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The Eastward Routes: Swedish Prisoners and Overlapping Regimes of Coercion in the Russian, Chinese and Dzungar Empires

When it comes to forced migration and long-distance slave trade, the bulk of the attention has been paid to the Atlantic world, and to maritime routes. In contrast, this chapter uses prisoners in early modern Central Asia to re-centre the story of past coercion to Asia, and might serve as a reminder to include overland slave trade routes and inland regimes in discussions of coerced labour in the past.

In the eighteenth century, Russia, the Qing Empire, a number of large and small nomadic and seminomadic polities as well as the nomad Dzungar Empire all had claims on the Central Asian borderlands – and all had separate and overlapping regimes of coercion. As a second contribution, this chapter presents an attempt to approach the history of coerced labour both from within and without: that is, simultaneously as a comparative history based on emic categories, and as an effect of inter-regional entanglements. The groups active in Central Asia offer a great variety of both notions and strategic uses of coercion, including technical and manual labour and large-scale migration, a use that stretched from the steppe and all the way to the imperial courts. These notions and systems can be considered regimes of coerced labour, regimes that at times worked in parallel, at times overlapped – and at other times affected each other.

To illuminate how diverse the experiences of coercion could be in this region, this chapter will be centred around a specific group: Swedish prisoners of war, moving in and out of several regimes of coercion, and producing sources as they went. In the early eighteenth century, Russia was involved in the Great Northern War (1700–1721). As a result of this war, which Sweden lost along with its Baltic empire, over 25,000 Swedes were captured by the Russian army. This group was diverse in terms of age, class and gender, origin and native language: it included officers, common soldiers, their wives and children, as well as servants and prostitutes. These male and female prisoners of war were gradually moved further and further eastwards, away from the western front, and some ended up in Dzungaria, the Qing Empire, Mongolia and the Kazak state. The Swedish prisoners’ regional spread, their diverse status and the wildly differing paths they took make them ideal to capture the multiplicity of coerced regimes of this region.

To capture both the regimes and the entanglements between them, this chapter will use the prisoners’ mobility – forced mobility, mobility as an imperial strategy, restricted mobility, and mobility as an opportunity – as a lens through which to...
Map 5: Central Asia in the eighteenth century.
study the Central Asia borderlands.¹ The experiences of the prisoners will relate and nuance Marcel van der Linden’s three ‘moments of coercion’, i.e. entry, work, and exit. In the sources, parallel to the word ‘prisoner’, the terms ‘serf’, ‘slave’ and ‘captive’ are used, and I attempt to mirror how they are used by the coerced actors themselves. Unavoidably, this means that the meaning and use of terms shift, depending on the actor, and over time. During the early modern period, the prisoner-of-war system included enslavement and captivity, in parallel with camps and formal exchanges.² While the Swedish prisoners of war constitute a small part of the flows of coerced labour moving across the Eurasian land mass, their mobility and immobility illuminate the diversity of such coerced groups, and their conditions.

Thematically and analytically, this relatively small group of prisoners offers an entry point into larger debates: a focus on prisoners’ mobility and entanglements of regimes of coercion might allow for the reconsideration of the notion of separate regimes of coercion altogether, and might show the importance of integrating the eighteenth-century Central Asian borderlands into histories of coercion on a global scale.³

1 Mobility and Immobility within Regimes of Coercion

The entry into bondage, the entry-point into coercion as it were, is relatively straightforward: most of the men and women at the centre of this story were captured at the catastrophic (for the Swedes) battle of Poltava in 1709. In order to accommodate the influx of tens of thousands of prisoners, the Russian administration organised an increasing number of camps in which to intern the prisoners; the largest camp was in Tobolsk, which housed about 800 officers, not counting their families. The formation of the Russian camp system relied on older Russian models for dealing with prisoners. What differed in this case was the diverse skill sets of the prisoners, their sheer number, and the way camps were set up further and further east.⁴

¹ A key work for mobility studies is Tim Cresswell, On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World (New York: Routledge, 2006).
During their imprisonment, the Swedish prisoners were subject to ongoing and forced mobility; mobility and bondage were two sides of the same coin. If we turn to the diary of the captured officer Leonard Kagg, the number and variety of their movements are striking. Kagg’s capture at the battle of Poltava led to a long forced march first to Moscow, and then to Tobolsk.\(^5\) In Tobolsk, hundreds of officers gradually arrived at the camp. The decade that followed was far from static. From the very beginning, prisoners came and went every week: sometimes arriving from other camps, and sometimes passing through Tobolsk, having been ordered even further away. At times, officers and their wives could receive permission to stay at Russian settlements, a sloboda, outside of the camps – at times, they were ordered to such settlements.\(^6\) Within months of first arriving in Tobolsk, two prisoners were dispatched all the way back to Moscow, a journey that took them a month on horseback. Their task was to arrange alimonies for the prisoners from the Swedish war fund.\(^7\) Every so often prisoners were offered service in the Russian army.\(^8\) Even those who refused Russian service altogether could be assigned to missions. Kagg’s diary tells the story of ensign Petter Damitz and quartermaster Lundgren who were sent out to inspect Russian mines, and captain Johan Müller, who took part in a three-month-long mission to Christianise the so-called Ostiaks.\(^9\) However, such tasks were reserved for officers and those with special skills. Kagg does not take down the names of ‘commoners’, he simply notes their arrival in large numbers, and records how they were sent to work sites around the camp, and to other camps.\(^10\) Punishment could also lead to mobility between camps: when a prisoner committed an offence, they were moved elsewhere.\(^11\) This kind of exile was even more common for the Russian population: many of the settlers in Tobolsk had been sent eastwards as a punishment.\(^12\) Several forms of coerced mobility, for prisoners and common citizens, coexisted in these camp sites.

There were recurring attempts to organise exchanges of prisoners between Sweden and Russia.\(^13\) A spectacular example of the mobility of the prisoners is that of Johan Adolph Clodt von Jürgensburg. He was captured as Riga capitulated in 1710, but through negotiations with prince A.D. Menshikov secured a promise to work towards a prisoner exchange – an exchange that would include himself. To travel, he had to give his ‘word of honour’ and pay bail. Most importantly, he had to give over

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\(^7\) Kagg, *Dagbok*: 186.
\(^8\) Kagg, *Dagbok*: 135.
\(^10\) Kagg, *Dagbok*: 189, 197.
\(^12\) Kagg, *Dagbok*: 158, 187, 260.
his sons ‘to serfdom’, should he abscond – demonstrating another possible route into coercion. Clodt worked hard for his own release but, as he would experience first-hand, few prisoner exchanges were carried out in this war. While King Charles XII created Clodt a baron, he refused an exchange, wherefore Clodt had to return to Russia in 1714 and spend the rest of the war, until 1720, with the other prisoners of war.\footnote{Bertil Boéthius, “J. Adolph Clodt von Jürgensburg,” in \textit{Svenskt Biografiskt Lexikon}, vol. 8, ed. Bertil Boéthius (Stockholm: A. Bonnier, 1929): 653.}

Throughout the war, there were reports of how Swedish prisoners were treated in Russia, and of how Russian prisoners were treated in Sweden. Both sides attempted to use reprisals against prisoners in their own land to alter the treatment of their countrymen abroad: the systems of coercion affected each other.\footnote{See for example \textit{Sannfärdig berättelse, angående ryssarnes ochristelige och hårda förfahrande emot kongl. may:tz af Sverige högre och ringare fångne officerare, betiente och undersätare, samt deras qwinnor och barn} (Stockholm, 1705).} There were not two, but at least three systems involved here: one of Sweden’s allies in the war against Russia was the Ottoman Empire, and Swedes went into Russia (and were subsequently captured) across the Ottoman-Russian borders.\footnote{See Hans Henrik Sylvius in Kagg, \textit{Dagbok}.} Over the course of the eighteenth century, Will Smiley argues, the Ottoman-Russian conflicts, and the ensuing problem of how to organise, treat and exchange these prisoners, led to the development of the modern prisoner-of-war system.\footnote{Will Smiley, \textit{From Slaves to Prisoners of War: The Ottoman Empire, Russia, and International Law} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).} Following the Swedish prisoners of war can show the diversity of systems of bondage, and also reveal the formation of the modern system for prisoners of war.\footnote{Arnold Krammer, \textit{Prisoners of War: A Reference Handbook} (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008); Juliette Pattinson, Lucy Noakes, and Wendy Ugolini, “Introduction: Incarcerated Masculinities: Male POWs and the Second World War,” \textit{Journal of War and Culture Studies} 7 (2014): 179–90.}

This prison system existed side by side with other systems, for example raids in the Baltic provinces of the Swedish empire, during which thousands of civilians were captured and deported. Also in this case, social standing was key. Those of a higher standing, such as aristocrats, but also civil servants and priests were quite well received by the local societies to which they were brought. Captured Baltic peasants, however, were sold into serfdom or into the slaving systems of the Ottoman and Central Asian empires.\footnote{Alf Åberg, \textit{Karolinska kvinnoöden} (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 1999): 15.} The Swedish prisoners are a marginal group in the history of Russia compared to the various forms serfdom in the Russian empire.\footnote{For an overview, see Christoph Witzenrath, ed., \textit{Eurasian Slavery, Ransom and Abolition in World History}, 1200–1860 (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015).} However, as the examples from the Baltic make clear, these regimes might not be as separate as they first appear. The Swedes were well aware of the status of
and conditions for Russian serfs, but still used the terms serf and serfdom as a simile to describe their own situation.\textsuperscript{21}

In Tobolsk, as in many other camps, the prisoners could walk around and move relatively freely – just not leave town without permission. Those who did try to escape, which a fair number of prisoners did, could be freely killed by farmers in the countryside, or captured anew after a few days.\textsuperscript{22} The strategy of binding the prisoners to the camp was thereby twofold: isolation and poverty. In the prison camps, a labour regime awaited that kept the prisoners tied to the camps, and made use of their skills. This was not unique to Russia: in Sweden, Russian prisoners were an important source of labour, in a land drained from the long war.\textsuperscript{23} There was some tension between their employment for public building works, such as mines and shipyards, constituting a nearly free work force for hard and dangerous labour, and times when they took part in market-oriented production, such as beer-brewing and international trade. There were ongoing attempts by the authorities to clamp down on this trade: if we return to the diary of Kagg, prisoners are over and over being ‘sent away in disgrace’ to other camps, away from Tobolsk, having been caught carrying on ‘forbidden trade’, most commonly brewing and selling alcohol.\textsuperscript{24} However, the alternative sources of income for the prisoners were few, and the trade kept going.

It is crucial to consider the different social standing of the prisoners. Officers were afforded a fairly high degree of freedom of movement and trade within and around the camps, which could lead them to compete commercially with Russians, causing conflicts. For the common soldiers, hard manual labour awaited. In the mines particularly, the survival rates were low. Different classes had different survival rates. Only 5,000 of the 25,000 prisoners made it back to Sweden, and of the survivors, a great proportion were either officers or skilled craftsmen.\textsuperscript{25}

To place the prisoners in Siberia killed two birds with one stone: it made the prisoners part of Russia’s eastwards push, and it removed them from the western frontier. If we consider Map 5, we see how dramatically Russia expanded eastwards, and the multiple polities it clashed with in that expansion. The prison camps, researchers now argue, helped the Russian expansion militarily, economically and intellectually.\textsuperscript{26} They underpinned the local economy, and made the camps high-functioning small

\textsuperscript{21} A typical example is the poetry collection of Georg Henrik von Borneman, “Sånger af en svensk fänge i Simbirsk” (1711), Lund University Library.
\textsuperscript{22} Kagg, \textit{Dagbok}: 142, 183, 179, 186, 193.
\textsuperscript{24} Kagg, \textit{Dagbok}: 207, 208, 233.
\textsuperscript{26} Shebaldina, \textit{Shvedskie Voennoplemye v Sibiri}. 
towns. One tenth of the population in Tobolsk were Swedish prisoners. Furthermore, the camps functioned as rest stops between trade hubs, and helped connect the Russian market to that of Persia and the Central Asian city states. Finally, the camps were information hubs for Russian diplomats, traders and explorers going east, northeast, and southeast into China and the Central Asian border states.\textsuperscript{27}

In the early eighteenth century, a large proportion of the Russian colonisers had arrived in Siberia either as punishment or as a form of exile. As argued by Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, who has traced the experiences of Polish, Lithuanian and Crimean prisoners of war, Siberia and Central Asia were to a significant degree colonised by exiles and prisoners from the west who were moved east.\textsuperscript{28} Thus, the prison camps constituted hubs for mobility, points of connection with other regions, and part of the Russian colonisation of Siberia.\textsuperscript{29}

## 2 Mobility between Systems of Coercion

Prisoners of war were subject to mobility due to coercion, but could also see mobility as an opportunity. The Swedish prisoners in Russia could be captured anew, lent to foreign powers, or be sent to the borders of the Russian empire – and beyond. A few prisoners’ experiences can illuminate how interactions between regimes of coercion took place across the Eurasian steppe.

In a Swedish history of war, written by the Finnish scholar Arvid Moller, the battle of Sangaste in modern-day Estonia in 1702 is described. Following the defeat of the Swedish army, ‘Kalmyks and Tatars swarmed the land’ and ‘took many hundreds of children to Tartary, to sell’.\textsuperscript{30} This is part of the general trend to underline Asian minority groups or Asian allies to the Russian empire when attempting to stress the opponents’ cruelty.\textsuperscript{31} That said, there were cases when those in the Swedish army
were captured by Kalmyks. One example is in 1709, when the captains Eric Reutenstierna and Gabriel Gyllenanckar were both ‘captured by the Kalmyks’. These two men were sent to Siberia, and made it back to Sweden after the war. But not all captives found their way into the structure of prisoner-of-war camps and prisoner exchanges. There was a stream of prisoners of war going east, either as ransom slaves or labourers. Traditionally, war captives made up the greater part of the slave populations of Central and Inner Asia, including Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, and other Slavs, who had been seized by Tatars and others on the southern frontier and dispatched to Central Asian markets at Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva or in the Crimea. These markets were primarily aimed towards the Mediterranean and the Ottoman Empire, but also provided Central Asia with slaves. These prisoners, regardless of ethnicity, fed into one and the same regime. In the context of coerced labour at large, the Swedish prisoners were but drops in a much larger stream.

The streams to Central Asia could take many forms. On one occasion, a foreign observer at the court of the tsar noted how a Bukharan emissary asked to receive – or buy – Swedish women. The tsar denied this request, but did ‘gift’ him two Swedish ‘whores’. As this example shows, both voluntary and forced mobility depended on gender and class. For some, notably male and educated officers with the necessary language skills, mobility could equal greater freedom to for example make money or to carry out scholarly investigations. For others, notably unmarried women, such movement or slippage was a marker of the vulnerable position they occupied within their system – from their precarious position they could slip into other regimes of coercion.

The mobility forced upon Swedish prisoners can provide an outside view of these other regimes. An example is Johan Christian Schnitser, who was imprisoned in Tobolsk as a Chinese mission to the Kalmyks passed through. He was then dispatched by the Russian governor to accompany and safeguard this Chinese mission. As is clear from the Qing reports, this mission illustrates both the growing diplomatic connections between the Qing Empire and Russia at this time, and the importance for both to establish and retain their relationships with Central Asian polities, such as the Oirat polity of the Kalmyk Khanate. In his own travelogue, Schnitser remarks on the local slavery regimes. Initially, he mentions how they take people,
cattle and horses from their neighbours, but that ‘the people, who they do not themselves need, they sell to other Kalmyks’. Indeed, while the Kalmyks theoretically were allied with Russians at this time, and together with the Russians caused the Swedish defeat at Poltava in 1709, still in 1714 Schnitser noted the Kalmyk practices to secure bail from captive Russians (‘against 50 to 60 good horses’). If someone was deemed guilty of an offence in this context, Schnitser claims he is ‘given to the other as an eternal serf’.

Schnitser says the Kalmyk serfs were Bashkirs, Karalpakians, Kubans, and captured Russians. These snippets demonstrate how ubiquitous these practices were, even for an outside observer. In several of the Central Asian polities, prisoners of war were sold into slavery if they could not be bailed out. This practice was well known in Russia, and for a long time complicated the border relations.

In several places, Schnitser’s travel writing has comments correcting the translation of local words, and titles. The man who could confidently correct such terms was Johan Renat, who spent almost two decades in an ever-larger Oirat polity: the Dzungar khanate. In 1716, Renat, together with several other Swedish mining engineers, Swedish officers in Russian service, and Russian troops, was sent to the borders of Dzungaria. They were captured by Dzungar troops, and enslaved in this khanate. One of the women of the group, Birgitta Scherzenfeldt, describes the state of the Swedish prisoners as ‘pitiful’. The experiences of the Swedish prisoners were far from unusual: Dzungar society was built on the capture of slaves and military conquest – Michael Khodarovsky sees it as a key to understanding this entire region.

In addition to the foreign captives, there was an in-group system of coercion, akin to serfdom. Peter Perdue argues that serfdom in the Dzungar Empire was set to solve similar structural problems as within the Russian empire, and that the differences between the two should not be exaggerated. In both cases, the majority of the coerced labourers were agricultural workers, some of them Dzungar, others Kazak, Kirghiz and Chinese captives. The largest group were Muslim men and women forcibly transported

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45 Perdue, *China Marches West*. 
to the Yili valley, a group known as the *tariyachin*. When justifying the Qing conquest of this region, arguing that he saved the Muslim minority, the Qianlong emperor said that this group ‘were made to work like slaves’. The group of Swedes and Russians seems not to have primarily been put into agricultural labour. A Russian report, together with Swedish letters, suggest that they were employed in the weapons industry. Dzungar military strength was a question of the khanate’s survival: there were ongoing struggles with the Khalka Mongols, and the Russian and the Qing empires, and the latter intensified in the 1740s. In 1757, the khanate was wiped out. Many Dzun-gars were killed, but more were forced into slavery – constituting another type of entry into forced mobility and coercion. The Qing administration moved the enslaved Dzungars into other regions, and embarked on an ambitious settling campaign for the land, where exiles, convicts, rebels, entrepreneurs and merchants moved in. No Swedish prisoners remained to see this shift. The last group of Swedish prisoners, together with a large group of Russians, around 150 people, left the Dzungars in 1734.

The experience of the prisoners in Dzungaria does bring us to a final example of the mobility of the prisoners, namely the prisoners who went to the Qing Empire. For some of them, we know very little. For example, in December in 1712, the cornet Gustaf Neibau is only noted to have ‘travelled with voivode Lubauski to the city of Nalim on the Chinese border’. For others, we know significantly more. The prisoner Lorenz Lange, who took part in several Russian diplomatic missions to Beijing during the war, gathering as much information as he could for his Russian masters, wrote several books about his experiences. During the first of his journeys to China, in 1715–1716, he was questioned by the Chinese officials he met about Moscow, Sweden, and the Swedish-Russian war. On this first journey, Lange wrote down observations of the nomadic and semi-nomadic people he encountered. After entering the Qing Empire, his notes become more sparse, and mention nothing of the coercive regimes in the places he passed. This is despite the fact that there was much to be observed. The regions he travelled through were in the middle of a great shift: not only were the north-eastern regions of the Qing empire used for exile, just like

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49 Khodarkovsky, *Russia’s Steppe Frontier*.
50 Scherzenfeldt, “Personalier”: 17–18.
51 Kagg, *Dagbok*: 197.
Siberia in the Russian empire, they were increasingly settled – a process that was partly voluntary, partly coerced.\textsuperscript{53}

The Swedish prisoners do not give the full picture of the multiple and complex regimes they encountered – not the least because they saw and understood such limited parts of the regimes. What they saw depended on their class, gender, and to some degree their own luck, and what they wrote about it depended on their own aims for the diary, report or letter. Nevertheless, despite normally being written into a completely different history, that of (a failed) European empire building, the Swedish prisoners of war give an ant’s-eye view of the forced migration across the Eurasian steppe, as part of the Qing, Dzungar and Russian expansion. That forced migration was key to early modern empire building has been demonstrated for European and maritime cases, but is more rarely connected to its Asian counterparts.\textsuperscript{54}

3 Social Mobility

The Swedish prisoners can also illustrate a different kind of mobility altogether: that of moving between social circumstances, or out of the state of coercion altogether. Slavery and coercion took many forms during this time and in this region, from the Oirat law on penal enslavement, to Chinese debt slavery and Russian serfdom. All of these forms allowed for very different opportunities for social mobility.\textsuperscript{55}

Social, perhaps even more than physical, mobility and immobility therefore illustrate not an overview of the many regimes of coercion that overlapped and interacted in Central Asia, but rather a view from one specific group.

In 1711, the Ottoman offensive against the Russian empire ended. At this point, the Russian administration initiated a conscious effort to make use of the tens of thousands of Swedish prisoners of war, and to encourage in particular the officers to enter Russian service.\textsuperscript{56} Their perceived usefulness to the Russian administration was an effect of the training in mapping, engineering and modern languages that Swedish officers were required to undergo. An equally helpful fact was that this highly trained personnel was also highly expendable, and eager to escape life in

\textsuperscript{53} Perdue, \textit{China Marches West}: 328.
\textsuperscript{56} Polnoye sobraniye zakonov Rossiyskoy Imperii [Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire], vol. 5, no. 3208, 11.06.1718.
the camps. Many Swedish officers chose to join Russian ranks. Most often we know little of their justifications. An exception is Birgitta Scherzenfeldt, who argued that while her husband Michael Ziems had been captured while in service of the Swedish army, the fact that he was a German national meant that he did not owe any loyalty to the Swedes. Once in Russian service, prisoners could attain high-ranking positions. An example is the aforementioned Lange, who accompanied several Russian expeditions to Beijing. Little is known about Lange, other than that he was born in Stockholm, and at some point before 1714 entered Russian service. After the war with Sweden was over, Lange was lent out from Russia to the Qing, to join a Chinese diplomatic mission to the Mongols. Eventually, he became vice governor of Irkutsk, a position he held for ten years. To enter Russian service could be a start of a successful new career.

Russian service as an ‘exit’ from captivity was not an alternative available to all prisoners, however. Most in the rank and file were used for hard, manual labour and were not sought after for their training or skill, nor were all of the officers of use to the Russian administration or army. Their skills notwithstanding, some prisoners attempted to use this opportunity to escape Siberia. In March 1717, two Swedes who reported for service were soon found to be useless at Russian, and were incarcerated anew.

For some prisoners, the time in Siberia meant the start of a new life: they married and stayed in Russia. The prisoners’ diaries commonly mention marriages between Swedish prisoners and prisoners’ widows and daughters in the camps, but also intermarriages between Swedish men and Russian women. The prisoners were free to practice their own faith in Russia, but were supposed to convert to the Orthodox faith if they married. That choice, however, meant that they would no longer be welcome in Sweden, as only the protestant faith was allowed there. To prove their loyalty to their king and faith, some prisoners even produced accounts of how repulsive they found Russian women. Some imprisoned couples returned to Sweden after the war, yet others stayed. The prisoners’ accounts mirror the disparity of their experiences. On the one hand, there is the Swedish couple Ebba Catarina Sabelhierta and lieutenant Anders Hästesko, who were both prisoners in Siberia. At the time of the armistice, however, he returned to Sweden, while she chose to stay in

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57 For examples see Kagg, Dagbok: 135, 197, 202, 204.
60 Lange, Tagebuch zwoer Reisen von Kjachta nach Peking.
Russia, and to keep her two children with her. On the other hand, both daughters of John Berner, an officer in Russian service close to Kazan, married Swedish officers, and then shared the destinies of their husbands in camp.\(^{64}\) To marry a free woman was not a certain way out of imprisonment.

Some Swedish women were subjected to forced marriage and conversion, and the civilians of the Baltic provinces were particularly vulnerable. The Swede Thomas Funck, trying to underline any and all signs of Russian cruelty, claimed to have walked around the slave markets of Constantinople, and found young Swedish women and whole families captured and sold by Cossacks and Kalmyks. Similarly, captain Carl von Roland claims to have ‘taken over’ his Finnish wife from his friend, the Livonian captain Jacob Johan Tiesenhausen, who ‘bought her in the market like a piece of cattle’.\(^{65}\) One example that has had much attention is that of Lovisa von Burghausen, who was kidnapped at the age of seven, was forced to convert, and to marry into first a Turkish and then an Armenian household, before being married to a Russian. Many years later, she was identified by a group of imprisoned Swedes, who ‘bought her freedom’\(^{66}\). Such abductions of children, especially girls, were a common fear and a recurring theme in stories of captivity. However, despite the dramatic eighteenth-century presentation of von Burghausen’s tale, where the Swedish girl represents purity and the foreign men are consistently blackguards, this was neither an unusual nor a solely Swedish experience. The forced removal of young girls for marriage and household labour can be found in multiple contexts in the Russian realm. In Siberia, young Central Asian girls were married off to Russian colonisers – something that the Russian administration long turned a blind eye to.\(^{67}\) There is even evidence that women were disproportionately exiled to Siberia. Andrew Gentes interprets this as a conscious administrative strategy on the Russian part, forcing fertile women to help settle the borderlands, and thus help ‘domesticate’ the border.\(^{68}\)

These practices of marriage, exile, and abduction show the gendered layer of the experience of captivity. For Swedish men, marriage to Russian women is presented in the literature as a way to integrate into Russian society. In contrast, for the Swedish, Russian, and Central Asian women supposedly forced into marriage, the union is presented as an entry point into another type of coercion, not as a road to a different society. That difference could reflect the actual gendered difference of the experience of intercultural marriage. One can also consider how this presentation

\(^{64}\) Åberg, *Karolinska kvinnoöden*: 115, 120.

\(^{65}\) Åberg, *Karolinska kvinnoöden*: 15–16.


\(^{68}\) Perdue, *China Marches West*; Gentes, “‘Licentious Girls’ and Frontier Domesticators.”
ascribes an agency to men that is denied the women.\textsuperscript{69} This is one of many reasons why it is necessary to bring together an understanding of the early modern labels, such as when von Burghausen talks of herself as being ‘abducted’ and ‘forced’, with an analysis of how the social relations at the time worked – and for that, analytical terms, such as coercion, are useful.

Swedish prisoners who ended up in Mongol polities like the Dzungar Empire, were, just like in the Russian empire, used both for manual labour, and for their skills, such as engineering. The prisoners were employed to produce military machinery, for example, side by side with captives from Russia and from other parts of Turkish and Mongol polities of Central Asia.\textsuperscript{70} The rights and duties of the captives were regulated in the Oirat law regarding ‘foreign specialists’, as they were called.\textsuperscript{71} It seems possible that the Swedes might have had more opportunities than captured Russians, on the basis of their perceived exoticism. Having been captured at the Dzungar border, Scherzenfeldt claims to then have been gifted to the khan ‘as she was from a strange and in this land unknown nation’.\textsuperscript{72} Similarly, the reason why the Bukharan emissary was interested in buying Swedish women specifically, was the things he had heard about this nation.\textsuperscript{73} At the same time, there are few signs of Swedes settling and integrating in any of the Mongol polities.

Coercion was not limited to captives of war, nor was it limited to manual labourers: the Dzungar rulers kept family members of their high-rankings retainers with them in the capital.\textsuperscript{74} This guarantee for their loyalty is somewhat akin to the Tokugawa sankin kōtai-system in Japan. Central Asian traditions did not always conflate slave status with a loss of social identity – enslaved artisans produced advanced craftsmanship and pursued trades.\textsuperscript{75} Several of the Swedish prisoners achieved a relatively good position with the empire, and stayed after the end of the war with Russia. Having secured their release, one group managed to return to Sweden. Among these, prisoners such as Mathias Brandt brought home a Dzungar wife and settled


\textsuperscript{72} Scherzenfeldt, “Personalier”: 9.

\textsuperscript{73} Weber, Das veränderte Russland.

\textsuperscript{74} Jin Noda, Ro-Shin teikoku to Kazafu hankoku: 63; Dazheng, “The Tarim Basin”: 193.

with her in Sweden, and Scherzenfeldt brought home slaves of her own. Interestingly, Russian slaves who were captured and sold on to Central Asia, became freedmen if they returned to Russia – ‘because of their suffering in captivity’. A circuitous way out of one regime of coercion could be enslavement in another. In short, the prisoners’ social mobility depended on their class, their gender, and where they had the fortune or misfortune to be moved.

4 Beyond Isolated Regimes of Coercion

The Swedish prisoners of war in the eighteenth century moved from northern Europe to eastern Asia. The prisoners were part of, left, entered, or observed systems of serfdom, prisoners of war, exile, enslavement, captives, hostages, as well as forced migration. While labels changed, some practices they experienced would remain long after they were gone, including punitive labour, forced migrations to north-eastern China – and using Siberia for exile. Placing mobility at the centre of the analysis shows the danger of equating mobility with freedom or, for that matter, equating a state of coercion with a state of immobility. Forced mobility was a hardship the prisoners endured, but mobility also provided them with opportunities. In this way, mobility highlights that coercion could be a whole spectrum.

Some, perhaps most, regimes of coerced labour were not located in one place only: regimes can span several regions, or depend on connections between regions. Prisoners of war are a natural example of a system that requires such connections, but so is the Central Asia trade enslaving prisoners. As Alessandro Stanziani has argued, coercion was rarely a strictly imperial or national phenomenon: there were multilateral imperial corridors between systems of coercion in both Europe and Asia. Prisoners taken from the eastern or southern frontier of Russia could end up in the coerced settlement of the Fergana valley. The focus on coerced mobility and the transformation and entanglements of regimes of coercion allow for the reconsideration of the notion of separate regimes of coercion altogether.

The prisoners are somewhat complicated examples of all of Linden’s three ‘moments of coercion’, i.e. entry, work, and exit: once captured, they could be captured again by other powers, which could lead either to a state of weaker, or of even stronger dependency. Their work could be a road to exit, even a successful career, or it could mean gradually being worn down, and not surviving to the end of the

76 Scherzenfeldt, “Personalier”; “Consistorii Ecclesiastici Protokoll, §. 2” (30 September 1736), vol. AI:13, Domkapitlets i Lund arkiv.
77 Khodarkovsky, Russia’s Steppe Frontier: 23.
war. The social standing of the prisoners is key to understanding their work circumstances. Similarly, while many officers and skilled craftsmen were offered the chance to join Russian service, this not only meant giving up on their homeland, but also entering into a strict military contract. Rather than finding a clear exit or entry point for those who moved within and between systems of coercion, it might be more useful to – as proposed by Noel Lenski and Catherine Cameron – consider an actor’s degree of freedom or coercion over his or her lifetime. To do so offers a notion of higher and lesser degrees of intensity of coercion, and does not presume a distinct line when an actor enters or leaves a state of dependency.  

The difficulty of balancing bondage and opportunity is apparent in the ambivalence in previous studies on the Swedish prisoners. On the one hand, there is a focus on their lack of freedom and the ill-treatment they suffered at the hand of the Russians. On the other hand, there is a focus on their skills as translators and scholars, and their influence – in particular those who went beyond the Russian borders are presented as adventurers and scholars, not prisoners or captives. These trends of seeing them as either completely unfree or as civilising adventurers, live on in parallel, sometimes even in the same works. However, the mortality rate of the prisoners is significant: part of what made them useful as colonial agents and go-betweens might have been their combination of education and expendability. The understanding of this spectrum of coercion, and a nuanced view of coercion, requires attention to the actors’ social standing (class) as well as their gender.  

The intercultural usage of terms is indeed a hard nut to crack for a historian. Using a word such as prisoners, instead of slave, can mask asymmetric dependencies and regimes of coercion, but also underline the severity of coercion; terms can both mask and exaggerate. The use of the word serf, the labelling of others as slaves, and calling rulers tyrants or despots, were all ways to orientalise and evaluate other polities and systems, a practice that went far beyond the early modern period. The use of slavery and freedom, for the others and the self, is especially stark in discourses of the status of women: coercion of women is something that exists elsewhere, while the women at home are presented as free. As such,


prisoners – in particular female prisoners or those writing about them – were simultaneously contributors to this epistemology of coercion, and assigned a particular symbolic place in it. Even if endemic categories for coerced labourers are used, these categories still depended on international connections and global intellectual currents of exchange.

The web of regimes presented in this chapter raises two analytical challenges. The first is the question of how to understand endemic terms. If a label such as prisoner, or serf, can only be understood as endemic categories, i.e., as a concept used within a society or system, what is the best way to approach intercultural forced mobility? Are historical actors moved between regimes, or does the whole coerced flow constitute a regime in and of itself? This leads to a different issue, that of when a regime stops or ends. The second challenge, based on the assumption that intercultural connections are key to a thick description of how regimes of coercion worked, is to overcome the fragmentation of our historiographies. There is perhaps a risk that the word regime brings to mind a notion of separate systems overlapping and interacting akin to world systems theory. Rather, regimes should be seen as webs, webs with thick threads of connections, nodes of exchange, and gaps with no exchanges at all. There is a wealth of excellent studies within Asian studies, and as part of the history of labour, and in the history of the Swedish, Russian, Kazak and the Qing empires. The intervention needed for the field to advance might be to combine hitherto separate historiographies, and lay supposedly separate regimes of dependency side by side.

5 Reflection

This volume offers multiple examples of the complex connections and intertwining routes of coercion in Asia during the last centuries. While many of the routes studied here are primarily maritime, not all were. The Swedish prisoners of war became part both of systems of coercion close to home, and in distant lands. As shown by James Fujitani, Rômulo Ehalt and Hans Hägerdal, Asian systems of coercion – whether those before, after or parallel to the European ventures – were not only local phenomena, but included far-reaching chains of human trade. The cases where the coerced groups were not from far away were not necessarily less complex: the chapters by Sanjog Rupakheti and Vinil Paul highlight the different ways population groups within a region could be constructed as enslavable – and indeed, as Rupakheti stresses, such a

construction could be ascribed long historical roots and religious properties it did not have. Similarly, Hägerdal paints a picture of early modern Banda where the coercion involved dozens of ethnic groups, indigenous, from Southeast Asia, and from further abroad. He shows that who could be forced into a dependent situation was not necessarily a simple matter. This awareness helps us to understand the in-between positions of the prisoners of war: some prisoners were forced into hard manual labour with little chance of survival, some were sold into slavery, while others – such as those in Central Asia – could benefit from the relative exoticism of their origin, or even integrate into the society in which they were taken prisoner.

The rules regulating the prisoners, whether the Swedish, Russian or Dzungar law, only tell part of the story. As both Kate Ekama and Rupakheti show, once regulations are put in a societal and historical context, they reveal power relations. However, the regulations say little about their implementation – or adherence to them – and more about who chose a certain phrasing and term. Therefore, attention to the practices might help us overcome the difficulties that legal sources present. In doing so, finally, the diverse labour opportunities and demands of the Swedish prisoners of war connect to the general, and difficult, question put forward by Amal Shahid: when should work be seen as coercion, and when is it relief? For the prisoners in the Siberian camps, finding paid work was the only way to survive more than a decade of imprisonment. At the same time, it is not necessarily easy to place that work on a clear-cut scale of opportunity or coercion – the labour in the camps might well have to be understood as both.