

Pieter Emmer

Slaves and Migrants



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To change your specialization is not commonly done among academics. Most scholars stick to the topic they started out with. In that I am no exception. I wrote my Ph.D. thesis on the abolition of the Dutch slave trade in 1974, and I have continued to work on related topics ever since. For more than 25 years, I published on trade and forced migrations from Africa and Europe to the New World, on the large-scale migrations of indentured laborers from South Asia, Southeast Asia and China during the 19th and the early 20th centuries. And finally, I studied the migrations from Africa and Asia to Europe triggered by the process of decolonization after WW II. Colleagues both at home and abroad, scholarly journals and students all assume that you remain true to “your” research topic; and the organizers of conferences, workshops and colloquia all expect you to

contribute to a limited range of issues. Over time, it becomes increasingly difficult to escape from these self-imposed parameters.

Many have no objections to this development, because it is far more comfortable to keep doing what you know than venturing into the unknown. An academic who is knowledgeable in many fields has become a thing of the past and often is derided as a jack-of-all-trades. In most fields, specialization and even narrow specialization is the only road to scholarly survival. Universal minds such as Karl Marx and Max Weber belong to the 19th century. Today, the research of these scholars would not even qualify for funding.

No wonder it was some trepidation that I decided to collaborate with Klaus J. Bade on a large project, composing and editing a historical encyclopaedia of migrations within and to Europe from 1600 to the present in which my own specialized expertise could only be of limited use. The outline of our project is described elsewhere in this volume. In dividing the various tasks and supervisory duties among the editors, I remained as close to my previous interests as possible by taking editorial responsibility for those parts of the project that pertained to 1. the early modern period, 2. Western and Southern Europe and 3. the migration from the New World, Africa and Asia to Europe. Nevertheless, there were many areas in the history of European migration that I had never studied before, and my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg was instrumental in filling this void. It enabled me to work full time in getting acquainted with the field of migration studies, as it is virtually impossible to do so in addition to my usual teaching obligations. The constant help and the many suggestions of my Co-Fellow Klaus Bade made my forays in this new field as effective as possible. The Wissenschaftskolleg allowed me to do so not only by providing books and articles, but also by allowing me to meet with colleagues in this field during the two workshops at the Kolleg organized to discuss the composition and future publication of the encyclopaedia.

In the end, the work on the encyclopaedia turned out to be a success story. In conjunction with the third editor, Jochen Oltmer, both Bade and I were able to construct a solid basis for the project. Particular care was taken in composing the long list of migratory groups that warranted an entry. In addition, we discussed an extensive set of general topics that should be included in the first section of the encyclopaedia. All this required frequent consultation between the editors as well as with colleagues in Germany and elsewhere. During this process, it became obvious that we were in need of a sizable subsidy to hire several editorial assistants and translators, because the

range of possible authors lead us to assume that quite a few of the contributions would not be written in German or English and that a sizable amount of editorial work would be required to harmonize both the style and the structure of these contributions. Fortunately, we were able to secure funds that will allow us to pay for such assistance in addition to the honoraria both to authors of single entries as well as to colleagues who are willing to supervise a set of national or regional entries.

Last but not least, I composed a prospectus describing the project in the hope of finding a publisher in either the UK or the US. At the end of my stay, the prospect of Oxford University Press publishing an English-language version of the encyclopaedia looked promising. Klaus Bade secured the publication of a German-language edition.

As is usual, everything took longer than was planned. None of the existing handbooks or encyclopaedias on migration or minorities provided us with an example that we could follow. The discussions about the structure of our book took a lot of our time. Let me take the discussions regarding the European borders as an example. As history has left few European borders untouched, the question arose which ones to use. Should the Alsatians during the 19th century be considered as migrants moving within and out of France or as migrants coming from Germany? In the end and after careful consideration, we decided to add a section to the encyclopaedia in which all migratory groups within, from, and into one country would be listed using the borders of today. That means that the Alsatians will feature in the country article “France”, and will be cross-referenced in the country article “Germany”. Both Klaus Bade and I left the Wissenschaftskolleg with a clear idea about the structure, format, and type of publication that we envision. To lay this foundation was imperative, since probably more than 100 authors and coordinators will contribute to the project.

In planning the encyclopaedia, it became clear that such a publication will be relevant to more than a scholarly audience, since my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg coincided with the public debate in Germany on asylum and the immigration of technical experts from outside the European Union. Hardly a day passed in which these issues did not feature in the German press, and I spent many an hour in the vicinity of the newspaper table in the common room of the Kolleg keeping track of the various points of view. My colleague, Klaus Bade, was one of the most prominent participants in this debate and kept me abreast of the latest developments. Both the government as well as the individual political parties in Germany

appointed groups of experts who were asked to look into the matter. A consensus was reached – a rare thing in German political life – suggesting that the country was in need of a new, comprehensive law regarding asylum, immigration, and integration. I published two articles on the relevance of the German immigration debate for the Netherlands in one of the leading Dutch newspapers, *De Volkskrant*. In the near future, my intimate knowledge of this issue in Germany might come in handy, for the Dutch Prime Minister has announced that a public discussion on immigration in the Netherlands would be extremely useful. During my stay in Berlin, the Dutch might have moved ahead of the rest of Europe by allowing homosexuals to marry and physicians to practice euthanasia, but in migration matters Germany now seems to be the leading nation in the European Union.

Migration is a complex phenomenon, and I was surprised to find that so many of the Fellows at the Wissenschaftskolleg had or took an interest in it. A Fellow philosopher pointed out that words such as “integration” and “assimilation” should be very carefully defined and that these definitions should be part of the information package sent to prospective contributors in order to avoid confusion. Over breakfast, a Fellow biologist mentioned that migration and life expectancy are closely connected. By moving from the tropics to a moderate zone, the human body was freed from its constant struggle against a whole range of dangerous bacteria, allowing it to increase fertility, stature, and life expectancy. A Fellow economist wanted to know whether international migration was bound to increase in proportion to the growing disparities in income between the developed and the developing world.

In addition to the work on the organization of the European Encyclopaedia of Migrations, I continued to work on trade and human migration to, from, and within Africa, Asia, and the New World as far as these were triggered by the process of European expansion between 1500 and 2000. First, I rewrote a previously published article “Between Slavery and Freedom, the Period of Apprenticeship in Surinam, 1863–1873” explaining why so many ex-slaves had moved away from the plantations in the New World after emancipation, in spite of the fact that the agricultural export sector continued to offer the best-paid employment to the ex-slaves, either as free laborers or as sharecroppers. In due course the article will be included in the “Black Diaspora Series” published by Indiana University Press in an anthology edited by Barry Casper. Second, I wrote a contribution on the history of Dutch maritime activities in

the Atlantic titled “The Dutch Atlantic, 1600–1800: Expansion without Empire” to be published in the forthcoming issue of the *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Lateinamerikas*. Third, I finished an article “Hat die europäische Expansion während des Ancien Régime zu einem ‘Atlantischen System’ geführt?” to be published in the *Jahrbuch des Vereins für vergleichende Überseegeschichte*, in 2001. Fourth, I produced a preliminary version of “The Dutch and the Atlantic Challenge” as a contribution to the conference on “Factor Endowments and Slavery in the New World, 1500–2000” held at the Department of Economics, University of Rochester, June 7–10, 2001, in honour of Prof. Stanley L. Engerman. After some revision, this contribution will appear in a conference volume edited by David Eltis and Frank Lewis and published by Cambridge University Press. Another version of this article will be presented at the round table in Lorient (France), September 1–3, 2001 on the impact of the expansion of Europe on the trade, capital movements, and migration both within and outside Europe. Fifth, I contributed an article on “Mythe et réalité. Les migrations des Indiens dans la Caraïbe de 1839 à 1917” for the *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer* to appear in 2001. Sixth, I wrote a contribution on the impact of metropolitan investments on colonial migration, “Het zwarte gat. Investeren in Suriname” to be included in: H.W. van den Doel and G. van Boon, eds. *In het verleden behaalde resultaten ...* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, forthcoming).

In addition to these publishing activities, I used my stay in Berlin to give a lecture at the Universität Hamburg, Department of History, on the Dutch Atlantic between 1600 and 1800, as part of a series in honor of Prof. Dr. Horst Pietschmann. In addition, I presented a seminar on “The Slave Trade and the Atlantic System” at the Department of History, Freie Universität, in a series of presentations organized by Prof. Dr. Reinhard Liehr.