The weakness of well ordered societies. Gypsies in Western Europe, the
Ottoman empire and India 1400-1914

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Introduction
The history of people labelled as Gypsies, tsiganes, cigan, kipti, bohémiens or Zigeuner (hence: Gypsies) has not attracted much serious attention. Moreover, those who have devoted their research time and energy, have predominantly focussed on the antagonistic nature of the relationship between Gypsies and non Gypsies (or Gadze). This has produced a historiography, in which Gypsies are portrayed as victims of racism or as criminals who more or less caused the repression themselves by their anti-social behaviour. As a result we know a lot about the Gypsy hunts in 17th and 18th century Western Europe, the genocide in the 20th century, or the enslavement of Gypsies in the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia until the 1860s, but surprisingly little about the day to day interaction with the rest of society.

This dominating approach is not only top down, it also fails to differentiate according to time and place so that the impression is conveyed that the ‘fate’ of the Gysies was universal and only marginally influenced by the specific historical context. This generalisation is often justified by assuming that human society is by nature sedentary and that as a result it will always be in conflict with itinerant and nomadic groups. Gypsies as the ultimate ‘other’, to use postmodern vocabulary, are often portrayed as a closed ethnic group that has successfully resisted assimilation and cultural change. The core elements are to be found in their itinerant way of life and the ensuing cultural norms and traditional occupations, which would set them clearly apart from the rest of society.

There are, however, two major problems with this approach. First of all, the term Gypsies has been used to label such different and diverse groups that it is difficult to uphold the idea that we are talking about a people with a distinct culture; and from research on itinerant occupations we know that Gypsies were much more socially and economically integrated in Western European society than is often assumed. In this paper we will therefore first give a (bottom up)

1 This paper is an abridged version of the article which appeared in Review 26 (2003) no. 3, pp. 283-313.
2 E.g. Mac Laughlin 1999.
5 Lucassen 1993.
6 Fricke 1996.
7 Lucassen et al. 1998. This is even admitted by scholars who adhere an ethnological approach to Gypsies (Fraser 1992).
impression of accommodation at the day to day level by going into the functionality of Gypsy occupations, putting these in the larger framework of migratory behaviour and ambulant professions. The emphasis in this section will be on the 19th and 20th century, because most research has been done on this period. By using long term developments in state formation and social relations in Western Europe as a background we then address the question how to explain the undeniable repressive atmosphere Gypsies were confronted with from the 15th century onwards. Finally, we compare the conditions under which the negative attitude of Western-European authorities could emerge with the treatment of Gypsies in other state configurations, such as the Ottoman empire and pre-colonial India.

**Accommodation through economic functionality**

Itinerant professionals like showpeople, musicians, jugglers, bear leaders, coppersmiths and peddlers have existed for ages and performed a wide range of functions, which had in common the disseminating of goods and services that mostly could not be offered, or not at such a low price, by the sedentary professional class. Roughly we can distinguish between two categories: those men and women who travelled alone (or in small groups); and people wandering with their families. The latter have been categorised in most countries from the Middle Ages onwards by various authorities as 'Gypsies', 'Zigeuner', 'Romanichals', 'travellers', 'Landfahrer' etc. Whereas the functionality of ambulant professions performed by people in the first category has been acknowledged by most historians, this is not the case for 'Gypsies'. They may have been active in the same kind of business, the idea that Gypsies only used itinerant trades to hide their parasitic and criminal behaviour is widespread and has obstructed structural comparisons of the social and economic history of both categories. That they have more in common than is generally assumed can be illustrated by focussing on the economic function of groups that have been lumped together as Gypsies or similar labels.

First of all, it is important to state that Gypsy occupations did not differ essentially from economic activities by sedentary people. One of the most confusing concepts used in this respect is nomadism. This idea refers to societies of hunters and gatherers, or herdsmen, and is often used as proof of the Gypsies' traditional and specific culture. Gypsies, however, differ as much from pastoral nomads - wandering in a certain area with their herds - as other members of Western-European societies. If we summarise the three main characteristics associated with the 'Gypsy economy', the family as work unit (in which all members contribute to the family

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income), an itinerant life style and self-employment, it is clear that these are far from specific for Gypsies. The interesting thing is, however, that these are often explained in primordial ethnic and cultural terms: group cohesion, nomadism, and dissoluteness. To substantiate our claims we will give a tour d’horizon along the different Gypsy specialisations and their function within society.

Trading, hawking and peddling
Trading was perhaps the most important economic niche for Gypsies, and within this category hawking, going from house to house selling products, seems to have been the principal activity. Gypsies did not have a monopoly on hawking; on the contrary, many people tried to earn a living in this way. In Europe most of them came form specifically delineated areas and localities, which served as operation base. Furthermore, in the nineteenth century members of the working class undertook itinerant activities, among other things, in order to supplement their low wages. For these ‘penny capitalists’ retailing continued to be popular for a long time. The low costs made street-selling or hawking attractive to the ambitious and destitute alike and provided a possible escape route for the ambitious working man. In only a few instances are ‘Gypsies’ mentioned in this respect. The ‘Gypsy-awareness’ of authorities increased after the middle of the century when more people started travelling in families and took their own housing with them. This transition was stimulated by the wider use of caravans after 1870. A caravan made travelling with one’s family not only easier and more comfortable, but also more visible. In most countries many of these travellers were quickly stigmatised and often ‘gypsified’ by the authorities.

The demand for products sold by hawkers and street-sellers was not restricted to the pre-industrial period. Not only did itinerant groups adjust to economic changes by finding new niches, modernisation was far from a linear process. Especially the increase of stores initially remained behind population growth, the purchasing power of the masses and urbanisation. Therefore many people depended on hawkers and. Even where various stores where within reach people often preferred buying goods from hawkers, many of whom were women. Most hawkers had a regular circle of customers and were therefore trusted. Moreover, they offered cheaper goods and did not show the contempt that many workers were confronted with in middle class stores. Consequently some shopkeepers were not all that popular with the working man. Not only the demand, but also the supply stimulated itinerant trade. Wholesale businesses in particular used hawkers for the distribution of their wares. The development of modern

11 Benson 1983.
12 Mayall 1988: 49.
13 Klein 1898: 371.
transport systems, e.g. railways, enabled peddlers to have goods sent to places in their work area from where they started hawking. For some time hawking and industrialisation therefore went hand in hand and performed a retailing function among the rapidly growing urban population. Itinerant traders were not an anomaly, but a buffer and a stimulus to the mass consumption of consumer goods in the industrial era.

Accusations that hawkers were workshy, only sold products of inferior quality and thereby deceived the simple country folk were mainly uttered by shopkeepers who were afraid of competition. These allegations were often false or exaggerated. Most hawkers also operated in larger towns, where people could compare the quality with that offered by shops. Moreover, in the smaller villages they returned regularly so that they could not afford to cheat.\(^\text{14}\) Otherwise it would not have been possible for many peddlers to return again and again to the same areas and customers. Only with the emergence of large department stores around 1900 did the function of urban hawkers gradually diminish. In the countryside modernisation sometimes took much longer, so that hawkers, among whom Gypsies, were able to earn a living for a long time.

Gypsies not only traded from door to door, but also on streets or at fairs. One of the best-known activities is the horse trade, which together with kettle-mending and the making of music is regarded as a typical Gypsy occupation. The role of Gypsies is illustrated by the history of Gypsy horse-dealers in the Netherlands. The first families immigrated around 1900, coming from Scandinavia. Although it was only a small group (at most some 500 people), they quickly managed to get a firm grip on the at that time expanding trade in cobs, small but tough horses which were indispensable for commerce and transportation until World War II. At horse fairs these Gypsies were very much at home and during the First World War they almost managed to monopolise the important trade in cobs. Mostly Gypsies bought horses from farmers and then sold them at horse fairs.\(^\text{15}\) The operational area of the (male) horse dealers covered the Netherlands, Belgium and the northern part of France, for which they had to cross the national borders frequently. The authorities interpreted these movements invariably as an invasion of their country by hordes of Gypsies. In fact, it only concerned relatively small groups (30 people) whose business required constant travelling. Apart from the recurring difficulties at the borders, they also had to face other kinds of opposition. This had to do with the well-known stereotype of the ever-cheating Gypsy, especially where horses are concerned. They were accused of transforming old and worn horses into elegant ones by a process of clipping, singeing and beautifying. There are, however, powerful arguments against the impression that Gypsy activity at horse markets was characterised by deceit. To begin with, it does not explain why customers kept dealing with

\(^\text{14}\) Demetz 1987: 54.
people with such a bad reputation. Trading between Gypsies and others suggests a relationship of trust and respect rather than intolerance and abuse. There can be no doubt that 'trickery' formed part of horse trading (and trading in general), but it was not peculiar to Gypsies, nor can it have been a general phenomenon. Nevertheless this stereotype was used to incriminate Gypsies. Despite the restrictive and even repressive policies pursued in many countries, making it more and more difficult for Gypsies to practice their occupations, most of them managed to earn a living until World War II. In the Netherlands as in Germany they were known for their riches, owning expensive caravans and substantial amounts of money.16

Itinerant crafts
A second important economic niche for itinerant groups were crafts, especially for repair work. For most people occupations as kettle-mending, chair-bottoming and knife-grinding come to mind when Gypsies are concerned. Most of these craftsmen travelled in a relatively small area because there was enough demand for their services. In such areas, however, they travelled constantly. Many crafts were constantly adapted to changing circumstances and demand. This can be well illustrated by the history of Gypsy copper- and tinsmiths, known in the literature as the Kaldarash.17 Coming from Hungary, at least according to their passports, the first groups appeared in Western Europe around 1860 and were immediately labelled as Gypsies. These coppersmiths were well organised in companies of some 40 people (men, women and children). Before coming to a certain country, these groups sent a few men ahead to explore the possibilities and make arrangements for camping places and residence permits. When the authorities made objections, they frequently used the services of their respective embassies and consulates, which in some cases pleaded their case with the authorities. According to the clients of the Kaldarash - and local authorities as well - their skills were impressive, and despite regular price-fixing problems, they were often asked back year after year by the same customers. Sometimes even authorities with the most negative Gypsy-image, and whose task it was to get them out of the country, e.g. the gendarmerie, were impressed by their skill and wealth.

More detailed descriptions of the professional activity of this group were offered by members of the English Gypsy Lore Society (founded in 1888). Eric Otto Winstedt's accurate and detailed accounts of these Hungarian Coppersmiths, as they called themselves, were based on a visit they made to Great Britain and France during the years 1911-1913. One of the remarkable conclusions from this petite histoire is the economic flexibility of these craftsmen. Due to a lack of

15 Lucassen 1990: 144.
demand from private consumers, they concentrated more and more on the industrial sector. The quality of their work was of such a standard that clients put up with the traditional bickering about the price. In contrast to indigenous coppersmiths, these Hungarians mastered a technique that was highly valued by industrial clients.18 Also in Western Europe some travellers and Gypsies specialised in this craft, as the example of the Scottish and Irish tinkers show.19 Irish tinkers repaired old vessels at farms and in villages as well as selling new ones. Broken kettles were mended with the aid of solder. Here, again, there existed a relationship of mutual dependence between Gypsies and their clients. Irish farmers before World War II expected them to repair the earthenware coolers that kept their milk from decay. Several of the same families of tinkers would also undertake specialist repairs of broken China, earthenware or glass.20

Wandering entertainers

A third important economic sector for Gypsies and other itinerant people was entertainment. Wandering musicians, animal-performers, acrobats, owners of freak shows, showmen and the like have always played a role in European history.21 Although for most of that time they were treated with a good deal of suspicion, their activities have always been valued too highly for them to vanish. Not only did they bring distraction, they also introduced all kinds of novelties. Thus, at the end of the nineteenth century, the telescope, cameras and cinema were introduced and made popular by itinerant entrepreneurs.22 By Easter some of them had already travelled large distances. Others brought in strange animals, such as bears, camels, and lions. Many of them were not labelled as Gypsies since they did not travel in family groups. Very mobile groups were Italian (child) musicians and organ-grinders, French bear-leaders from the Pyrenean and German itinerant music orchestras.23 To get a clearer picture of their activities we will focus on bear-leaders, musicians and fortune tellers.

At the same time as the coppersmiths from Hungary moved West, small family groups of bear-leaders from Bosnia (at that time part of the Ottoman empire) appeared. The labelling of them as Gypsies was not as general and quick as with the Kalderash, but in most countries they were stigmatised as well. Like the Kalderash they travelled great distances and did not restrict themselves to Europe. In the 1880s many emigrated to the United States. Many of them who left

22 Benson 1983: 68.
the continent had considerable sums of money and were able to buy houses in England and the United States.24

A well known Gypsy occupation is that of musician and performer, such as acrobats, comedians, showmen, magicians and puppeteers. In contrast to coppersmithing these occupations were not monopolized by men, for women are also regularly found in historical sources as independent professionals.25 After the turn of the century we can discern an occupational specialization. Whereas in the nineteenth century many Gypsy performers combined music with other showmanlike activities, trading and crafts, in the twentieth century they began more and more to concentrate on the making of music. This shift may have been caused by increasing professionalism within the world of showmen. From the end of the nineteenth century we see in all countries the emergence of more capital-intensive attractions, such as carousels, merry-go-rounds and cake-walks. At the same time the policy toward the small street performers became more repressive and since they lived in caravans these people were marginalised as Gypsies. This combination of economic and socio-political developments caused the more successful operators, who also lived in caravans, to organise themselves into professional organisations and thus try to escape from the Gypsy stigmatisation.26 In some cases Gypsy-musicians settled in cities, because the demand for their work was sometimes so great that they could give up travelling altogether.

In a survey of occupations within the entertainment field, fortune-telling is probably the most 'Gypsy-like' of all, having been associated with Gypsies since the end of the Middle Ages.27 In eighteenth-century French encyclopedias, it was even part of the definition of 'bohémiens'. This is not to say, however, that this branch was monopolised by Gypsies. Others (sedentary and itinerant people alike) also engaged in this sort of activity, often combined with magic and sorcery.28 Although many Gypsy-women have earned money in this way up to the present day, little is known about this activity except that there was a regular demand from all classes in society and it was often combined with hawking or entertainment. Many of these women not only operated in holiday resorts, but also in the countryside, where they offered all kinds of 'emotional services'. Some gave advice in the case of theft and bewitching, but most of them talked with their clients about the highs and lows in life, such as marriages, travels (emigration), the possibility of evading conscription, accidents or death. Although many fortune-tellers lived at

24 Lucassen 1990.
a fixed place waiting for people to visit them, a good number travelled and combined it with peddling.

As with all professions, itinerant or not, abuse was possible and occurred now and then. Some fortune-tellers used their skills to lift their clients, for example, in cases of illness or bad luck (sick cattle) by suggesting that a spell was put on the unlucky farmer. In offering to lift the spell they would advise their clients to gather up all their valuables and bury them. After a set period of time the client was to dig these up again, after which the situation would be normal again. It needs little imagination to realise that in such cases the fortune-teller was ahead of the superstitious client.

*Seasonal labour*

Except for some Gypsies (as the coppersmiths and bear leaders) most of them combined all kinds of crafts and services in order to react to seasonal changes in demand and supply. History offers numerous examples of this economic flexibility. In nineteenth-century England, as we have seen, many Gypsies settled down during the winter months and made all kinds of products (clothes-peggs, skewers, flowers, etc.). At the beginning of spring they started to travel and sell their manufactured wares, as well as offer all kinds of services; during the summer many of them were hired as seasonal labourers, whereas during the autumn fairs were visited and trade was resumed.

Seasonal labour in agriculture was one of the few occupations that did involve wage-labour. In England agricultural employment was found chiefly in the South and the East. Seasonal workers, including Gypsy families, used to go from farm to farm following the ripening of the crops: hay-making, turnip-hoeing, pea-picking, wheat-fagging and strawberry-picking. The cycle was completed with the picking of hop. How large the number of Gypsies within the seasonal work force in England was, is not clear. According to a government report of 1907, between a quarter and a third of those picking peas in England were Gypsies. For hop-picking this number seems to have been much lower and here they were only a small minority; the bulk of the workers were Irish. Hiring Gypsies, especially women for fruit, could be advantageous for farmers because they brought their own accommodation with them. Remarkably enough the same report states that Gypsies had a standard of living and level of health far above that of the ordinary seasonal labourer. In Germany and France Gypsies are also reported as ‘hoppers’. In some Bavarian communities at the beginning of the twentieth century in the months August and

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29 Levy 1953: 133.
30 Cuttriss 1915: 68.
31 Mayall 1988: 63-64.
September an ‘international army’ of hop-pickers visited the area. Among them were many people with carts and caravans, generally labelled as Gypsies. They arrived some weeks earlier, not only to assure themselves of a spot to put their caravans, but also to make the baskets that were needed for the harvest. In other cases (potato harvest) farmers depended on (Gypsy) basket-weavers as well. They even used to save twigs so that the Gypsies would have enough material for the baskets needed and therefore not lose time.

This overview of the economic domain may be somewhat impressionistic, it shows that Gypsies cannot simply be portrayed as workshy criminals, nor as a people with a unchangeable nomadic character. Moreover, it makes clear that the interaction between Gypsies and others was much more varied than is often assumed. If this is so, however, it the question forces itself upon us why they have been treated in such a repressive way for so long.

**Stigmatisation and persecution in the early modern period**

The standard history of Gypsies in Western Europe reads as follows: Gypsies left their homeland India around the year 1000 and slowly migrated westward through Persia and Armenia to reach Byzantium and Greece in the eleventh century. They stayed for some time in the Balkans and then moved to Western Europe around 1400. Here they wandered from town to town proclaiming to be pilgrims from Egypt (hence ‘Egyptians’ from which the word ‘Gypsies’ is derived). At first they were welcomed and given alms, but soon the attitude changed and the Egyptians were more and more regarded as beggars, parasites and outright criminals. Their anti-social nomadic behaviour led increasingly to clashes with the authorities and from 1500 onwards a negative spiral of criminalisation and repression was set in motion, amounting during the first half of the eighteenth century in gypsy hunts and attempts to exterminate this group.

Although the stereotype of parasites and criminals has since the 1970s gradually been replaced by the image of nomadic, anarchistic victims of sedentary modernisation, the focus remained very much on repression and the discordant relationship with the sedentary society. A way out of this predominantly ethno-cultural explanatory framework was offered by the work of social historians as Zemon Davis, Hufton, Beier, Geremek, Danker and Schubert, to mention a few, who implicitly or explicitly integrated the gypsy tale in the changing attitude towards poverty, vagrancy and banditism.

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33 Fraser 1992: 1.
34 For a recent example see Fricke 1996.
Changing attitudes towards the poor in Early Modern Europe

According to Bronislaw Geremek, who wrote a number of fundamental and influential studies on the changing attitude in Europe towards the poor in general and vagrants in particular, the stigmatisation of travelling groups has its origin in the fourteenth century. Vagrancy was increasingly looked upon in a negative way and soon regarded as a crime in itself. The negative stereotyping culminated at the beginning of the sixteenth century in popular books as *Das Narrenschiff* (1494) the *Liber Vagatorum* (about 1510), and publications on the secret language of rogues. In these works people without a fixed abode were depicted as professional thieves, robbers and cheats. The spreading of this image, which strongly influenced public opinion and was supported by state and church alike, coincided with the emergence of a serious labour shortage. As a consequence of the plagues that almost halved Europe's working force wages rose fast and leading up to a short 'golden age' for workers. For many of them it could be profitable to leave their master and try to get another job with a higher wage. Employers, together with authorities, tried to prevent this by enlisting as many workers as possible. One of the measures to bind labour to capital and fix wages was the Statute of Labourers issued in England in 1351 and a similar act two years later in France. The result of these structural ideological and economic changes was the emergence of a repressive policy towards people looked upon as vagrants and an attempt to control labour migration. When during the ‘long sixteenth century’ the labour shortage disappeared due to population growth the stigmatisation of labour migration waned. The expanding economies needed seasonal labour and peddling middlemen, and repressing them would not have been very wise from an economic point of view. Moreover many of them, like the wandering craftsmen, ('Gesellen' in German), servants and seasonal labourers were part of more or less institutionalised systems with formal controls and often indentured contracts. This did not end the stigmatisation of Gypsies, because their visible travelling way of live underlined their status as 'masterless' men, which made them a threat to a well ordered society.

Equally important in explaining the ongoing stigmatisation of Gypsies, however, were the fundamental changes in the organisation of the poor relief. The initiative was taken by urban authorities who took over the coordination of the poor relief from the various private and religious bodies. This not only led to a more rational and bureaucratic distribution of alms, but also to the exclusion of alien beggars, whose stay in cities was formally forbidden from the

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35 Geremek 1980: 71; Woolf 1986: 17-18. According to Schubert (1995: 359-361) the stigmatisation became only effective after 1500 when itinerant groups and Gypsies lost their social and economic functionality and the state increased its claims to guarantee a 'well ordered society'.


37 Steinfeld 1991: 36.

38 Steinfeld 1991.
sixteenth century onwards. This does by no means imply that their entrance could be stopped. It was difficult to distinguish them from indigenous beggars, whereas many tolerated their stay and thus frustrated the official policy. Nevertheless, as time moved on, the attempts of the cities (and later also villages) to restrict the poor relief to their own people, made life more difficult for those who could not prove that they belonged in a certain place and stimulated a kind of local aliens policy avant la lettre. One of the aims of the reorganisation of the poor relief was to establish a better regulation and control over the labour reserves. As the demand for labour fluctuated strongly, it was important for the employers to offer relief during bad times. In Germany the main pillar of the exclusion policy of alien (alleged) poor was the Heimat-principle. Every city or village was given the right to send back aliens to the place where they were supposed to have some sort of citizenship, mostly the place of their birth. In many cases travelling people could not assert their rights and thus a class of wandering and illegal (to use the modern term) people was created.

It does not come as a surprise that quite soon after the reorganisation of the poor relief the acts and regulations aimed at repressing these vagrants proliferated, whereas the category was much broader defined and equalled with criminals. The implementation of the anti-vagrant legislation from the seventeenth century onwards proved to be quite difficult in practice. Not only because most states were quite weak and had to rely on local authorities and the cooperation of their citizens, but also because the distinction between the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ was less simple than the acts assumed. Moreover, the repressive policy was seriously weakened by the fact that many ‘bad’ migrants performed a variety of services, such as the catching of mice and rats, mending of kettles, playing music and peddling, which were valued by many people (including local authorities).

Notwithstanding these mediating influences, in the course of the seventeenth century, the number of edicts against vagrants became more numerous and the sanctions more and more extreme. Gypsies, often explicitly included in these decrees were increasingly regarded as the most dangerous subgroup and became the symbol for the unwanted itinerant. Their way of living, travelling with their families, seemed to indicate a permanent wandering, and being seen as aliens they could not just be sent back to their places of birth, so that the legislation simply forbade their stay in the country and aimed at expulsing them. Although these ‘Egyptians’ were pictured in ethnic terms (having a dark complexion, wearing a distinct costume), the edicts made clear that it was foremost their way of life that formed the core of the accusation, very similar to the accusations levelled against vagrants. In the course of the seventeenth century part of the

Gypsies and other itinerants, including Jews, became engaged in organised crime, and as a result the whole category became the target of, sometimes brutal, repression.41

State formation in an age of industrialism and urbanisation, 1815-1914

From the end of the eighteenth century onwards internal migration in Western Europe increased.42 Due to the ongoing commercialisation of the agricultural sector and the jerkily character of industrialisation jobs became less secure, leading to a growing mobility. In agriculture year-contracts were replaced by irregular demand, and in industry much work was still seasonal (construction), whereas factory work often was temporary as well. This unstable feature of labour markets caused many labourers to move constantly from one place to another. In view of the traditional ideas on migration and mobility it is not surprising that this situation led to growing concerns of the authorities. Migration may have been the rule, as it had been in pre-industrial Europe, the fear for a great mass of rootless and wandering paupers was widespread.

Apart from political disturbances, the fear for the mobile poor, especially those who were labelled as vagrants, seems to have been one of the major reasons for professionalising the police in Western Europe as well as in the Ottoman empire.43 This was especially the case in Great Britain. In the discussion on the professionalisation of the police in 1840-1850 the repression of vagrancy was stressed and crime was mainly associated with migrants.44 According to Steedman the County and Borrow Police Act (1856) was directly caused by the wish to repress vagrancy.45 The most important legal framework was the Vagrancy Act of 1824, characterised as ‘the most pernicious peace of legislation against Gypsies and travellers in the nineteenth century’.46 The definition of vagrant had become so wide and the discretionary power of the police so big that all obnoxious behaviour could be labelled as such. In practice, however, it was aimed in the first place against migrants. In France the professionalisation of the police was not only linked to vagrancy, but first of all to the insecure political situation and the fear for revolutions and disturbances of the public order.47 After 1850, however, criminality became a dominant theme and as in Great Britain the causes were primarily sought among the poor: unskilled, unemployed paupers and vagabonds, whose personal defects were thought to be responsible for their criminal

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41 Egmond 1993: 96.
43 Ergut 2002.
44 Emsley 1991: 49.
45 Steedman 1984: 57.
behaviour. The vagabond was depicted as the prototype of the criminal, because of his alleged refusal to work and to accumulate possessions.

In Germany the situation, at least before the unification, was more complicated and differed from state to state. In general, however, the police acted in a proactive way. This is especially well illustrated by the emergence of detailed extensive collective search warrants (*Actenmässige Nachrichten*) at the end of the eighteenth century. These contained dozens, hundreds sometimes even thousands of descriptions of people who were wanted or suspected of criminal acts (including vagrancy).\(^{48}\) Comprehensive information was given on numerous people who were labelled according to various stigmatised categories (Jew, Gypsy, vagrant). After the Napoleonic wars these warrants, often private initiatives of higher administrative civil servants, were slowly replaced by official police journals that appeared on a regular base. In these journals most attention was paid to the *gemeinschädliche Umhertreiber* (harmful tramps). Although most of them did not commit (serious) crimes, the police tried to establish a constant supervision and control, by spreading detailed information about them among the local police forces. As Lüdtke already observed, the tenor of executive police conduct was directly influenced by the increase in population and migratory movements.\(^{49}\)

*Waning of the Gypsy-stigmatisation after c. 1750*

The stigmatisation of Gypsies did not keep pace with that of vagrants. After the end of the gypsy hunts around 1750 the interest in this category waned for about a century. In some countries, like the Netherlands the authorities seemed to assume that they had vanished, whereas in other countries they received significantly less attention than before. As far as authorities were involved with Gypsies, it concerned attempts to civilise certain family groups, mostly by trying to make them sedentary, as examples in Württemberg, Austria-Hungary and Prussia show.\(^{50}\) It is not quite clear how this decrease in the stigmatisation has to be explained. It may have been partly caused by the general disappearance of banditism, with which Gypsies were often associated, but for a more satisfying explanation we have to look for structural causes. The first is, paradoxically, the emergence of the nation state and the transition from indirect to direct rule. Although one might expect that this would rather stimulate stigmatisation of irregular groups like Gypsies, it took quite some time before the national state became powerful enough to take over a number of vital functions that thus far had been exercised at the local level, especially by cities, such as

\(^{48}\) Lucassen 1996; Fahrmeier 2000: 67.
\(^{49}\) Lüdtke 1989: 82.
\(^{50}\) Willems 1997; 141-145; Fricke 1991; Danckwort 1995.
policing and poor relief. In the case of aliens control, from the second half of the 19th century onwards the central state (especially in Germany and Britain) gradually tried to monitor the migration of alien labour migrants by demanding some sort of national identification which guaranteed that the state of origin would take back the bearer in case of poverty.

This process of centralisation proved to be fertile soil for a renewed stigmatisation of gypsies. If we want to understand how and why, the German case is instructive. A good source are the already mentioned police journals. Although vagrants in general remained the most important target, from the 1830s onwards the labelling of certain families as ‘Gypsies’ (Zigeuner) gained ground. This was triggered by several factors: failure of the attempts to sedentarise Gypsies in Germany, a more ethno-cultural image of Gypsies, stimulated by the dissemination of a new scholarly paradigm that linked Gypsies to India, and the problems the police ran into when trying to document individual identity.

Gradually the problematisation led to a breakthrough during the 1860s in the sense that Gypsy became a ‘master’ category again. Although it is tempting to link this to the simultaneous migration of coppersmiths from Hungary bear leaders from Bosnia we mentioned in the first part of this paper, the changing role of the central state and the ethnic character of German citizenship seems to offer a more fruitful perspective. With the German unification under Bismarck in 1870 the nation building process got a strong impulse and one of the consequences was that those who were considered as alien to the German national body, such as the Poles, but also Gypsies from Eastern Europe, were seen as a threat. Secondly, we point at changes in the poor relief system in the 1860s, shifting the responsibility for (wandering) poor from the municipality of origin (the so-called Heimat principle) to the municipality of settlement (often the growing cities). This change brought about a much more negative attitude towards those newcomers at the local level who were considered (rightly or wrongly) as potential poor. Itinerant groups who travelled in families, and often in caravans, were highly visible and became one of the first objects of a repressive policy at the municipal level. This development has been documented in detail for the Netherlands by Annemarie Cottaar, who also demonstrated that this also marked the beginning of the emergence of indigenous Dutch caravan dwellers as a separate ethnic

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51 An interesting case is Britain. As Feldman (1999) has shown, the British state was not interested in aliens, who were looked after by their own communities, but very much in the (massive) immigration of Irish workers, who were treated as internal migrants and who were frequently expelled to Ireland, because of the locally based poor relief system.
52 Lucassen 2001; Feldman 1999.
53 Lucassen 1996.
54 Willems 1997.
55 Especially the use of fake names and alibis was deemed highly suspect (see also Singha 2000: 155).
Thirdly, after the unification the central state under Bismarck became much more active in the social and economic domain, which gave an important impulse to the further implementation of creating a well ordered state and establishing the identity of its citizens. One of the consequences was that itinerant groups within the Reich, often without a fixed abode, were increasingly treated with suspicion and repressed.

This tendency was reinforced by the specialisation within police forces that took place in the last decades of the nineteenth century throughout Western Europe. In the wake of the general bureaucratisation that accompanied state formation in Western Europe, special branches were established for the surveillance of ‘social problems’ as prostitution, aliens, vagrants and in some countries Gypsies. Strongly influenced by the general negative ideas on travelling groups, the sections that occupied themselves with these categories could to some extent gain autonomy and the power to define the problems in their own perception and interest, if only to justify their existence. Around 1900 the two main thriving objectives of the policy towards travelling groups were sedentarism and regular work, and - in the case of foreigners - expulsion. The result of this development is that the demarcation line between nationals and foreigners on the one hand and normal and anti-social citizens at the other was more and more stressed.

Overviewing the attitude towards Gypsies in Western Europe we conclude that its system of rule was characterised by an inability to deal with highly mobile groups that could not be fixed administratively. From a political and ideological point of view they were regarded as a threat to a well ordered society, whereas in a socio-economic domain they did not fit in the poor relief systems. In order to deepen our understanding of these two shortcomings, we will make two comparisons with systems of rule under which Gypsies were treated with more tolerance, the Ottoman empire and pre colonial India.

Contrasting comparisons and the impact of administrative regimes: the Ottoman Empire and pre colonial India

In a recent article Zoltan Barany argues that the treatment of Gypsies under Habsburg and Ottoman rule was quite different from that in Western-Europe. Although both states were multi-ethnic empires, especially the Ottoman empire through its millet system offered a better social environment for a relatively harmonious and enduring ethnic coexistence. To explain the diver-

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56 Cottaar 1996.
58 Barany 2001. See also Fraser 1992: 173-178. It should be noted, though, that historical research on Gypsies under Ottoman rule is rare, at least as far as we can judge from publications in Western-European languages. A
gent developments in Western Europe and the Ottoman empire three more or less independent variables seem to matter: the nature of state formation, the organisation of social life and the position of gypsies in society. The distinct path of state formation of the Ottoman empire has been noted by many scholars. Many have stressed the weakness of the central state in monopolising violence and monitoring its population, which is commonly seen as the cause of the illness of the ‘sick man of Europe’. Recently Karen Barkey has criticised this interpretation and argued that at least for the seventeenth century, this alleged weakness in fact was its strength because the central state neutralised its potential enemies (peasants and local elites) by a process of negociation and incorporation.\(^5^9\) A consequence of this Ottoman ‘route to state centralism’ was that phenomena which were seen by Western European states as threatening, such as vagrancy and banditism could very well be incorporated and even used to consolidate the power of the central state. Vagrancy resulting in banditism among landless peasants, especially in Anatolia, became a wide spread phenomenon in the second half of the sixteenth century.\(^6^0\) Although these groups caused a lot of misery in the countryside, the Ottoman state, very differently from France or German states, used these groups on a regular basis as additional soldiers and to fight local power holders, who at times when they were without a job hired these men as well. Thus these armed vagrants turned into permanent mercenaries rotated through society and depended one way or another on the central state.

The distinct feature of Ottoman society was the already mentioned millet system, which ordered social life differently from Western Europe. In stead of local civic communities within a common judicial system Ottoman villages and cities were pillarized through millets with religion as ordering principle: Muslims, various sorts of Christians and Jews Gypsies were the only category which was constituted on an ethnic basis. Within these millets guilds played a central role in in- and excluding people from, among other things, poor relief. these guilds were much more all embracing than their Western variant. In principle all occupations, also the ‘immoral’ professions such as entertainers, were organised in guilds who’s functions spread over all aspects of social and institutional life. Moreover, they were moulded from above to ensure the central state the collection of taxes and the administration of its subjects.\(^6^1\)

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good summary can be found in Fraser (1992). Furthermore we consulted Marushiakova & Popov (1997) who used Turkish, Serbian and Bulgarian sources and literature.


\(^6^0\) Inalcik 1984: 285.

\(^6^1\) Baer 1970; Edhem et al. 1999: 161-162.
Due to the continuous migration into towns in the Early Modern period pressure upon
the guilds to be included was strong,\textsuperscript{62} but - as far as we know -\textsuperscript{63} this did not lead to
stigmatization of itinerant groups or poor migrants similar as in Western Europe. In the case of
Gypsies this is furthermore explained, and here we touch upon the third factor, by the fact that
many of them were sedentary and, moreover, organised in their own millet and living in their
own city district.\textsuperscript{64} On the social position of Gypsies not much is known, but their presence in
the Balkans has been unveiled to some extent by recent research, especially in Bulgaria. The
presence of Gypsies in Bulgaria probably predated the invasion of the Ottoman army in the
second half of the 14th century. In addition many Gypsies entered the Balkans as part of the
Ottoman army (servants and craftsmen) and then settled there, both in sedentary and nomadic
forms, starting in Bulgarian lands.\textsuperscript{65} In the archives of the central government and local
administration they are called \textit{chingene}, \textit{chingane}, \textit{chigan} or \textit{kibti}. Although a growing number of
them became Muslims (especially from the 17th century onwards), they had to pay head tax
(\textit{haradzh}) regardless of their faith. Only the black smiths in service of the army, who lived in
fortresses, were exempted. The latter had a special status and belonged to a special Gypsy
\textit{sandzhaq}, a non territorial administrative unit.

Most Gypsies settled and only a minority consisted of wandering groups. Both were
distributed over different special tax units (\textit{dzhemaats}). Some of them gave up traditional itinerant
occupations and turned to farming. Most however, held on to a great variety of itinerant trades,
especially blacksmiths and musicians, but also tinkers, goldsmiths, shoers, sieve-makers, tailors
and servants. Next to the fundamental division of the population in faithful and \textit{raya} (mostly
Christian), Gypsies were given a special ambiguous status. Contrary to the general rule they seem
to have been categorised according to their ethnic roots and ideosyncratic religious practices.
Compared with the situation in the Habsburg empire and Western Europe, their position seems
to have been less problematic. This is confirmed by the large-scale migration into Ottoman lands
from run away gypsy-slaves from the neighbouring vassal principalities of Wallachia and
Moldavia throughout the Early modern period. The relative favourable position of the Gypsies
under Ottoman rule may partly be explained by the fact that many of them were sedentary, but
also those who continued a nomadic way of life seem to have been left in peace and not regarded
as a threat to a well ordered society.

\textsuperscript{62} Inalcik & Quataert 1994: 697.
\textsuperscript{63} The problem is that not much has been published on poor relief systems in the Ottoman empire.
\textsuperscript{65} This paragraph is mainly based on Marushiakova & Popov 1997: 18-27.
The fact these ghezende also were 'legible', to paraphrase James Scott, through the system of flexible administrative units (dzhemaat), may have played a role, in addition to the pillarization embodied by the different millets. Finally it is important to realise that itinerant Gypsies were by no means the only nomadic group. Much more numerous were nomadic pastoral tribes, such as the Yörüks and the Turcoman tribes. Although they posed administrative problems to the authorities, they constituted an integral part of the sedentary society and fulfilled certain functions without which the society would not have been able to survive. The Ottoman state realised this and gave each clan a yurt, summer and winter pasturelands with fixed limits and well circumscribed in the imperial registers.

These still very preliminary conclusions from the Ottoman case (which need further substantiation) strengthens our idea that the diverging treatment of Gypsies in South-East and Western Europe is not only explained by differences in the approach to ethnic and other minorities, as has been put forward by Barany, but has also to do with the fact that Gypsies could be 'caught' by the state in an administrative sense and as members of a well circumscribed unit did not pose a (free rider) threat to the general principles of the poor relief system. In addition, it is possible that the fear in Western Europe for 'masterless men', was less pronounced in the Ottoman empire, because the state tried to solve the shortage of manpower by raiding the non occupied part of Balkans and other foreign territories for slaves, thereby keeping the population under their rule out of range.

Another interesting case is India before and during colonial rule. Pre-colonial India, especially under (Muslim) Mughal rule, has long been depicted as an anarchy personal despotisms, which stood at the basis of an anti-capitalist 'Asiatic mode of production'. More recent work has criticised this view by pointing out the dynamic and class aspects of Indian society, such as the commercialisation in the 18th century. There is less dispute over the nature of the 'fiscal-military state'. Most historians agree that this state, through many intermediaries, like warlords, Hindu kings and regional potentates, was mainly interested in extracting taxes from the village communities through their headmen. The central state, nor the local potentates, seem to have been motivated to repress mobility or to create a 'well ordered society' in a Western European

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69 Toledano 1982.
70 This image is quite tenacious as the recent study of Landes (1998) proves.
71 Bayly 1988. See also Goody 1996.
sense. This may have been partly due to the pioneer character of Indian society. As the English historian Bayly stated:

"Indian society in the eighteenth century was typical of other frontier societies in that the internal extent of the state's influence and of the arable economy with its more hierarchical landed society was constant in flux. Migration was followed by counter-migration, especially across the great empty lands of the Deccan. Settled society and its values were not irrevocably divided from the frontier; they were in a state of mutual dependence."73

As a large part of India before colonial rule was occupied by unsettled, semi-nomadic people, their position in society at large was quite different from that in Western Europe. Furthermore it is relevant to note that – in contrast to the classical static image – labour was scarce and migration necessary and an accepted phenomenon.

Finally, as far as we know, no comparable poor relief system existed at the local level, so migration and itinerancy were regarded less problematic than in contemporary Western Europe. As a consequence rulers seemed to allow itinerant groups, such as pilgrims, pastoral nomads, peddlers, musicians etc. to travel without any form of control, independent of any political authority.74 This situation appalled British colonial rulers when they tried to settle the population, because of tax and police, in the 19th century. They saw themselves confronted with an 'illegible' population, both in an economic and in a social sense. The social manifested itself in the impotence of the colonial rulers to categorise the indigenous population in a hierarchical sense and to distinguish between honest and dishonest subjects. British colonial rulers therefore deemed it of utmost importance to establish a firm system of personal identification embedded in distinct (caste like) collectivities. Moreover, with their European conception of vagrancy they were astonished by the tolerance that the Indian society displayed towards 'vagrant' communities, such as the Badbaks or the Maghiya Doms. A second reason to make the population legible and to monitor geographical mobility was the need to mobilise labour for public works, plantations and mining enclaves. The most important legal framework to combat undesirable mobility and to establish personal identity was the Criminal Tribes Act for, issued in 1871, which was too a large extent stimulated by the European vagrancy acts. Is cannot be a coincidence that that a similar development took place during the Ottoman Tanzimat era (18390-1876) and the following rule of Abdülhamid (1876-1909) when centralisation after the French model replaced the earlier

decentralised model. As in India Western European concepts of vagrancy were introduced and enshrined in explicit anti vagrancy Laws.\textsuperscript{75}

**Conclusion**

In this paper we have tried to reach a better understanding of the way various itinerant groups who travelled with their families, labelled as Gypsies, have been treated in Western Europe from the fifteenth century onwards. Notwithstanding considerable differences between regions and time periods, we think that a number of general conclusions can be drawn. First of all we have argued that it is essential to study the day to day interaction at the local level and avoid a one-sided top down repression history. By concentrating on the social and economic functions of Gypsies in various regions and looking at the relation with both local authorities and ordinary people, it follows that in spite of the general repression of vagrancy and Gypsy groups, in many cases itinerant groups because of the services they offered were more integrated in society than is often assumed. Moreover, we argued that the legal rhetoric of extreme repression was only effective in certain periods and in certain regions, whereas the extent to which they were accepted and given the possibility to lead their itinerant live, depended on the group and the specific local context. During the hop picking season in England and Germany, well into the 20th century, for example, they were left in peace, whereas these same groups may have been chased as peddlers or musicians at other moments. This more nuanced and differentiated view of the place of Gypsies in Western European societies is of course very general and there is still a lot of work to be done to specify these conditions.

A second conclusion of this paper is that there are two important factors which stimulated the stigmatisation of Gypsies. The first is closely linked with the path of state formation. With the emergence of dynastic states in Early modern Europe, rulers left less room for subjects who remained out of its reach. Vagrants and itinerant groups, Gypsies in particular, were increasingly seen as a threat to society, which was in essence considered as sedentary. In this sense we agree with the German historian Schubert that the end of the Middle Ages around 1500 marked the beginning of a much more problematic relationship between the state and Gypsies. Equally important, and closely linked to the concept of a well ordered society, is the functioning of the poor relief. The restructuring of this system in the same period led to the stigmatisation of

\textsuperscript{74} Singha 2000: 152-157.  
\textsuperscript{75} Ergut 2002.
those who did not have a fixed abode and who as a consequence were not integrated in these locally based arrangements. 76

The structural inability or weakness of the European well ordered societies to deal with Gypsies was finally accentuated by the (admittedly sketchy) comparisons with the Ottoman empire and pre-colonial India. Both cases highlight the two key variables for our understanding of the antagonistic relationship between them and the state. On the one hand the desire to bring subjects under direct control and to make population-groups legible and on the other hand the double faced nature of poor relief systems, which by laying down the rules for inclusion based on a sedentary model irreversibly excluded and stigmatised highly mobile groups.

76 This theme also needs to be researched more thoroughly. It would especially be interesting to compare the position of Gypsies and other itinerants in different types of poor relief system, for example those in England, France and Germany.
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