract—as coerced (197). Instead of official definition as treason (74), desertion for workers seems to have operated as a necessary corrective to the salaried slavery of “[w]orking environments” which presented “a continuum rather than a polar opposition between enslavement and contract” (99). Consequently, employers around the European-ruled parts of the world often preferred negotiable “incentives” to “regulations” or “mechanisms” of “control” (195). And soberingly, workers’ individual and group desertions demonstrate a frequent “lack of sense of solidarity” (172): we are not far from the conceptualization of workers’ acquiescence to behaviours along a spectrum from consensus to coercion that was at the heart of Gramsci’s theory of how hegemony operated in “civil society”.

This volume rescues early modern delinquent workers’ agencies from what E.P. Thompson called “the enormous condescension of posterity”, that is, from the criminalization of their willed mobility as desertion by the global marketplace’s legal institutions. It maps the coercive labour itineraries of capitalism and imperialism’s expansion by telling us much about “what they [workers] understood as acceptable and unacceptable restrictions on their working life” (98). But readers looking for a Hobsbawmian pre-political or a Marcus-Rediker-style collective proto-revolutionary spirit amongst them will be disappointed: desertion “as a socio-political act” involved very little consistency. If Gramsci was right that workers organized only when they overcome their false consciousness, then early modern desertion, even massive 30% collective desertion, was never revolutionary. This volume’s analysis of individual and “conjonturally” collective desertions leaves us with the question of the degree to which it all fitted into Europe’s only exceptional deed, the exporting around the world of a peculiar form of military-cum-commercial violence (what we should call the Frederic Lane—Jan Glete thesis). Put differently, did venture capital’s expansion contribute to a measurable collective consciousness of its coercive, exploitative nature on the part of the wide-ranging labourers it paid and forced to work? Or were their absences, piratical mutinies, and wide-spread desertions ultimately isolated reactions?

doi:10.1017/S0165115319000172

Fabio López Lázaro, *University of Hawaii*

Kelly L. Watson. *Insatiable Appetites: Imperial Encounters with Cannibals in the North Atlantic World*. New York: New York University Press, 2015. 288 pp. ISBN: 9780814763476. \$40.00.

Historians looking for accounts of anthropophagy will be disappointed by Watson’s monograph. *Insatiable Appetites*, however, will delight readers interested in “cannibalism” as a leitmotif,