

REVIEW ESSAYS

A Blind Spot: Migratory and Travelling Groups in Western European Historiography*

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INTRODUCTION

Pursuits which sound innocent and picturesque enough but which nine times out of ten were a cloak for begging. [...] The tools over his shoulder, brushes for chimneys, an axe for chopping wood gave an appearance of usefulness, the idea of industry, which ensured a kind reception and deceived the authorities.¹

All these professions and travelling people were not without reason classified by contemporaries in mendacity-registers. Only very few travellers were at least able to earn a living with their occupations.²

These quotations from the years 1972 and 1988 show how little the negative image of travelling groups among professional historians has changed during the last decades. It is not strange to see that in more general overviews on the socio-economic history of Europe this image is repeated time and again. A good example is the recent book by Henri Kamen on Western European history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which "poverty", "beggary", "vagrancy", "seasonal migration" and "criminality" are lumped together point blank.³ More or less the same mixture can be found in Wehler's recent overview of German social history. Travelling people are depicted as aimless wanderers, whose criminal behaviour forced authorities to cruel repression.⁴

In this article I will try to explain how this interpretation came into being and to what extent it is tenable. Because ambulatory professions and travelling groups are mostly indirectly studied in the context of vagrancy,

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¹ Olwen Hufton, "Begging, Vagrancy, Vagabondage, and the Law: an Aspect of the Problem of Poverty in Eighteenth-Century France", *European Studies Review*, 2 (1972), no. 2, pp. 97–123, esp. pp. 102 and 103.

² Uwe Danker, *Räuberbanden im Alten Reich um 1700. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte von Herrschaft und Kriminalität in der frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), p. 358.

³ Henri Kamen, *European Society 1500–1700* (London, 1986), pp. 167–193.

⁴ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Vom Feudalismus des Alten Reiches bis zur defensiven Modernisierung der Reformära 1700–1815* (Munich, 1987), pp. 174–176.

poverty, criminality, marginality, linguistic peculiarities (secret languages), among other aspects, the criteria for the selection of studies had to be broad. To provide an answer to the two questions above, I will first give a brief sketch of the historiography, where emphasis is laid on the underlying assumptions and sources used. In order to structure the huge amount of studies, the literature has been subdivided into three perspectives: criminality, marginality and poverty. The criterium for this subdivision is their main focus, mostly reflected in the sources used. The subdivision was not always easy, in that in most works all three, or at least two aspects, are dealt with. When this happened, then the most important issue was decisive. For practical reasons I have restricted myself mainly to studies on France, Belgium, Great Britain, Germany and the Netherlands in the period 1500–1950, many of them focusing on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the third section of this article a new perspective is presented, having a greater explanatory power than the ones used in most studies.

I would like to clarify the nature of my (critical) comments. As most of the studies to be reviewed only deal partly, or even marginally, with the main theme of this paper, I will restrict my analysis to these passages. The reader should therefore bear in mind that criticism of certain authors only applies to their statements on migratory and travelling groups, and not necessarily to their entire work or line of thought.

A final remark about the terms used. In this article a distinction is made between *migratory* and *travelling* groups.⁵ The first includes *all* people whose occupations make it necessary to travel. Travelling groups, on the other hand, relate to people practising ambulatory professions and who travel in family groups. The latter form therefore only a (small) part of a much wider category.

TRAVELLING GROUPS IN THE EYES OF THE AUTHORITIES: FROM THE TOP DOWN

THE CRIMINOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

In the past centuries the lower strata of society have been studied primarily as a criminal group, resulting in a pathological image of crime among “les classes dangereuses”, characterized by lawlessness, degeneration and moral corruption. Especially the alleged innate criminal behaviour of the wandering poor aroused interest.⁶ Before the Second World War this resulted in numerous studies on the so-called “anti-socials” and “gyp-

⁵ For the sake of variation, the term “travellers” is also used.

⁶ See, among others, F. C. B. Avé-Lallemant, *Das Deutsche Gaunerthum*, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1858–1862); C. Paultre, *De la répression de la mendicité et du vagabondage en France dans l'ancien régime* (Paris, 1906); C. J. Ribton-Turner, *A History of Vagrants and Vagrancy and Beggars and Begging* (London, 1887) and F. Aydelotte, *Elizabethan Rogues and Vagabonds* (Oxford, 1913).

sies",⁷ especially in Germany.⁸ During the post-war era in the social sciences the pathological explanation, in which the pariah-position in society was explained by individual flaws caused by racial degeneration, was gradually criticized, and slowly the attention shifted to the repressive and stigmatizing attitude of the dominant society. To put it more simply: the culprits became victims. Thanks to historians such as Stedman-Jones these new insights were introduced into historical research.⁹

However, the pathological, and partially racist, explanation remained tenacious, especially in Germany, but not only there.¹⁰ The influential works of Arnold on travelling groups (such as gypsies) set the tone till the middle of the seventies.¹¹ His view differed only slightly from scientists such as Ritter¹² who had laid the theoretical foundation of the racially inspired¹³ extermination policy of "gypsies" and "anti-socials" by the Nazis.

⁷ To be defined here as people who have been labelled with this term during time. See Leo Lucassen, "En men noemde hen zigeuners". *De geschiedenis van Kaldarash, Ursari, Lowara en Sintj in Nederland: 1750–1944* (Amsterdam etc., 1990), and "The Power of Definition. Stigmatisation, Minoritisation and Ethnicity Illustrated by the History of Gypsies in the Netherlands", *Netherlands Journal of Social Sciences*, 27 (October 1991), no. 2, pp. 80–91.

⁸ An influential study in the 1930s was: Robert Ritter, *Ein Menschenschlag. Erbärztliche und erbgeschichtliche Untersuchungen über die – durch 10 Geschlechterfolgen erforschten – Nachkommen von "Vagabunden, Jaunern und Räubern"* (Leipzig, 1937). See also Otto Finger, *Studien an zwei asozialen Zigeuner-Mischlingsippen; ein Beitrag zur Asozialen-und Zigeunerfrage* (Gießen, 1937). For an overview of German publications on "gypsies" from a criminalistic point of view: Martin Ruch, *Zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte der deutschsprachigen "Zigeunerforschung" von den Anfängen bis 1900* (Ph.D., Freiburg, 1986), pp. 489–498.

⁹ G. Stedman-Jones, *Outcast London. A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (London, 1971, reprint Harmondsworth, 1984). See for a similar approach, J. White, "Campbell Bunk: a Lumpen Community in London between the Wars", *History Workshop*, 8 (1979), pp. 1–49; and David Jones, *Crime, Protest, Community and Police in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1982), pp. 178–207.

¹⁰ In Switzerland it also took a long time before the classical racist study of R. Waltisbühl on vagrants (*Die Bekämpfung des Landstreicher- und Landfahretums in der Schweiz. Eine Untersuchung der rechtlichen und soziologischen Stellung der Nichtsesshaften in der Schweiz* (Aarau, 1944)) was fundamentally criticized. His racist interpretation (see especially pp. 104–130) was attacked only from 1987 onwards: Thomas Huonker, *Fahrendes Volk – verfolgt und verfemt. Jenische Lebensläufe* (Zürich, 1987), and Clo Meyer, *Unkraut der Landstrasse. Industriegesellschaft und Nichtsesshaftigkeit. Am Beispiel der Wandersippen und der schweizerischen Politik an den Bündner Jenischen* (Discontis, 1988).

¹¹ The most important works of Hermann Arnold are: *Vaganten, Komödianten, Fieranten und Briganten. Untersuchungen zum Vagantenproblem an vagierenden Bevölkerungsgruppen vorwiegend der Pfalz* (Stuttgart, 1958); *Die Zigeuner. Herkunft und Leben im deutschen Sprachgebiet* (Olten, 1965) and *Fahrendes Volk. Randgruppen des Zigeunervolkes* (Neustadt a.d. Weinstrasse, 1980, reprint in 1983, Landau/Pfalz).

¹² Arnold refers in the first place to Ritter's book on anti-socials (*Ein Menschenschlag*) in which an outright racist theory is put forward. Only recently have the racist views of Arnold been sharply attacked, especially by scholars specialized in the history of gypsy-persecution in Germany: Michael Winter, "Kontinuitäten in der deutschen Zigeunerforschung und Zigeunerpolitik", in W. Ayass et al., *Feinderklärung und Prävention. Kriminalbiologie, Zigeunerforschung und Asozialenpolitik. Beiträge zur Nationalsozialistischen Gesundheits-*

Arnold is quite unambiguous about the character of travelling groups. In his book on "Vaganten" of 1958 he defines his subject explicitly as an "anti-social problem". Travellers are regarded as a "disease of the national community"¹⁴ whose behaviour is to be explained mainly in biological terms. In his more recent book (1983) on all sorts of travellers (for example, pedlars, showmen, tinkers, circus people) in Germany and other European countries – a mixture of contemporary observations and historical and genealogical research – his main thesis is that travelling is caused by hereditary traits, that is, by a certain mixture of the lower sedentary German classes with gypsies, who are believed to be of "foreign blood". Thus a contrast is created between the sedentary and the nomadic population, the latter being partly of gypsy descent. The consequences of this are far-reaching, according to Arnold. Travellers are unproductive, primitive and criminal. Just as nomadic hunters and gatherers they only "find" things and produce nothing, thus remaining on the lowest level of human civilization.¹⁵

According to the influential¹⁶ Arnold this is not only the case in Germany, but with all "vagrant groups" in Europe. In a short overview he rejects socio-economic explanations for travelling and tries to prove that travellers are all partly of gypsy descent.¹⁷ The existence of pedlar-communities in Germany is not due to the poor soil and lack of employment. Explicitly, he states that "the composition of the blood is decisive".¹⁸

The first serious attack on Arnold's biological and racist interpretation

und Sozialpolitik, Vol. 6 (Berlin, 1988), pp. 135–152. See also Michael Zimmermann, *Verfolgt, vertrieben, vernichtet. Die nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik gegen Sinti und Roma* (Essen, 1989), pp. 25–32; and Volker Berbüsse, "Das Bild 'der Zigeuner' in deutschsprachigen kriminologischen Lehrbüchern seit 1949. Eine erste Bestandsaufnahme", *Jahrbuch des Zentrums für Antisemitismusforschung*, Vol. 1 (Berlin, 1992), pp. 117–151.

¹³ To be defined as the way of thinking that stresses the importance of biological and hereditary traits to explain negative social behaviour. This regards not only so-called races, but also social groups such as causal workers or "anti-socials" whose behaviour is considered as a product of hereditary traits.

¹⁴ "Krankheit des Volkskörpers" (*Vaganten, Komödianten, Fieranten und Briganten*, p. 2).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁶ See, for example, his influence on R. J. Evans, "Introduction: the 'Dangerous Classes' in Germany from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century", in Evans (ed.), *The German Underworld. Deviants in German History* (London etc., 1988), pp. 1–28. Evans mentions four books of Arnold as serious sources without any critical comment (note 3 on p. 20). See in this respect also Michael Doege, *Armut in Preussen und Bayern (1770–1840)* (Munich, 1991), p. 115. Even more remarkable is the unquestioning reference to Ritter's *Ein Menschenschlag* by R. Endres: "Das Armenproblem im Zeitalter des Absolutismus", in F. Kopitzsch (ed.), *Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum in Deutschland* (Munich, 1976), pp. 220–244, esp. p. 229. One of the few professional historians who explicitly criticizes Arnold is Danker (*Räuberbanden*, p. 4). See in this respect also Berbüsse, "Das Bild 'der Zigeuner'", and Carsten Küther (note 20).

¹⁷ Arnold, *Vaganten, Komödianten, Fieranten und Briganten*, pp. 37–43.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

was made in 1976 by the social historian Kütther.¹⁹ In his favourably received²⁰ book on bandits in pre-industrial southern Germany, in which he uses Hobsbawm's ideas on the function of social bandits, he rejects Arnold's position by stressing that socio-economic changes were responsible for the formation of vagrant groups. The problem with his study, however, and this holds also true for his book on "vagrants" that appeared seven years later,²¹ are the very general statements on migratory and travelling groups (which include all kinds of people with ambulant occupations, such as knife-grinders, tinkers, showmen, pedlars), whereas his sources are mainly on bandits. His explanation for the pariah-position of vagrants may be principally different from that of Arnold, the image is more or less the same: he assumes without further ado that they formed a closed social group that was despised by the rest of sedentary society. His division of pre-industrial Germany into productive (farmers and craftsmen) and unproductive (vagrants) members is not only simplistic, but, as we shall see, also highly questionable. In the wake of German criminologists a picture is given of vagrants doing nothing but robbing, stealing, intimidating and begging. Even in his definition Kütther follows without comment the highly negative image of earlier criminologists.²² This mixture of critical and traditional attitudes is also evident in his treatment of Arnold's idea that criminal behaviour was an individual predisposition. He rejects this pathological approach, but does not exclude the possibility that genetic traits can explain the parasitic way of life of the "racially pure gypsies".²³

Although in Kütther's research traces of the traditional criminological approach can be found, his work marks a break with the past and must be considered an important step in German historiography. The same can be said of several other studies on "bandits" and "vagrants" in pre-industrial Germany that have appeared in the past decade.²⁴ A good

¹⁹ Carsten Kütther, *Räuber und Gauner in Deutschland* (Göttingen, 1976).

²⁰ See, for example, the reviews of his book of 1976 in the *Journal of Social History*, 12 (1978–79), no. 4, pp. 648–649 (by J. F. Wagner) and in the *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 27 (1980), pp. 331–332 (by H. J. Lüsebrink). His book of 1983 (*Menschen auf der Strasse. Vagierende Unterschichten in Bayern, Franken und Schwaben in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 1983)) was favourably reviewed in *Vierteljahrshefte für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 71 (1984), pp. 407–408 (by K. Fuchs) and the *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*, 13 (1986), pp. 374–375 (by U.-C. Pallach).

²¹ Kütther, *Menschen auf der Strasse*.

²² Kütther, *Räuber und Gauner in Deutschland*, p. 14. Here he refers to G. Radbruch and H. Gwinner, *Geschichte des Verbrechens* (Stuttgart, 1951), p. 268.

²³ Kütther, *Räuber und Gauner in Deutschland*, pp. 25–26.

²⁴ See, for example, Andres, "Das Armenproblem"; K. L. Ay, "Unehrllichkeit, Vagantentum und Bettelwesen in der vorindustriellen Gesellschaft", in W. Grab (ed.), *Jahrbuch des Instituts für deutsche Geschichte*, Vol. 8 (Tel Aviv, 1979), pp. 13–38; A. Kopečný, *Fahrende und Vagabunden. Ihre Geschichte, Überlebungskünste, Zeichen und Strassen* (Berlin, 1980); C. Sachsse and F. Tennstedt (eds.), *Bettler, Gauner und Proleten. Armut und Armenfürsorge in der deutschen Geschichte. Ein Bild-Lesebuch* (Hamburg, 1983); H. Reinicke, *Gaunervirts-*

example is the work of Schubert on *Arme Leute*.²⁵ He also mainly used criminal records, leading him to conclude that migratory groups in general were criminal and poor. His main argument is that in the list of wanted persons so many ambulant professions were mentioned. Notwithstanding this bias, however, Schubert definitely has an eye for the way certain types of behaviour are “criminalized”.²⁶ He shows how distrustful central authorities were and therefore tried to forbid and criminalize ambulant professions. The people involved were regarded to be of a low moral standard and the professions as a cloak for begging “and criminal behaviour”. In practice many local authorities were tolerant because they knew that this image did not completely hold true.²⁷ In his section on migratory groups he therefore gives a sympathetic sketch of all kinds of ambulant professions, stressing that many of these were functional, especially in the countryside.

In the past few years, at least in Germany, the new approach of Küther and Schubert has been elaborated by scholars of the Ancien Régime who question the attitude of the state, explicitly using theoretical insights of Elias and Foucault into the disciplining offensive from the sixteenth century onwards.²⁸ These studies mark a second important step, because the attitude of the state towards groups called vagrants is studied in a more systematic way. In general it has produced a less stereotypical image of migratory groups. Finzsch, for example, points out that it is wrong to assume that all the people concerned were poor and deviant, and that it has to be realized that the lower classes only appeared in the sources when they were seen as a problem.²⁹

A second important field of research within the “criminality-interpretation” is the Tudor period in England. The reason for this interest

chaft. Die erstaunlichen Abenteuer hebräischer Spitzbuben in Deutschland (Berlin, 1983); H. Reif (ed.), *Räuber, Volk und Obrigkeit. Studien zur Geschichte der Kriminalität in Deutschland seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984); and S. Rohrbacher, “Räuberbanden, Gaunertum und Bettelwesen”, in J. Bohnke-Kollwitz et al. (eds.), *Köln und das rheinische Judentum* (Cologne, 1984), pp. 117–124.

²⁵ E. Schubert, *Arme Leute. Bettler und Gauner im Franken des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Neustadt a.d. Aisch, 1983).

²⁶ See in this respect also his article “Mobilität ohne Chancen: die Ausgrenzung des fahrenden Volkes”, in W. Schulze (ed.), *Ständische Gesellschaft und soziale Mobilität* (Munich, 1988), pp. 113–164.

²⁷ Also on this point Schubert shows himself to be critical towards his sources: “Wieder also das bereits bekannte Problem: Die von der Obrigkeit aus städtisch-grossbürgerlichem oder adligem Denken heraus Verfolgten bzw. Inkriminierten sind ebenso wie die Hausierer notwendig für die Versorgung des Landes” (*Arme Leute*, p. 243).

²⁸ Danker, *Räuberbanden*; N. Finzsch, *Obrigkeit und Unterschichten. Zur Geschichte der rheinischen Unterschichten gegen Ende des 18. und zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1990); and Peter Nitschke, *Verbrechensbekämpfung und Verwaltung. Die Entstehung der Polizei in der Grafschaft Lippe, 1700–1814* (Münster etc., 1990).

²⁹ Finzsch, *Obrigkeit und Unterschichten*, p. 26. See also Danker, *Räuberbanden*, p. 431, and Nitschke, *Verbrechensbekämpfung und Verwaltung*, p. 41.

is the well-known repressive policy of the authorities against what they saw as a threat to orderly society posed by vagrants. From the nineteenth century onwards this resulted in a number of studies that have become known as the “rogue literature”.³⁰ The main argument here is that vagrants formed large bands of work-shy and idle rogues and were organized in a separate criminal anti-society. This picture is due to a particularly uncritical approach of the sources which breathe an outright hostility towards vagrants. As Tawney already observed on the image of the vagrant: “His history is inevitably written by his enemies.”³¹

An important turn in the historical interpretation of these “rogues”, comparable to the reorientation of Küther, was caused by the publications of Beier and Slack.³² Especially the work of Beier has to be mentioned here. In 1974 already he refuted the basic assumptions of the rogue literature and convincingly attacked the (at the time) recent book of Pound on vagrancy.³³ Beier pointed out that most vagrants were not criminal, but only looking for work. The idea of an anti-society is not supported by his sources.³⁴ Most of them were “migrants in search of subsistence”, as Clark had already noticed.³⁵ These conclusions are in line with the research by Slack, who studied vagrancy in the first half of the seventeenth century.

Just what kind of people are behind the label “vagrant” remains in both studies for an important part in the dark.³⁶ Due to the selectivity of the

³⁰ See in this context the works of Ribton-Turner, *A History of Vagrants and Aydelotte, Elizabethan Rogues and Vagabonds*. To show the strength of this approach, see also the more recent book of G. Salgado, *The Elizabethan Underworld* (London, 1977). A more elaborate list can be found in A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men. The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560–1640* (London etc., 1985).

³¹ R. H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1967), p. 275, quoted by A. L. Beier, “Vagrants and the Social Order in Elizabethan England”, *Past & Present*, 64 (August 1974), pp. 3–29, esp. p. 3.

³² Beier, “Vagrants and the Social Order”, an elaboration of which article was published in 1985 (*Masterless Men*); P. A. Slack, “Vagrants and Vagrancy in England 1598–1664”, in Peter Clark and David Souden (eds.), *Migration and Society in Early Modern England* (London, 1987), pp. 49–76. Slack’s article was published earlier in *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 27 (1974), pp. 360–379. See also Peter Clark, “The Migrant in Kentish Towns 1580–1640”, in P. Clark and P. Slack (eds.), *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500–1700. Essays in Urban History* (London, 1972), pp. 117–163.

³³ J. Pound, *Poverty and Vagrancy in Tudor England* (London, 1971). See also the debate with Beier in *Past & Present*, 71 (1976), pp. 126–129 and 130–134.

³⁴ His study of 1974 is based on an analysis of the arrests of 1,159 vagrants in various English counties in the period 1560–1640.

³⁵ Clark, “The Migrant in Kentish Towns”. He propounded a difference between “betterment” and “subsistence” migration (p. 149), the latter being regarded as a symptom of poverty and typical for vagrants, especially when they travel in family groups.

³⁶ See on this point the review of Beier’s book of 1985 (*Masterless Men*) by D. Underdown, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 18 (1987), no. 2, pp. 353–355. Underdown justly argues that the difference between “vagrants”, “migrants” and “masterless people” remains much too vague. See also the critical remarks in the review article of J. Boulton, “The Counting

sources used – only those who have been arrested are known – it remains unclear to what extent they were representative for the entire group of migratory people. Conclusions are only valid for “vagrants under arrest” not for “vagrants in general”. This selectivity has another disadvantage, namely, that it is assumed too easily that people labelled as vagrants were poor and that travelling was at the bottom end of society. This may be so, but the evidence put forward by Beier and Slack does not support such general conclusions. The result is that contemporary characterizations on the professions of “vagrants” are easily reproduced, judging by the profile of a tinker by Beier:

Having a tinker do a job was, again, rather like a bribe to go away.³⁷

To conclude: as we have seen, the criminality perspective has been very strong in Germany, although not only there.³⁸ This approach is valuable for our knowledge on travelling groups, certainly as far as the attitude of the authorities is concerned. Especially the more recent studies by Beier, Schubert and Finzsch have showed how far-reaching the criminalization of migratory groups and their travelling existence could be. On the other hand, however, the survey makes clear how difficult it is to break loose of the traditional negative interpretations of the socio-economic functions of travelling groups. The racist interpretation of Arnold may not find many followers any more, but his picture of the work-shy and criminal traveller is still very much alive and kicking.

THE MARGINALITY INTERPRETATION

The second important point of departure in studies on travelling groups is marginality. Instead of the economic status, the social position is highlighted. The “founding father” of this perspective is the well-known Polish historian Bronislaw Geremek, who wrote several studies on marginal groups, especially on beggars and vagrants.³⁹ He was interested in the changing attitude of church and state towards begging and the

of the People and the People that Counted”, *The Historical Journal*, 31 (1990), no. 3, pp. 713–719, esp. pp. 718–719.

³⁷ Beier, *Masterless Men*, p. 90.

³⁸ See for the Netherlands, for example, the works of Olav van Kappen, *Geschiedenis der zigeuners in Nederland* (Assen, 1965) and H. F. J. M. van den Eerenbeemt, *In het spanningsveld der armoede* (Tilburg, 1968); *idem*, *Van mensenjacht en overheidsmacht* (Tilburg, 1970). For France, P. Dartiguenave *et al.*, *Marginalité, déviance, pauvreté en France XIVe-XIX siècles* (Caen, 1981, Cahier des Annales de Normandie, no. 13).

³⁹ Bronislaw Geremek, “Criminalité, vagabondage, paupérisme: la marginalité à l’aube des temps modernes”, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 21 (July–September 1974), pp. 337–375; *idem*, *Les Marginaux Parisiens aux XIV et XVe siècle* (Paris, 1976); *idem*, *Truands et misérables dans l’Europe moderne (1350–1600)* (Paris, 1980); *idem*, *Les Fils de Caïn. L’image des pauvres et des vagabonds dans la littérature européenne du XVe au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1991).

poor during the early modern period. Placed in the light of the crisis of the feudal system and the emerging capitalist system, he shows how the term “vagabondage” (the French term for vagrancy) was given an increasingly negative connotation from the fourteenth century onwards, culminating in the judicial practice of penalizing the *state* of vagabondage (instead of the criminal *acts* that could result from it). Because of the difference between “deserving” and “undeserving” poor,⁴⁰ many migratory people were criminalized. Uncontrolled and individual mobility (in contrast to organized and collective forms such as pilgrimage and emigration) was increasingly associated with crime. This was especially the case with already marginal groups such as Jews, gypsies, lepers, whores and beggars. Geremek’s paying attention to the stigmatizing policy of the authorities is an important addition to the criminological perspective, but at the same time relics of the traditional criminality perspective can be found, leading to an ambiguous and inconsistent explanation. Thus he *also* considers marginalization as an inevitable outcome of the objective growth of the vagrancy problem and the existence of an “anti-society” in which crime, beggary and theft are the core values. This is based on the unproven assumption⁴¹ that marginal people placed themselves outside the social order, retreating into their own “society”. Geremek’s emphasis on the stigmatizing role of church and state, on the other hand, however, marked an important break-point in the hitherto traditional historical studies on marginality and formed a stimulus for many (mainly French) historians.⁴²

Another important representative of the marginality approach is the Swiss historian Graus who wrote a fundamental article on marginal groups in the late Middle Ages, thereby focusing on the attitude of the dominant society and the reaction of the stigmatized groups.⁴³ Although in the case

⁴⁰ J. Depauw, “Pauvres, pauvres mendiants, mendiants valides ou vagabonds? Les hésitations de la législation royale”, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 21 (July–September 1974), pp. 401–418. See for this also Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Hassocks, 1979), pp. 80–96.

⁴¹ Based on the sociologists Vexliard and Merton. It is remarkable, though, that Alexandre Vexliard (*Introduction à la sociologie du vagabondage* (Paris, 1956)) states that wandering or migration is *not* decisive for becoming a vagrant: “Dès lors, l’errance, la migration, ne sont pas des notions essentielles dans la définition du vagabond, malgré l’étymologie” (p. 18).

⁴² See, for example, Jacques le Goff, “Les Marginaux dans l’occident médiéval”, in *Les Marginaux et les exclus dans l’histoire* (Paris, 1979, Cahiers Jussieu), pp. 19–28, who points to the state and the church as responsible for the growth of marginal groups. See also P. Chaunu (ed.), *Marginalité, déviance, pauvreté en France XIVe-XIXe siècles* (Paris, 1981) and M. Agulhon (ed.), *Les Marginaux et les autres* (Paris, 1990). Recently the stigmatization concept was used by R. I. Moore in explaining the persecution of heretics, Jews and lepers in the Middle Ages (*The Formation of a Persecution Society* (Oxford, 1987)).

⁴³ F. Graus, “Randgruppen der städtischen Gesellschaft im Spätmittelalter”, *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*, 8 (1981), no. 4, pp. 385–437.

of Jews and gypsies Graus is not free from primordial assumptions,⁴⁴ he justly criticizes the inclination of many historians to take over all kinds of stigmatizing terms, such as vagrants, paupers, beggars, dishonest people, etc., and the use of a linear model of society, placing these categories at the bottom.⁴⁵ To break loose from this way of thinking he proposes the term “marginals” (“Randgruppen”), to be defined as people who have been labelled as being on the edge of society. With this fresh approach, in which all kind of “marginal” groups are not from the start regarded as down-and-outs, Graus creates the possibility of escaping the linear scheme.

Recapitulating we can say that the contribution of the second interpretation is that migratory groups, now defined as marginal, have been dissociated, at least in principle, from criminality and poverty. Not all marginal groups are poor and criminal, they are only different. The primordialism that lies underneath, however, can be problematic. Another important contribution is more or less the same as the new direction in the criminality approach: a systematic analysis of the authorities' attitude, and the not taking for granted of contemporary opinions and categorizations. Because of the great attention to the (changing) attitudes, the socio-economic function of migratory groups is only treated in a superficial way.

THE POVERTY INTERPRETATION

Looking for the socio-economic functions of migratory people, books on poverty offer a good starting point. Most of these, however, do not deal with travelling groups and are not very useful for the argument in this article. I therefore selected only studies that go deeper into their history, to start with the influential work on *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France* by Olwen Hufton. In this study ambulatory professions, seasonal labour and migration are considered as signs of social decline. Only when there were no possibilities of livelihood left did people start to wander and

⁴⁴ These groups are assumed to be different in the first place by their origin, but the most important explanation for their marginal position is the fact that they *want* to be different, by their religion and nomadic way of life. Thus, according to Graus (who is on one line with Geremek), they placed themselves outside the regular society. The stigmatization and marginalization, however blameworthy they are, are only a reaction to this deviant behaviour (Graus, “Randgruppen der städtischen Gesellschaft”, p. 398). See in this respect also Robert Jütte, *Abbild und soziale Wirklichkeit des Bettler- und Gauertums zu Beginn der Neuzeit. Sozial-, mentalitäts- und sprachgeschichtliche Studien zum Liber Vagatorum (1510)* (Cologne etc., 1988), pp. 28–34, and Heiner Boehncke and Rolf Johannsmeier (eds.), *Das Buch der Vaganten. Spieler, Huren, Leutbetrüger* (Cologne, 1987).

⁴⁵ He criticizes in this respect the classification of Th. Fischer, who put the dishonest professions and work-shy anti-socials at the bottom: Th. Fischer, *Städtische Armut und Armenfürsorge im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1978), pp. 82–91.

become vagrants. Seasonal migrants barely distinguished themselves from these down-and-outs. They are pictured as poor and unskilled wretches who, when they were lucky, earned some money in the high season. The socio-economic position of people with ambulatory professions is described in an even more negative way, as the quotation given at the beginning of this article showed. They are considered as beggars in disguise, a nuisance to the natives because of their intimidating and criminal behaviour.⁴⁶

A more balanced view is presented by the studies of Gutton and Schwartz on poverty in the Ancien Régime.⁴⁷ They make a clearer distinction between the definition of “vagabondage” by the contemporary authorities and the people behind this label. In his search for the “vagabonds” Gutton used the archives of the “marechaussée” and the poor houses (“Hôpitaux généraux”) and ends up more or less with the same conclusions as Hufton a few years later. People who started wandering, especially the pedlars (“colporteurs”), had a great chance of ending up as vagabonds. In many places in his work he puts these general remarks into perspective. To start with, he shows that the authorities made an exception for seasonal workers, because they were indispensable for the farmers, especially during harvest time.⁴⁸ For the “marechaussée”, whose main function was to repress beggary and vagrancy, the difference between a seasonal worker and a vagrant was often unclear, however. A good example are the so-called “scieurs de long”, men specializing in sawing planks out of trees, using huge sawhorses. Although they earned enough money and worked regularly, they were arrested on many occasions, because they used to beg for food travelling to and from their work, in order to maximize their income.⁴⁹ A second illustrative example are the pedlars who were also often arrested on suspicion of vagrancy. In many cases they could prove that they earned enough money to make a living and, just as the “scieurs”, they were soon released. Although Gutton holds the view that most ambulatory travellers were poor and close to vagrancy, his analysis of the marechaussée-archives leads him to the con-

⁴⁶ Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France 1750–1789* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 71, 83–102 and 120. See also Hufton, “Beggings, Vagrancy, Vagabondage, and the Law”, pp. 100ff. A similar description can be found in Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1976), II, pp. 80–83. His explanation (“cette silencieuse et épouvantable armée des prolétaires”, p. 83) fits well in the poverty interpretation.

⁴⁷ Jean-Pierre Gutton, *L’Etat et la mendicité dans la première moitié du XVIII^e siècle. Auvergne, Beaujolais, Forez, Lyonnais* (n.p., 1973), p. 21. This book is largely based on his Ph.D. thesis, “La Société et les pauvres. L’exemple de la généralité de Lyon 1534–1789” (Lyon, 1971). R. M. Schwartz, *Policing the Poor in Eighteenth-Century France* (Chapel Hill etc., 1988).

⁴⁸ Gutton, “La société et les pauvres”, p. 54.

⁴⁹ Gutton, *L’Etat et la mendicité*, pp. 180–181.

clusion that “real vagrants”, people without any occupation, formed a small minority.⁵⁰

An important contribution to the study on poverty has been made by the neo-Marxist studies of the Belgian historians Lis and Soly. Building on the work of Hufton and Gutton among others they offer a broad overview of the history of poverty and the poor-relief in Western Europe from the Middle Ages onwards. The innovating aspect of their approach is mainly that they reject the vision of Abel and Le Roy Ladurie that poverty in the Ancien Régime was more or less a “natural” and therefore inevitable situation.⁵¹ Following Brenner⁵² (among others) they give a class analysis of the socio-economic developments in Europe, explaining the attitudes of the governing classes as a means to control the labour force in order to keep wages down and labour available. The main idea is that the growth of capitalism has increased poverty by the proletarianization of the mass of the population.

The interesting part of their book for our theme is their analysis of the increasing criminalization of begging and wandering from the fifteenth century onwards. They show that poverty is no longer deemed useful and is now equated with vagrancy and criminality. At the same time an elaborate stereotyping of the alleged criminal anti-society came about. The “social problem” was associated with idleness, criminality, etc., to be solved by the creation of workhouses. In order to regulate the labour-market the cities created a system of poor-relief. In this climate the idea of “vagrants” could easily become the symbolic apogee of anti-social behaviour and it was extended to everybody who refused to work for a (low) wage. The aim was not so much to catch the real criminals, but to stigmatize the wandering poor as disorderly and anti-social. The church did the same and the middle groups soon took over the hostile attitude. Especially from the seventeenth century on, the alleged resistance of the poor against wage-labour was regarded as structural. Marginal groups were thought to be extra dangerous because they could persuade others to go astray.

A weak point is that it is too easily assumed that proletarianization can be equated with impoverishment, at least where the pre-industrial period is concerned,⁵³ and that migration has to be regarded in the first place as

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 198. This is supported by the analysis of the relationship between marginality and migration in the recent study of Leslie Page Moch, *Moving Europeans. Migration in Western Europe since 1650* (Bloomington, 1992), pp. 88–93.

⁵¹ See Lis and Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism*, pp. 224–225, on the weakness of traditional (neo-Malthusian) explanations.

⁵² R. Brenner, “Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe”, *Past & Present*, 70 (1976), pp. 30–75.

⁵³ This criticism was uttered by Jan de Vries in his review article “Armoede en kapitalisme; een bespreking”, *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 21 (March 1981), pp. 49–58. In their rejoinder Lis and Soly denied that they had equated proletarianization with impoverishment, but further on (p. 64) they admit that on the whole they support this proposition: Catharina

a phenomenon of poverty.⁵⁴ The possibility that travelling was sometimes a positive choice, for example to escape poverty, is not considered. Migratory groups, which strictly speaking need not be proletarians,⁵⁵ are thus reduced to victims of capitalism and state formation, and this explains why Lis and Soly refrain from a thorough analysis of their economic functionality. This does not mean that their thesis is not useful; the contrary is true. The stigmatization of migratory groups, regarded primarily as people who resist wage-labour, explains the hardening policy towards them.⁵⁶ Very important, and in need of elaboration, is the observation of Lis and Soly that all kinds of alternative strategies have to be regarded as rational economic behaviour and not as a "carpe diem" mentality.⁵⁷

THE ECONOMIC FUNCTION OF TRAVELLING GROUPS: FROM THE BOTTOM UP

THE LABOUR MIGRATION APPROACH

The recent theoretical developments within the approaches dealt with so far have in common that all three show an important progress in our knowledge of the attitude of authorities towards migratory groups. A highly critical study of the sources in the past few decades has focused the attention on the stigmatizing and criminalizing policy of many state institutions. As we have seen, however, this did not change fundamentally the general image of the socio-economic place of migratory groups in society. The reason for this is that the socio-economic history of these groups is in general not the main object of study. Most authors have other preoccupations, such as crime and poverty. This makes it understandable why the sources used may be suited for their research, but are highly selective and therefore produce a biased analysis in the case of migratory groups.

Lis and Hugo Soly, "Proletarisering en verarming: een repliek", *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 21 (March 1981), pp. 58–71.

⁵⁴ Lis and Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism*, pp. 79 and 188–190. Their interpretation of the functions of migration is based on the work of Hufton (*The Poor*), among others.

⁵⁵ Many of them were not involved in wage-labour, at least not systematically, but were "penny capitalists". See for this concept John Benson, *The Penny Capitalists. A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Entrepreneurs* (Dublin, 1983).

⁵⁶ Some German authors go even further and, without giving any proof, argue that travelling groups indeed resisted the new work discipline. See for this also Nitschke, *Verbrechensbekämpfung und Verwaltung*, p. 42, and Danker, *Räuberbanden*, p. 431. The latter argues that travelling groups resisted modernization because they had the greatest trouble accepting a work discipline opposed to their lifestyle.

⁵⁷ Catharina Lis, Hugo Soly and Dirk van Damme, *Op vrije voeten? Sociale politiek in West-Europa (1450–1914)* (Leuven, 1985), p. 84. A balanced approach is also offered by H. Reif, "Vagierende Unterschichten, Vagabunden und Bandenkriminalität im Ancien Régime", *Beiträge zur Historischen Sozialkunde* (1981), pp. 27–37, and by Schubert, "Mobilität ohne Chance", pp. 128–129 and 138–143.

In order to produce a more balanced analysis we therefore have to use the new insights of the three approaches and combine these with a study of the socio-economic history of ambulant professions. This implies more attention to the importance of labour and mobility. To what results such an interpretation can lead is illustrated by several studies of the group around the French historian Goubert, who has pleaded for the use of quantitative and serial sources. The results of his research on vagrancy in eighteenth-century France (in the departments of Brie and Bicêtre) is much more balanced than the studies mentioned in the poverty-approach. It shows that most of the people arrested by the marechaussée did have genuine professions, and the increase in the number of "vagrants" in the first place has to be explained by the fact that the marechaussée was offered higher bounties. Criminality and begging only played a minor role. The majority of the people arrested as vagrants were labourers and not beggars, vagrants, thieves or bandits.⁵⁸ The research of Baulant into rural mobility has been carried out in the same tradition. Searching for the reasons of migration she draws radically different conclusions than, for example, Hufton. Mobility not only appears to be a common feature, her analysis also makes clear that poverty and delinquency cannot simply be put on the same footing:

A very mobile population does not imply instability; mobility and marginality are absolutely not bound; one of the most mobile groups is that of labourers, the "crème de la crème" of the rural society.⁵⁹

The idea that labour mobility – especially seasonal labour – is not only a functional, but also a necessary element within the labour-market and therefore for economic development, has been elaborated further and more thoroughly in the study of Jan Lucassen on migrant labour in Europe between 1600 and 1900.⁶⁰ In this mainly (socio-)economic analysis of migrant and seasonal labour the emphasis is laid not on marginality, poverty or criminality, but on the factor of "labour". Compared with the works mentioned in the first part of this article, the interpretation of ambulatory professions (which make up only a minor part of this study) is here radically different. By concentrating on their actual function the author makes clear that they cannot in general be seen as a cloak for begging or

⁵⁸ Pierre Goubert, *Clio parmi les hommes* (The Hague etc., 1976), pp. 265–278.

⁵⁹ Micheline Baulant, "Groupes mobiles dans une société sédentaire: la société rurale autour de Meaux au XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles", in *Les Marginaux et les exclus dans l'histoire* (Paris, 1979, Cahiers Jussieu), pp. 78–154, esp. p. 118. Similar conclusions for urban migration in the nineteenth century are drawn by Sophie de Schacprijver, *Elites for the Capital? Foreign Migration to Mid-Nineteenth-Century Brussels* (Amsterdam, 1990).

⁶⁰ Jan Lucassen, *Migrant Labour in Europe between 1600 and 1900. The Drift to the North Sea* (London etc., 1987). An important earlier study on this subject is: Abel Chatelain, *Les Migrants temporaires en France de 1800 à 1914*, 2 vols. (Lille, 1976). More recently this topic was enriched by the study of Danièle Ponchelet, *Ouvriers nomades et patrons briards. Les grandes exploitations agricoles dans la Brie 1848–1938* (Paris, 1987).

just as marginal. In spite of the often bad reputation of tinkers, knife-grinders, hawkers and pedlars, their work was important for the distribution of goods and services and many could make a reasonable living out of it. Hawkers and pedlars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, specialized in areas with a weak infrastructure and economically backward conditions. They were well organized, had considerable financial reserves and made agreements on the coverage of certain territories. Although their home base was situated in push-areas, with little economic possibilities, it would be wrong to consider them as poor. During their lifetime, many accumulated a modest capital with which they bought a farm or a small working place.⁶¹

The study on migrant labour not only shows that the existence of migratory and travelling groups was primarily economically based, but also that migration in general was a widespread phenomenon. This fits very well with recent studies that emphasize the structural character of migration in the pre-industrial world.⁶² To put it concisely: migration was not an exception, but the rule; in the words of Tilly: "In fact most peoples remain on the move most of the time."⁶³ Moreover, as the recent review of Fertig makes clear, it cannot be explained by war and crisis:

We can hardly explain all these urban and rural migrations if we see them only as symptoms of crisis. To a large degree, they performed an indispensable function within society.⁶⁴

Fertig argues that for too long emphasis has been put on the sensational aspects of migration, as is illustrated by the large number of studies on the (forced) emigration of religious minorities to the United States. This approach ignores the active role of the migrant in making the decision to leave and treats him in the first place as a victim. More important for our presentation of the question is that this fixation ignores the importance of internal and less conspicuous external migration.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Lucassen, *Migrant Labour*, pp. 88–92. Spufford came to a comparable conclusion in her book on petty chapmen in seventeenth-century England: Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclotting of Rural England. Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth-Century* (London, 1984), pp. 14–31. See also Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories. Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 1981).

⁶² See, for example, Lucassen, *Migrant Labour*; Jan Lucassen, "Dutch Long Distance Migration. A Concise History 1600–1900" (Research paper no. 3 of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, 1991); and Moch, *Moving Europeans*. For the industrial period, see Klaus J. Bade (ed.), *Population, Labour and Migration in 19th- and 20th-Century Germany* (Leamington etc., 1987).

⁶³ Charles Tilly, "Cities and Immigration in North America" (working paper no. 88, September 1989, New School for Social Research, New York), p. 1.

⁶⁴ Georg Fertig, "Migration from the German-Speaking Parts of Central Europe, 1600–1800: Estimates and Explanations" (working paper no. 38/1991 of the John F. Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien, Berlin, 1991), p. 4.

⁶⁵ The analyses of Jan Lucassen and Georg Fertig are part of a more general change in the interpretation of migration. See in this respect also Peter Clark and David Souden (eds.),

Applied to people working in the retailing and amusement sector this migrant labour approach proves to be promising, as is shown by a few monographs on certain ambulatory professions in the nineteenth century.⁶⁶ A good example is the study of Demetz on the hawkers from the Austrian Grödenthal.⁶⁷ She shows that the negative image of the hawking-business (“Hausierhandel”) cannot be maintained. The accusations that these hawkers were work-shy and only sold products of inferior quality and thereby deceived the simple country folk were mainly uttered by sedentary shop-keepers who were afraid of the competition. Demetz argues that these allegations were generally false. Many of these hawkers also operated in larger places, where people could compare the quality with that offered by the shops. Moreover, in the smaller villages they returned regularly enough so that they could not afford to cheat the villagers. As the saying goes:

You can fool some people all the time, you can fool all people some time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.⁶⁸

The more positive interpretation of Demetz and others is supported by the results of a research into the hawking-business (“Hausierhandel”) initiated by the German *Verein für Sozialpolitik* (Society for Social Politics) in 1895.⁶⁹ The overall image arising from the inquiry was that of a hard-working, resourceful and economically functional group that not only operated in the traditional countryside, but increasingly in the ever growing working-class neighbourhoods of the cities.⁷⁰ It appeared that many workers preferred to buy from these pedlars instead of going to the more

Migration and Society in Early Modern England (London, 1987); Tilly, “Cities and Immigration in North America”; and Nancy L. Green, “L’Histoire comparative et le champ des études migratoires”, *Annales ESC* (November–December 1990), no. 6, pp. 1135–1350.

⁶⁶ There are some valuable German monographs on ambulatory occupations, e.g.: P. Höher, *Heimat und Fremde. Wanderhändler des oberen Sauerlandes* (Münster, 1985). On itinerant musicians and showmen, see H. Zeraschi, *Drehorgeln* (Bern etc., 1976); Ph. J. van Tiggelen, *Musiciens ambulants et joueurs d’orgue au XIXe siècle. Approche socio-historique du phénomène de la musique de colportage dans la région bruxelloise*: special issue of “The Brussels Museum of Musical Instruments, Bulletin”, Vols. 12–13 (1982–1983); and John E. Zucchi, *The Little Slaves of the Harp. Italian Child Street Musicians in Nineteenth-Century Paris, London, and New York* (Montreal, 1992). Some information can also be found in Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c.1780–c.1880* (London, 1980), pp. 30–35 and 174–175, and in Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, pp. 65–72.

⁶⁷ M. Demetz, *Hausierhandel, Hausindustrie und Kunstgewerbe im Grödenthal. Vom 18. bis zum beginnenden 20. Jahrhundert* (Innsbruck, 1987).

⁶⁸ Cf. Werner Sombart, *Deutsche Volkswirtschaft im neunzehnten Jahrhundert und im Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine Einführung in die Nationalökonomie* (Berlin, 1927), p. 227.

⁶⁹ Wilhelm Stieda (ed.), *Untersuchungen über die Lage des Hausiergewerbes in Deutschland* (Leipzig, 1898).

⁷⁰ The same conclusions can be found in Benson (*The Penny Capitalists*, p. 102), and in David Alexander, *Retailing in England during the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1970), p. 63.

expensive and snobbish stores.⁷¹ Most contributions to this inquiry stress the good and regular contacts between pedlars and customers and reject implicitly the idea that the sedentary population is mostly the victim of the deceitful pedlars.

The conclusions of these monographs are supported by the results of several smaller contributions to the socio-economic history of hawkers in the nineteenth century.⁷² Although opinions on the chances for upward social mobility greatly differ,⁷³ a *communis opinio* exists on the indispensable function of pedlars. Moreover, these studies show that the negative attitude towards ambulant professions was more differentiated than is often suggested. Notwithstanding the distrust of authorities in France, Belgium and Great Britain of pedlars (especially from abroad)⁷⁴ they recognized their economic functionality and therefore refused to give in to pressure from shop-keepers to restrict the competition of hawkers. In this respect Alexander cites Prime Minister William Pitt, who in 1785 replied that arguments in Parliament in favour of pedlars had convinced him that:

there were some parts of the Kingdom that would be highly inconvenienced by this suppression, as from the distance from towns or cities, they depended on those people for a considerable part of their consumption.⁷⁵

In France the policy of many local authorities to restrict ambulant peddling required the Minister of the Interior in 1816 to instruct the prefects that the law of October 1798, guaranteeing freedom of trade, must be enforced.⁷⁶

⁷¹ This also applies to Belgium and England: Serge Jaumain, "Un métier oublié: le colporteur belge au XIXe siècle", *Revue Belge d'histoire contemporaine*, 16 (1985), pp. 361–408, esp. p. 330; Alexander, *Retailing in England*, pp. 82ff.; Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, p. 102.

⁷² Among others: Abel Chatelain, "Lutte entre colporteurs et boutiquiers en France pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle", *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale*, 49 (1971), pp. 359–384; Jean-Jacques Darmon, *Le Colportage de librairie en France sous le second empire* (Paris, 1972); Claire Krafft-Pourrat, *Le Colporteur et la mercière* (Paris, 1982), pp. 235–283; Charlotte Niermann, "'Gewerbe im Umherziehen'. Hausierer und Wanderlager in Bremen vor 1914", *Der Bremer Kleinhandel um 1900. Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte Bremens*, vol. 4 (1981), no. 1, pp. 207–255; Sven Dahl, "Travelling Pedlars in Nineteenth Century Sweden", *The Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 7 (1960), no. 2, pp. 167–178; W. H. Th. Knippenberg (ed.), *De Teuten, Buitengaanders van de Kempen* (Eindhoven, 1974); and B. W. de Vries, *From Pedlars to Textile Barons. The Economic Development of a Jewish Minority Group in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam, 1989).

⁷³ Chatelain ("Lutte entre colporteurs et boutiquiers", p. 380) and De Vries (*From Pedlars to Textile Barons*, pp. 146–147) are much more optimistic than, for example, Jaumain ("Un métier oublié", pp. 352–353) and Benson (*The Penny Capitalists*, pp. 100–101).

⁷⁴ See Jaumain, "Un métier oublié", pp. 315 and 331: "Les clichés chers aux petits commerçants n'épargnent donc pas l'administrateur de la Sûreté publique et la conduisent à proposer des mesures très sévères à l'égard de l'ensemble des colporteurs étrangers, comme si le simple fait de ne pas appartenir à la communauté belge constituait un indice de malhonnêteté et de délinquance" (p. 331).

⁷⁵ Alexander, *Retailing in England*, p. 67.

⁷⁶ Chatelain, "Lutte entre colporteurs et boutiquiers", p. 371.

Restrictive regulations were only issued towards aliens and in some cases towards indigenous groups, such as Jews⁷⁷ and gypsies. General instructions are rare and were seldom enforced.⁷⁸

The studies mentioned so far mainly deal with single men or women who normally do not travel with families. Although they give reason to assume that the ideas as expressed by Hufton and Danker at the beginning of this article are highly questionable, they still do not teach us very much about *travelling groups* (people practising ambulatory professions and who travel in family-groups). For this we have to turn to the recent historical research on groups labelled as "gypsies". The results of these studies can be regarded as the ultimate test, as all the works that mention gypsies depict them as the work-shy and vagrant group "par excellence".⁷⁹ Historical research on gypsy-groups from a labour migration angle is not easy to find. In the past decade most authors in this field have begun to attack the criminological and racist interpretation for the marginal position of gypsies, especially in Germany, but this analysis is restricted to the attitude of the authorities.⁸⁰ An exception to this rule are the studies of the historians Fricke on Württemberg,⁸¹ of Mayall and of Sexton on the gypsy-travellers in Great Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries⁸² and my book on the history of gypsies in the Netherlands during the same period. These studies show that when the activities of people labelled as gypsies are set in a labour migration perspective, the highly negative image is refuted to a great extent.

The analysis of the Hungarian coppersmiths (they called themselves "Kaldarash"), for example, who migrated from Eastern Europe to the

⁷⁷ For restrictions in Germany see: Anton Höfle, *Die Gewerbeordnung der Pfalz seit der französischen Revolution bis 1868* (Munich, 1908), p. 4; and K. Vogt, *Das fahrende Volk in der Pfalz* (Würzburg, 1921), p. 115.

⁷⁸ The Belgian act of 18 June 1842 regulating peddling, for example, did not have much effect and was soon forgotten (Jaumain, "Un métier oublié", p. 318). In Great Britain and France (apart from hawking in books – cf. Darmon, *Le Colportage*) no national legislation was enacted against pedlars. The English "Hawkers and Pedlars Acts" from 1810, 1871, 1881 and 1888 even offered some protection: Annemarie Cottaar, Leo Lucassen and Wim Willems, "Justice or Injustice? A Survey of the Policy towards Gypsies and Caravan Dwellers in Western Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries", *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 11 (March 1992), no. 1, pp. 42–66.

⁷⁹ An exception is Florie Egmond, *In Bad Company. Organized Crime in the Dutch Countryside during the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Ph.D., Groningen, 1992). Only the evidence given for the impression that "gypsies offered important and valued services to the rural population" (p. 71) is quite scanty.

⁸⁰ For a short review of this historiography, see Lucassen, *En men noemde hen zigeuners*, pp. 12–14, and Cottaar *et al.*, "Justice or Injustice?"

⁸¹ Thomas Fricke, *Zwischen Erziehung und Ausgrenzung. Zur Württembergischen Geschichte der Sinti und Roma im 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main, 1991).

⁸² David Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth-Century Society* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 13–70, and R. D. Sexton, "Travelling People in the United Kingdom" (Ph.D., University of Southampton, 1989).

West from 1860 onwards tells quite a different story than when one only relies on government sources. In contrast with the popular image about gypsies (“work-shy”, “living from day to day”, “thievish”), their economic behaviour appears to be quite rational. These tinkers were well organized in companies of some forty people (men, women and children). Before coming to a certain country, they first sent a few men ahead to explore the possibilities and make arrangements for camping places and residence permits. In case the authorities made objections they frequently used the services of their respective embassies and consulates, who in some cases pleaded the gypsies’ case with the authorities. According to the clients of the Kaldarash – and local authorities as well – their skill was impressive, and despite regular problems with the fixing of the price, they were asked year after year in many cases. As specialists they earned a good living and some tinkers possessed impressive amounts of money. A second example concerns gypsy horse-dealers in Western Europe. Like the coppersmiths they performed useful economic functions and did in fact not fit the parasitic image that many central governments had of them. The horse-dealers played an important role in the market for cobs: little but tough horses that were indispensable for commerce and transportation until the Second World War. One of their most important operational areas covered the Netherlands, Belgium, northern France, for which they had to cross the national borders frequently. The authorities, however, interpreted these movements as an “invasion” of their countries by “hordes” of gypsies. In fact, it concerned a relatively small group of some 500 people whose business required constant travelling. Despite the restrictive and even repressive policies pursued by many countries, making it more and more difficult for “gypsies” to practise their trades, most of them managed to earn a living until the Second World War.⁸³

These conclusions agree with the recent anthropological research on “peripatetics” or “service nomads”, since that also focuses on their economic function within society.⁸⁴ Most students no longer depict them as rare and exotic beings or as parasites, but stress their organizational flexibility and willingness to move and to switch occupations, which enabled them to fill gaps in the host economy.

⁸³ See for this chapters 3 and 4 of my book (*En men noemde hen zigeuners*). See also my paper, “Under the Cloak of Begging? Gypsy Occupations in Western Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries”, *Ethnologia Europaea* (1993, forthcoming).

⁸⁴ For a recent overview, see Sharon Bohn Gmelch, “Groups that Don’t Want in: Gypsies and Other Artisan, Trader, and Entertainer Minorities”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 15 (1986), pp. 307–330. Some useful studies are Anne Sutherland, *Gypsies, the Hidden Americans* (New York, 1975); Judith Okely, *Traveller-Gypsies* (Cambridge, 1983); contributions by Patrick Williams, Matt T. Salo and Sheila Salo in the special issue of *Urban Anthropology*, 11 (Fall–Winter 1982), nos. 3–4; George Gmelch, *The Irish Tinkers. The Urbanization of an Itinerant People* (Prospect Heights, 1985); and Aparna Rao (ed.), *The Other Nomads. Peripatetic Minorities in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Cologne etc., 1986).

ALTERNATIVE SOURCES

In the preceding section I hope to have made clear that for a more balanced approach of migratory groups three conditions have to be fulfilled: (1) they must be treated as a normal part of the general labour migration; (2) research should be aimed at a detailed analysis of their economic functions; and (3) a different and more diverse use of historical sources should be applied. As the first two conditions have already been discussed at length, we will here dwell on the third condition. In the following, four categories of sources are proposed.

GENERAL ECONOMIC AND STATISTICAL SOURCES

If we consider the possibility that not all migratory and travelling groups were poor and criminal, and that most performed useful functions in society, then they must have left traces in government records concerning the regulation of ambulant professions. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have produced a wealth of such sources. As a result of state formation and national economic policies from the Napoleonic time onwards, all kinds of permits, patent registers and taxes⁸⁵ were introduced for people with ambulant professions; in many cases these records have withstood the ravages of time. To reconstruct the economic history of the Grödner pedlars, for example, Demetz used lists of permits containing all sorts of social (name, place of birth, age, etc.) and economic (income, destinations) information.⁸⁶ A similar German source in this respect is the 'travel permit'⁸⁷ for ambulant professions introduced in 1869 in order, among other reasons, to guarantee that the holder did not use his or her profession as a cloak for begging.⁸⁸ The fact, for example, that local

⁸⁵ For England, Alexander (*Retailing in England*, p. 64) and Benson (*Penny Capitalists*, p. 103) mention census returns.

⁸⁶ Demetz, *Hausierhandel, Hausindustrie und Kunsthandel*. A similar source are the registers of "labour booklets" ("livrets") used by Chatelain ("Lutte entre colporteurs et boutiquiers", p. 361).

⁸⁷ "Legitimationsschein" in the act of 1869, "Wandergewerbeschein" in the amendment of 1 July 1883 (Georg Meyer, "Die Gewerbegesetzgebung in den einzelnen Staaten", in J. Conrad *et al.* (eds.), *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften* (Jena, 1990), pp. 412–440, esp. p. 429).

⁸⁸ See a.o. Kurt von Rohrscheidt, *Die Gewerbeordnung für das Deutsche Reich* (Leipzig, 1901), pp. 285–375; and Tillmann Miritz, *Geschichte des Gewerberechtes von 1869 bis zur Gegenwart unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Kaiserreichs und der Weimarer Republik* (Erlangen and Nürnberg, 1983), pp. 23–24, 41. Before the coming in force of this national act, there already existed similar regulations in various German states. A useful overview is given by Bernhard Endrucks, *Die Besteuerung des Wandergewerbes in den deutschen Bundesstaaten* (Lucka, 1906). For the practice in nineteenth-century Württemberg, see Fricke, *Zwischen Erziehung und Ausgrenzung*, pp. 39–43. Niermann ("Gewerbe im Umherziehen") used registers of these permits to reconstruct the socio-economic history of pedlars in Bremen.

authorities in many cases kept providing “gypsies” with these permits, notwithstanding continued instructions from central authorities not to, can be an important indication that “gypsies” in this respect could not be differentiated from other travellers and therefore were not as parasitic as is generally assumed. A more specialized source for travelling groups, producing more or less the same information as the records used by Demetz and others, are records of caravan permits, which exist in the Netherlands from 1918 onwards.⁸⁹

Apart from these records in some countries (government) inquiries on ambulant professions are available. The most elaborate is the French inquiry of 1811, which formed the main source for the studies of Chatelain and Lucassen on migrant labour.⁹⁰ Other important inquiries were undertaken at the end of the nineteenth century in Germany, Italy and Belgium,⁹¹ as a reaction to complaints of shop-keepers and delegates in Parliament on the alleged unfair competition of pedlars. The best known is the already mentioned publication of the German “Society for Social Politics” of 1898 on the situation of ambulant professions in Germany, called “Hausierer”.⁹²

A last important statistical source for migratory groups operating outside their native country are passport registers for alien as well as indigenous travellers, foreigners’ registers and population registers.⁹³ As a result of state formation these can be found in most European countries, as well as for the United States,⁹⁴ on several levels (local and national) from about 1815 onwards and in some cases also for the Ancien Régime. Such sources make it possible to reconstruct to some extent mobility patterns, occupational shifts and methods of operating.

⁸⁹ This source is at the moment being used by Annemarie Cottaar in her research into the history of Dutch caravan dwellers. See also Cottaar *et al.*, “Justice or Injustice”

⁹⁰ Chatelain, *Les Migrants temporaires*, and Lucassen, *Migrant Labour*.

⁹¹ Jaumain (“Un métier oublié”, pp. 307 and 316) and J. J. Boddewyn (*Belgian Public Policy Toward Retailing since 1789. The Socio-Politics of Distribution* (Michigan, 1971), p. 20) used the inquiry of the Ministry of the Interior of 1840 on peddling and the oral inquiry of the “National Committee for the Petty Bourgeoisie” of 1902–1907. Zucchi (*Little Slaves*, p. 9) consulted an Italian parliamentary investigation into children in itinerant trades, c.1870.

⁹² Stieda, *Untersuchungen*. For Great Britain Mayall also used government reports to reconstruct the importance of travellers for hop picking (Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers*, p. 214, note 71).

⁹³ See, among others, Chatelain, “Lutte entre colporteurs et boutiquiers”, p. 361; Darmon, *Le Colportage de librairie*, p. 41; Lucassen, *Migrant Labour*, p. 291, note 121; and Dahl, “Travelling Pedlars”, p. 170. The value of population and foreigners’ registers is illustrated by Van Tiggelen in his study on itinerant organ grinders in nineteenth-century Brussels (*Musiciens ambulants et joueurs d’orgue*, pp. 38–39 and 54–55). A fruitful combination of foreigners’ and population registers can be found in De Schaepdrijver, *Elites for the Capital?*, pp. 120 and 136–164.

⁹⁴ Records of the US Customs Service. See Lucassen, *En men noemde hen zigeuners*, p. 248, note 93; and Matt T. Salo and Sheila Salo, “Gypsy Immigration to the United States”, in *Papers from the Sixth and Seventh Annual Meetings of the Gypsy Lore Society, North American Chapter* (New York, 1988), pp. 25–41.

THE TRADITIONAL "REPRESSIVE" SOURCES

The fact that most letters, reports, etc., of authorities dealing with "vaga-bonds" (especially the police and gendarmerie) are in many cases biased does not rule them out as an important source. As we already saw in the review of the first three approaches (cf. especially the work of Gutton), neutral information can be deduced from them.

On a *macro* level long series of correspondence between various authorities concerning "gypsies", "travellers" or "vagrants" can be established. The advantage of such series is that for a longer period cycles can be found in the attitude towards and ideas on the categories concerned. Moreover, a large collection of such documents enables us to differentiate between the various branches of the state (justice, foreign affairs, domestic affairs, industry) as well as the several hierarchical levels (local, provincial, national). Let me illustrate this on the basis of the history of gypsies in the Netherlands. Analysing the long series of correspondence and regulations concerning this group during the period 1868–1944 (3,000 documents) the general parasitic image does not hold and the attitude of local authorities and the population does not appear entirely negative. This can be deduced from the fact that despite numerous and repeated exhortations from central authorities to expel gypsies without exception, all kinds of permits were issued to them and people continued to make use of their services.

On a *micro* level documents from the same series show that even in the letters of the most rabid anti-gypsy official in the Netherlands, the Administrator for Border Control and Aliens Service (AGVD), neutral information can be found. Thanks to his registration passion, for example, it is possible to calculate how many horses an average horse-dealer took with him. This helps to determine the relative importance of these horse-dealers to the Dutch and Belgian horse-fairs. A second advantage of this source is found in the often very detailed descriptions of gypsy-activity. The numerous letters of the AGVD on certain groups of Silesian copersmiths contain valuable data on their way of operating, customers, earnings, skill, etc.⁹⁵ In Germany and Great Britain no systematic serial research has been undertaken yet, but the available studies give reason to believe that with a similar approach more or less the same conclusions will be reached.⁹⁶

Apart from correspondence between various officials, "repressive" sources can contain other valuable information. A good example is police

⁹⁵ Lucassen, *En men noemde hen zigeuners*, pp. 162–168.

⁹⁶ See in this respect Mayall, *Gypsy Travellers*, pp. 13–70; Reiner Hehemann, *Die Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens im Wilhelminischen Deutschland und in der Weimarer Republik, 1871–1933* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), pp. 181, 203, 205, 238, 295, 328–329, 364–365; Fricke, *Erziehung*, pp. 76–85; and Wolfgang Günther, *Die preussische Zigeunerpolitik seit 1871 im Widerspruch zwischen zentraler Planung und lokaler Durchführung* (Hanover, 1985), pp. 11–12.

reviews that were published from 1850 onwards.⁹⁷ The Dutch review, for example, published weekly lists of people who had been expelled because they were unwanted aliens. These lists not only give their names, but also their places of birth, ages, occupations, means of transportation and family members. These make it possible to reconstruct the migration and economic specializations of the four main gypsy groups that came to the Netherlands during the period 1850–1920,⁹⁸ but these lists can also be used to gather information on other migratory groups, such as the Italian street musicians or French bear leaders.

OTHER QUALITATIVE SOURCES

Not only in government sources can a wealth of information be found. Newspapers, specialized reviews, literature, contemporary descriptions,⁹⁹ iconographic material,¹⁰⁰ etc., can also be important in reconstructing the socio-economic and cultural history of migratory and travelling groups. In most Western European countries the migration of gypsies from Eastern Europe, for example, has been reported in a very detailed way in newspapers. Numbers, dress, carts, tents, occupations, wealth, destination, attitude of the population and authorities: all these subjects have been dealt with, and these newspaper accounts can help to fill the gaps left by other sources. The same holds true for certain colourful itinerant groups such as Italian child-musicians, who attracted much attention from politicians, civil and police authorities, philanthropic agencies, Italian diplomats, newspapers, magazines and contemporary writers in cities such as Paris, London and New York. Zucchi has shown that a careful and critical analysis of the various sources that were the result of this attention can produce a balanced description. Being aware of the pathological image of the wandering musicians (the “little slaves of the harp”) of his middle-class sources, he is able to discount many negative exaggerations and generaliza-

⁹⁷ In the Netherlands *Het Algemeen Politieblad* (from 1851 onwards), available in the National Bureau of Genealogy in The Hague. See for Germany, e.g. *Das bayerische Central-polizeiblatt* (1866–1945), available in the National Library of Bavaria in Munich; or the *Königlich Preussisches Central Polizeiblatt*.

⁹⁸ Lucassen, *En men noemde hen zigeuners*.

⁹⁹ Alexander (*Retailing in England*, p. 74), for example, relied to some extent on the work of Henri Mayhew (*London Labour and the London Poor*, 3 vols. (London, 1851–1862)). This source was also used by Zucchi, *Little Slaves*, pp. 76–111, and by David R. Green, “Street Trading in London: A Case Study of Casual Labour 1830–60”, in James H. Johnson and Colin G. Pooley (eds.), *The Structure of Nineteenth-Century Cities* (London etc., 1982), pp. 129–152, esp. pp. 133–134.

¹⁰⁰ An impressive collection of pictures of ambulant professions (sixteenth to nineteenth centuries) was published by Karen F. Beall, *Kaufleute und Strassenhändler. Cries and Itinerant Trades. Eine Bibliographie* (Hamburg, 1975). See also Willie Römer, *Ambulantes Gewerbe, Berlin 1904–1932* (Berlin, 1983), and *idem*, *Gaukler, Bärenführer, Musiker . . . Berlin 1920–1930* (Berlin, 1986).

tions and reconstruct the economic reason for their migration.¹⁰¹ Less conspicuous groups, such as German musicians, remained in the dark, but a creative combination of various sources enables a reconstruction of their professions and mobility.¹⁰²

Specialized (economic) reviews can be crucial for our knowledge on the economic functions of travelling groups. If one entertains the possibility that certain gypsy groups played a valuable role in the horse-market, for example, one should study reviews such as *The Horse, The World of Horses* or the economic archives of places with important horse-fairs instead of police reports. These are sources which may not seem obvious at first, but which nevertheless can contain valuable material.

INTERVIEWS

A last important source are interviews with travellers. The use of interviews by now is widespread among historians, especially in social history (history of women, labourers, etc.). In historical studies on travelling groups this source is seldom called upon. Anthropologists and sociologists, however, have shown that this can be a valuable source. For the research of Acton, Okely and Sexton into the economic life of English travellers after the Second World War, the core of their material was gathered by interviews and participating observation.¹⁰³

The critical reader may argue that most examples given above concern the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whereas the historiographical review was mainly restricted to the Ancien Régime. I cannot, of course, reproach other historians for neglecting sources that are non-existent for their period. Historians of the Ancien Régime must manage with what they have, and in many cases this means highly selective sources. Although their job is definitely more difficult than that for students of the past two centuries, they also have sources at their disposal which permit them to escape the dominating contemporary anti-migratory opinion. The research by Baulant, Goubert and others into French parish records in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has made this clear. Moreover, Goubert –

¹⁰¹ Zucchi, *Little Slaves*, pp. 10–13. Some information on the groups mentioned can also be found in Lucassen, *En men noemde hen zigeuners*, pp. 234–235 and 367–369. Similar conclusions were drawn by Van Tiggelen (*Musiciens ambulants et joueurs d'orgue*, pp. 78–79) who contrasts the prejudices of the middle-class against organ grinders with the popularity of their trade in the working-class areas.

¹⁰² E. Christmann, "Die Entstehung des westpfälzischen Musikantentums", *Mitteilungen des historischen Vereins der Pfalz*, 53 (1955), pp. 19–46; and W. Schneider, "Das westpfälzische Musikantentum, seine Entstehung, seine Eigenart und seine Auswirkung auf die Entwicklung meines Heimatortes Jettenbach", *Westricher Heimatblätter*, 15 (Juni 1984), no. 2, pp. 72–116.

¹⁰³ Thomas Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change* (London and Boston, 1974); Okely, *The Traveller-Gypsies*; Sexton, *Travelling People*.

and to some extent also Gutton and Schwartz – showed that the repressive sources of the *marechaussée*, when analysed as a socio-economic source, also lead to different conclusions than in those cases where only information regarding poverty or criminality is selected. Although less abundant than in the past centuries the Ancien Régime also offers economic and statistical sources. In the study of Lucassen on migrant labour in Europe between 1600 and 1800, for example, the transport of migrant labourers and the recruitment of sailors was reconstructed,¹⁰⁴ whereas Spufford in her search for the petty chapmen in seventeenth-century England combined (qualitative) information from wills and inventories with quantitative data from the register of licences under the 1696–97 Act, enabling her to give a balanced impression of the chapmen's economic function.¹⁰⁵

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this article two questions were posed. To begin with how to explain the negative image of travelling people in European historiography. As we have seen, the answer is partly of a methodological and technical nature and therefore relatively simple. Most historians are in the first place interested in criminality, marginality and poverty where migratory and travelling groups are concerned. The consequences for the overall image are far-reaching. Travellers are only treated when they appear within the context of these themes: when they are suspected of theft, aimless wandering, deviant behaviour or vagrancy. In this light it is tempting and therefore conceivable that on the basis of these selective sources authors implicitly or explicitly jump to conclusions on travellers in general. The reason for this is perhaps not so much the prejudices in their, mostly criminal, records – most historians nowadays are aware of this bias – but primarily the omission of other sources.

The tenacity of the negative image is further strengthened by a strong *communis opinio* on migratory and travelling groups among historians. It is notable that it makes no great difference whether the ideas are inspired by Marxism or liberalism. In both cases the outcome is more or less the same. "Leftist" historians such as Hufton and Hobsbawm seem to be strongly influenced by Marx's idea of the "Lumpenproletariat", which includes everybody without (regular) wage-labour, i.e. pedlars, showmen and others.¹⁰⁶ In his famous study *Bandits*¹⁰⁷ Eric Hobsbawm differentiates

¹⁰⁴ Lucassen, *Migrant Labour*, pp. 152 and 157.

¹⁰⁵ Spufford, *The Great Reclathing*, pp. 14–31.

¹⁰⁶ Karl Marx divided the poor in *Das Kapital* (Hamburg, 1872, reprint Berlin, 1987, Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe), Vol. I, chapter 23, sub 4, p. 586) into four categories: (1) the vagrants, criminals and prostitutes (the real Lumpenproletariat); (2) the unemployed, hit by temporary crisis; (3) orphans and abandoned children and (4) the disabled and the old. See also S. Woolf, *The Poor in Western Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London etc., 1986), p. 71, note 1.

between “real” social bandits and “real” criminals. The first category presumably is recruited from farmers, whereas the second comes from the vagrant and nomadic population. This picture may be due to Marx’s characterization of the “Lumpenproletariat” as an untrustworthy underclass that – susceptible to populism – by their lack of class consciousness could easily be used by reactionary forces as their storm troopers. In the “historical process” of the proletariat they did not play a role. The result is, as White has put it, that:

As a category within Marxism the Lumpenproletariat has tended to become an embarrassment to analysis, which has either taken it for granted or denied its separate and conscious existence.¹⁰⁶

The linear perspective of society, in which travelling is seen as a sign of being uprooted and vagrant, is shared by non-Marxists, and as a result travelling groups are predominantly studied in the light of criminality, deviancy and poverty. It seems as if both “left” and “right” are so strongly influenced by the nineteenth-century cultural offensive of the bourgeoisie against groups such as travellers that the negative ideas concerning these groups are often reproduced in contemporary sources.

Notwithstanding this communis opinio several studies offering the labour mobility approach have made clear that the dominating image is not tenable in general. In particular, studies with an economic perspective supply quite different conclusions. The ultimate test in this respect are “gypsies”, often presented as the parasitic and criminal group “par excellence”. As we have seen, recent historical and anthropological research shows that this image cannot be maintained. They were not aimless wanderers, living from day to day and earning their money by theft, deceit or begging. Most of them, as all travellers, tried to make a living by using the possibilities and advantages that ambulant professions offered. Some were quite successful, others had to be content with a more modest income, and there were people who now and then resorted to crime; more or less the same picture as can be drawn for the group of wage-labourers or civilians in general. These conclusions agree with the new insights into the field of the history of migration, namely, that migration (be it internal, seasonal or permanent) has to be considered as a normal drive and motivated by an urge for upward social mobility, and therefore not automatically a symptom of crisis.

This conclusion, however, leads to the paradoxical situation that although monographs on certain migratory groups draw a fairly favourable picture of their economic function, these results do not influence the dominant criminality/marginality/poverty paradigm. Conversely, historians who do this kind of economic research do not seem to realize that their

¹⁰⁷ (United States n.p., 1969), pp. 31–32.

¹⁰⁸ White, “Campbell Bunk”, p. 43.

results implicitly contradict the outcome of many studies mentioned in the first part of this article. Why have the studies based on the labour migration approach not fundamentally influenced the interpretation of historians working with other perspectives? One might think that this lack of communication is caused by the ongoing specialization of the historical discipline. However tempting and partially justified this explanation is, it is not sufficient. The reason for the cohabitation of contradictory knowledge is more complicated. Reviewing most studies one cannot escape the impression that the students involved are often aware of the existence of other approaches, but do not realize that they plough the same field. The contrast between “honest” and “dishonest” travellers, as continually propagated by authorities from the fifteenth century onwards (comparable with deserving and non-deserving poor), is thus maintained.