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## Call for Papers

### **Moving People by Force: Comparing the Claims and Constraints of Deportation and Transportation in the Early Modern World**

**International Conference, German Historical Institute Paris, May 12–May 14, 2027**

**Organized by: Eva Seemann (GHI Paris), Florian Kühnel (IEG Mayence), Eva Marie Lehner (Univ. Bonn), Falk Bretschneider (EHESS)**

Forced mobility constituted a significant share of global mobility in the Early Modern period (1500–1800). This category includes not only the mass trafficking associated with the Transatlantic slave trade and displacement in the wake of armed conflicts or religious persecution, but also deportations, forced resettlements, penal transportation, and other forms of coerced mobility organised and carried out by the authorities, primarily on their own subjects.

This conference brings together researchers from different fields who share an interest in these forms of Early Modern forced mobility and to foster a global, comparative perspective on these phenomena. It takes a systematic look at the genesis and functioning of different practices of sending people away, of deporting or transporting them. In doing so, the conference contributes to a better understanding of practices of governance during the Early Modern Period while simultaneously focusing on the experiences and potential agency of the people subjected to these practices. By bringing together case studies from across the Early Modern world and placing them in systematic dialogue, the conference seeks to move beyond established regional and disciplinary boundaries towards a comparative history of forced mobility that is attentive to both the claims and constraints of coercive power, and the people who were subject to it.

Forced mobility – understood as the targeted movement of people through space under direct or indirect coercion – attained a new quality throughout the Early Modern Period. This can be seen as a consequence of the increasing consolidation and systematisation of rule and the exercise of power, as expressed since the late Middle Ages in the expansion of judicial, police and surveillance apparatuses. The emergence of European colonial empires was also closely connected to the forced transportation of people to newly settled territories. Yet such practices were extensively used even by powers without overseas colonies, such as the land-based Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman empires. The exploitation of labour played a role, as did the (re-)establishment of public order, demographic-political objectives, the punishment of deviant behaviour and the harassment of marginalised population groups – in most cases, several of these motives were intertwined.

At the same time, the capacities and forms of coercion at various political levels – from monarchies with complex imperial structures down to territorial or local potentates or warlords

– were subject to significant constraints. These were not merely logistical in nature. They arose, for example, from the pervasive competition between different authorities, the limited size and effectiveness of administrative apparatuses, or the absence of financial resources. The actual exercise of coercion was frequently delegated; in some cases it originated entirely from private, profit-oriented actors. Communication and surveillance were limited by the technical capacities of the period. Systems of coercion such as penal colonies were often far more porous than official accounts would suggest, and deportations and banishments by no means automatically ensured that those affected remained where they were meant to. In other words: numerous forms of officially organised forced mobility were constrained by barriers to their implementation. Despite contrary claims by the authorities, they were thus frequently only loosely institutionalised and rested instead on situational processes of negotiation between various actors and groups of actors, each with their own interests and power resources.

This is the tension which the conference seeks to highlight. By homing in on the gap between official claims and concrete practices, negotiation processes and power dynamics in the interplay of different actors, it pursues a comparative global perspective on different forms of deportation and transportation, building on recent advances in the field of penal mobility. At the same time, the conference seeks to broaden the view to encompass various practices of forced mobility more generally – for while forced mobility as a phenomenon has now been intensively researched for some years, significant gaps remain with regard to particular regions or forms of deportation, not least because existing work is frequently distributed across separate fields of research or historiographical traditions.

The following comparative criteria and questions will be foregrounded:

**1) Actors, agents and institutions:** Deportation, expulsion, conscription or the transportation of children from Europe to the colonies frequently affected the same socially marginalised groups and classes as well as often being specifically gendered. Moreover, they tended to be organised and enforced by the same actors and institutions. In the global context, it was overwhelmingly people from Africa and Asia who were subjected to mass abduction, leading to the entanglement and parallel development of slavery and deportation as racialised practices. Who, then, were the people moved under coercion, often across great distances? Against which groups were the various forms of forced mobility directed? From which (proto-)state or from which regional, municipal or ecclesiastical authorities did different forms of forced mobility originate? When was the exercise or implementation of forced mobility delegated to such non-state actors as private business owners, entrepreneurs and contractors? What further actors – judicial and police officials, administrative officers, military personnel, clergy, merchants – were involved in its implementation?

**2) Forms and reach of coercion and violence:** Despite all commonalities, different forms of forced mobility frequently differed significantly in the degree and duration of the coercion applied. Recent scholarship on slavery, for instance, has emphasised the often fluid transitions between different forms of dependency, which could frequently persist even after emancipation or the legal abolition of slavery. In what did the coercion applied consist – before, during, and after transportation? When was physical or military force employed, and when was it not? How was the exercise of coercion organised? What forms of agency and resistance were available to those affected? What differences and commonalities existed in this regard between different groups – such as galley slaves, indentured servants, prisoners of war, chattel slaves, convicted criminals subject to banishment or transportation, vagrants, and others – and to what extent could an individual's status shift in the course of their mobility?

**3) Mobility and immobility, proximity and distance:** The concrete exercise of forced mobility depended on material and logistical as well as on political conditions. The reach of both controlled mobility and surveillance was often confined to a polity's area of effective control. What distinguishes forms of forced mobility that took place within a defined political space from those that crossed boundaries or occurred within colonial contexts? What significance did natural geography (mountains, rivers, oceans) and the logistical challenges associated with it hold for the execution of coercive measures? How were boundaries of different kinds – administrative boundaries, territorial borders, boundaries between political spheres of influence – negotiated? What role did transport infrastructure, routes and distances play? When and in what ways did mobility give way to (temporary) immobility, secondary mobility or multidirectionality, depending on what was expected of those affected upon their arrival?

### **Modalities**

We welcome contributions in English or French. Each proposal should include a tentative title, a short CV and an abstract of no more than 350 words. Please send these documents in one PDF file by July 12, 2026, to : [eseemann@dhi-paris.fr](mailto:eseemann@dhi-paris.fr)

Travel and accommodation costs will be covered for active participants, subject to funding approval. The conference is planned as an on-site event.