

*Migration in
European History*

Klaus J. Bade

Translated by Allison Brown

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Migration in European History

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Series Editor's Preface

Europe is in the making. This is both a great challenge and one that can be met only by taking the past into account – a Europe without history would be orphaned and unhappy. Yesterday conditions today; today's actions will be felt tomorrow. The memory of the past should not paralyse the present: when based on understanding it can help us to forge new friendships, and guide us towards progress.

Europe is bordered by the Atlantic, Asia and Africa, its history and geography inextricably entwined, and its past comprehensible only within the context of the world at large. The territory retains the name given it by the ancient Greeks, and the roots of its heritage may be traced far into prehistory. It is on this foundation – rich and creative, united yet diverse – that Europe's future will be built.

The Making of Europe is the joint initiative of five publishers of different languages and nationalities: Beck in Munich; Blackwell in Oxford; Critica in Barcelona; Laterza in Rome; and le Seuil in Paris. Its aim is to describe the evolution of Europe, presenting the triumphs but not concealing the difficulties. In their efforts to achieve accord and unity the nations of Europe have faced discord, division and conflict. It is no purpose of this series to conceal these problems: those committed to the European enterprise will not succeed if their view of the future is unencumbered by an understanding of the past.

The title of the series is thus an active one: the time is yet to come when a synthetic history of Europe will be possible. The books we shall publish will be the work of leading historians, by no means all European. They will address crucial aspects of European history in every field – political, economic, social, religious and cultural. They will draw on that long historiographical tradition which stretches back to Herodotus, as well as on those conceptions and ideas which have transformed historical

enquiry in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. They will write readably for a wide public.

Our aim is to consider the key questions confronting those involved in Europe's making, and at the same time to satisfy the curiosity of the world at large: in short, who are the Europeans? where have they come from? whither are they bound?

Jacques Le Goff

Preface and Acknowledgements

The subject of migration is experiencing a negative boom in Europe. This has to do with global migration problems and European fears of growing ‘migration pressure’. Current interests also raise questions regarding the history of migration to, from and within Europe, since twenty-first-century migratory processes can be better assessed if already completed – that is, past – processes are understood and the lines of development leading to present-day problems are known.

This book is intended as a contribution to that end. It goes beyond the narrower scope of migration research to reach a broader public concerned with migration in the past and in the present. I have therefore refrained from including an introductory discussion of the current state of international research and the different methodological approaches that have been adopted by scholars in the interdisciplinary field of social and cultural history research on migration.¹ Any of these aspects that are necessary for understanding the approach will be briefly explained in the text. I would, however, like to offer a few preliminary comments.

There has been a *Homo migrans*² for as long as *Homo sapiens* has existed, since migrations are as much part of the human condition as birth, reproduction, sickness and death. Migrations as social processes, with the exception of refugee and forced migration situations, are responses to more or less complex economic, environmental, social and cultural conditions of basic survival. The history of migration is thus always also part of human history in general and can only be understood against that background. This applies equally to the history of European migrations, yet the concept of Europe and its borders has changed over the course of centuries. The question that then arises – how European history should be perceived and written – has long been a subject of

research³ and is currently of great significance within the context of European unification at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

When researching European history, migration historians are confronted with an extraordinarily complex historical reality. For one thing, not only did people move over borders, but borders moved over people. Furthermore, even the attempt to 'order' historical migration processes is a very abstract and artificial exercise, since migration patterns,⁴ like migration behaviour, assumed many different forms whose boundaries overlapped or were constantly shifting and blurred.

In geographical terms, despite considerable overlap it is possible to distinguish among, for example, emigration, immigration and internal migrations. It is also helpful to ask what were the causes, motivations and aims of these migrations. Economic and socio-occupational considerations, for example, can be further narrowed down, distinguishing between employment migrations as subsistence migration or betterment migration, and career migrations for the purpose of attaining further qualifications or training, or migration within branches of one company. Survival migrations, involving people for whom the late twentieth century coined the collective term 'environmental refugees', also took place owing to loss or destruction of economic means of subsistence and were thus ultimately also motivated by economic factors. Migrations for such reasons can in turn be viewed as separate from refugee or forced migrations on religious, ideological, political, ethnonationalist or racism-related grounds. These include the expulsions and forced resettlements of the twentieth century in which movements of people over borders were often the result of borders shifting over people.

Migratory patterns can also be sought, again bearing in mind the numerous transitions and intermediary forms, by distinguishing between local and circular, and between temporary (e.g., migration for work or training) and permanent (e.g., emigration and immigration). Transitions from temporary to permanent forms were usually marked by chain migrations. Migration traditions that developed through the migratory events themselves, together with the transfer of information between places of origin and destination via migration networks, accompanied and at the same time stabilized circular migration systems and emigration and immigration movements. In places of origin, they helped determine destinations and often led immigrants in their new regions into communities based on common origin, which greatly facilitated immigration and integration.⁵

This diversity of overlapping forms of mobility, behaviour patterns and collective motivations was even greater in the historical reality. It becomes yet more difficult to comprehend if historical change and changes in cultural and milieu-specific perspectives and contemporary

descriptive forms are taken into consideration. 'Emigration', for example, was a central leitmotif in nineteenth-century Europe – with the exception of France – yet not in preceding centuries. Even within the nineteenth century, as we shall see, the ordinary person's dream that 'emigration' would bring happiness in the 'New World', despite pragmatic considerations and information from transatlantic networks, had little in common with a cosmopolitan businessman setting up a branch office in the United States as a better production location or market for his goods. In addition, scholars are only now beginning to consider gender-specific differences in emigration behaviour and coping strategies for migration.⁶ Cultural, milieu- and gender-based differences as well as regional diversity and fluid boundaries in the course of epochal change raise particular periodization problems.⁷

For decades there have been demands for European history and even world history to be written as a history of migrations. These demands remained unsatisfied into the 1990s,⁸ even for the European perspective, with the exception of Alexander and Eugen M. Kulischer's world history of migration,⁹ E. M. Kulischer's European history of migrations during the world wars,¹⁰ and a few edited collections¹¹ and stocktaking reports and syntheses geared to the second half of the twentieth century.¹² Efforts to approach this ambitious goal – beyond numerous offerings on the history of emigration or immigration of individual countries – usually restricted themselves to a particular time frame and were either specific in form and geographically non-specific, or specific in terms of geography and open as regards form. Subjects included certain types of migration in an extended area covering several countries, such as emigration from Europe¹³ or labour migration in the Atlantic realm in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries;¹⁴ refugee migration to, from and within Europe in the twentieth century;¹⁵ cross-border migration systems such as the North Sea system from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries;¹⁶ and all migration in a particular region and beyond its borders in longitudinal historical studies¹⁷ or comparative international or intercultural histories of migratory and diaspora experiences and cultural identity issues.¹⁸

In contrast to those works, this book considers migration to, from and within Europe over a range of eras, countries and migration types. A relatively recent initial approach of this type is Leslie Page Moch's 1992 book *Moving Europeans: Migration in Western Europe since 1650*.¹⁹ Focusing on economic and social history as well as cultural history, this pioneering study deals primarily with changes in the four aspects of landholding distribution, demand for employment, population and settlement structures and capital movements as material determinants in migratory events. The main time period under discussion is from the

seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, and the twentieth century is only briefly considered at the end. In contrast, the present book focuses on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – apart from a retrospective discussion in chapter 1 and other comparisons that refer back to the eighteenth century – with special attention to the period following the Second World War and more recent problems at the close of the twentieth century. In addition to economic, social and cultural aspects, political factors will also be especially stressed.

This is due to the fact that the basic conditions of transnational migration have undergone significant change. The period of European migration history from the early nineteenth century to the eve of the First World War was dominated by ‘proletarian mass migrations’.²⁰ It was determined to an unprecedented and never repeated extent by the freedom to migrate across borders. The subsequent ‘century of refugees’²¹ or of the ‘homeless man’²² was an era – continuing into the twenty-first century in this respect – in which migration movements in the European and Atlantic realms were triggered or forced, and at the same time regulated and limited, as never before by political developments and state-determined conditions. This epochal change in political and state conditions must be brought to bear in any account of twentieth-century European migration.²³

The area under investigation ranges from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean and from the British Isles to east central Europe. Origin and destination regions outside this major area, such as the European part of Russia, will be included as necessary to explain migration contexts. This also applies, more or less, to selected non-European destination regions of migrations from Europe, such as the United States, in so far as this seems relevant in explaining the determining factors and underlying conditions that led to emigration.

Having considered several different criteria – chronological, systematic, typological – by which to structure the book, I rejected all of them in favour of a mixed form based on structure and epoch. In this way areas of overlap can be underlined without unnecessary repetition and contexts highlighted by means of cross-references. The book does not attempt to achieve encyclopaedic comprehensiveness, which is all but impossible, but presents typical examples and is not afraid to admit that gaps exist. This also applies to the notes and bibliography, which had to be kept as concise as possible.

In working on this book I received much assistance, for which I am very grateful. I would like to thank my life partner Susanne Meyer, who is also a historian and who accompanied me through the production of the manuscript from the outset, for her encouragement, patience and helpful criticism. The third part of the book is based essentially on the research

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Osnabrück

1

Migration during the Shift from Agrarian to Industrial Societies

1 MIGRATORY TRADITIONS AND SYSTEMS AT THE END OF THE EARLY MODERN ERA

Old Europe was a turbulent world on the streets of which itinerants, vagabonds and distinguished travellers encountered one another daily.¹ In the eighteenth century, the spectrum extended from young aristocrats aboard their coaches on a gentleman's excursion, to travel groups taking a grand tour to Italy, to travelling journeymen and heavily laden itinerant traders, right the way down to all kinds of riff-raff who never let foreign lands seem totally free of danger.²

A wide variety of migrant groups covered great distances in early modern Europe by sea or by land, either temporarily or permanently. There were employment migrations that included architects, artists and technical experts, seasonal labour migrants and itinerant merchants with a fixed residential base, transient labourers and traders without a residence, mercenaries, seamen, those working in colonial service and many others. There were settlement migrations, for example, to populate Prussia and Austria-Hungary, or to settle colonists in the Russia of Catherine the Great. Between overseas labour migration and colonial settler migration were the transatlantic migration of indentured servants, who worked in servitude in the 'New World' to pay their passage, at the end of which they often received a minimum start capital and/or a piece of land. There were also refugees and those expelled for religious reasons whose immigration was frequently viewed by the authorities of the receiving country as a welcome transfer of innovation and a strengthening of the country's industrious reputation, and in any case as an expansion of the working population and thus tax revenue. Huguenots and Waldenses in the seventeenth century and the Salzburgs in the eighteenth are the best

known though by no means the only examples. In addition to the many temporary and permanent migrations over long distances, migrants, both men and women, also covered small to intermediate geographical distances between rural settlements or between the countryside and the growing cities with their enticing labour markets and their offer of 'freedom'. In virtually all areas of life and work, a large number of people covered ground and moved on, in one way or another, either voluntarily or against their will.

The diversity of forms encompassed by the word 'migration' in the highly mobile early modern age can hardly be ignored, and in some areas has not yet been adequately explored. The intention here is not merely to expand the list of works that offer orientation in this regard.³ Let us instead choose two examples to create a bridge back into late Old Europe before the industrial age. We shall examine two widespread, long-established major forms from the area of employment migration: labour migration and itinerant trade. Both emerged largely against the background of a disproportionate relationship between population growth and available work options. This situation had been intensifying especially in rural areas since the mid-eighteenth century. In the demographic '*crise européenne*'⁴ from the early seventeenth to the early eighteenth centuries, numerous wars, principally the Thirty Years' War in central Europe, and the accompanying yet also independently raging famine and epidemics, led in certain regions to a severe population decline. Not until 1700 had a population level around an estimated 115 million been achieved. Even before the mid-eighteenth century, the population started increasing dramatically, once again varying greatly from region to region. The population of Europe rose to about 185 million around 1800 and continued to climb, finally leading to the population boom of the industrial age.⁵

At first this population growth in central Europe essentially filled the gap left by the population decline from the period that became largely symbolized by deserted settlements, with their empty, plundered and dilapidated residences. For survivors, this might have served as a kind of crisis-related social compensation in which the redistribution of goods and opportunities in some regions even took on aspects of an economic miracle. But even in areas that continued to be affected by previous declines in population, the size of especially the landless population increased at the latest as of the mid-eighteenth century beyond the limits of available work. In rural areas, high natural fertility rate among these sub-peasant social classes acted in combination with their increase in numbers as a result of social decline due to exclusion from landholding. Manorial property structures as well as forms of cultivation limited the available agricultural land area. Inheritance rights in which an entire

estate was transferred largely to one heir, usually the first-born, and division of land among all heirs had the same social repercussions in cases of high population growth: whenever offspring were excluded from inheritance or heirs could not subsist from the parcel of land they received, the growing army of those with little or no land continued to multiply through social decline.

In addition, another destabilizing factor, varying in degree from region to region, affected the precarious demographic-economic balance in areas with significant proto-industrial cottage production. These family-run home industries, which also included a large number of poor urban households, were mainly transplanted to the countryside by urban businesspeople and capitalist trade distributors and were ostracized by the urban guilds. They were tied to interregional and even intercontinental markets through trade by the distributors and wholesalers. Proto-industrial cottage production encompassed a broad spectrum of products ranging from linen and blended fabrics to haberdashery, wood, clay, copper and hardware products and all kinds of consumer goods for everyday use. Despite the frequently exploitative nature of the capitalist distribution system, in many areas it was often the only opportunity for those with little or no land to have a sole or additional family income that could remain fairly stable in good economic times. The comparatively secure, albeit low, income and the fact that children did not have to leave the house to work but could be used in the family's own cottage production had immense consequences for natural population developments. In many places, the population involved in cottage industries soon grew beyond the limits of what the domestic production system could absorb.⁶

Where even the proto-industrial domestic system could no longer resolve the disproportionate relationship between population growth and job availability, or if the population dilemma even intensified, the necessity for employment migration grew. If tools and production sites did not belong to the distributor or if credit financing or high debts led to an impossible situation of dependency, cottage producers turned to selling their own products. This usually involved itinerant trading in the local rural area or through sales at nearby city markets. When selling their own products over long distances, some family members became temporarily unavailable for cottage production. These early forms of overlap between independent production and travelling sales were maintained only in isolated cases, however. The situation was similar for labour migrants whose family income was still insufficient despite seasonal migration in summer, and who therefore strove to increase their income in the winter through the sale of cottage industry products. Usually, however, intensive proto-industrial domestic production represented a major wage-earning alternative to labour migration until it was

pushed out entirely by machine competition in the early nineteenth century.

Labour migration and itinerant trade were the two most important forms of employment migration. They ranged from local movements to long-distance migrations of hundreds of kilometres. Both were stabilized by family or group-related migratory traditions, sometimes over generations. In contrast to the 'floating population' or traders and artisans without a fixed residential base and to other marginal migrant groups⁷ who were mobile or even nomadic more or less as a means of survival, labour migration and itinerant trade refer to employment migration aimed at supplementing a basic – albeit insufficient – livelihood at a fixed location. It originated largely in rural areas, usually consisting of subsistence farming and/or proto-industrial cottage production. On this basis, labour migration was temporary work, preferably in wage-intensive regions with an additional demand for seasonal workers. Itinerant trade refers to the independent sale of goods produced in ('direct trade') or purchased from ('indirect trade') cottage industries, as well as non-self-employed travelling traders ('hired traders') or independent traders, usually established as an amalgamation of equal partners to form so-called trade companies. Rarer mixed forms of labour migration and itinerant trade included travelling sale of goods combined with service offers in the product range, such as tinkers who dealt with both new and used copper goods.⁸

This secondary supplement to an insufficient primary means of income in the place of origin could develop into a second main income source, depending on how much it contributed to the family income. In the absence of the husband as the main breadwinner, agricultural and/or cottage industry production was carried on by the rest of the family, under the wife's direction, who was then no less a main breadwinner. Labour migration and itinerant trade could also become the main income source. In such cases, agrarian subsistence production in the place of origin was downgraded to become a secondary business or subsistence gardening if the migrant labourers spent only the winter months at home, when there was no demand in the destination regions for their labour, which was usually in agriculture or outdoors. The same was true for itinerant traders if the main breadwinner was on the road not only during the spring and autumn months, which were generally favourable for sales since rural customers were more accessible, but was absent most of the year.⁹

In addition to migration by the main breadwinner in order to support the family, younger family members of working age also migrated, sometimes in combination with forms of apprenticeship migration, for the same purpose or to start up their own household. Apart from rural or

agricultural jobs outside the home for young men and women, work was available in the trades or services in nearby cities, while domestic service provided an urban job opportunity especially for young women from the countryside looking for employment outside agriculture.¹⁰ There were also diverse ways of relieving the burden on the family household by temporarily sending younger able-bodied family members off to fend for themselves outside the home. This was a side-effect of journeyman migrations, which in addition to their training purpose also served to exclude the individual for a period of time from the limited and inflexible local job market, in the system that required them to earn their 'honest bread'.¹¹

There were also a number of regionally varied forms of exclusion from the household for the purpose of temporary self-sufficiency and modest supplementary earnings to the family income. Among these were numerous migratory traditions within the area of child labour, especially in barren mountainous regions. Up until the First World War this pertained, for example, to the so-called 'Swabian children' from Tyrol and Vorarlberg who went abroad to work each spring after attending a short 'winter school' at home. After several days' walk, the 'shepherd children', boys and girls from poor mountain peasant families, were offered for work in the countryside until autumn by their 'leaders' at the child markets in Upper Swabia, Friedrichshafen and Ravensburg. The girls generally cared for children and the boys usually worked as shepherds. Many also came alone or in groups to offer their services. Wages included free room and board, new clothing and possibly shoes, and a total remuneration that amounted to about 50–70 Reichsmarks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although this was a desirable additional source of earnings for the mountain peasant families, the main objective was to 'remove the children from the table'.¹² The situation regarding labour migration of children from northern Italy, Savoy and Ticino remained somewhat similar until the Second World War. Especially well known were the movements of 'Ticino chimneysweep children' to European countries north of the Alps from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries within the scope of poverty-induced south-north child migrations.

Labour migration was often not a migration of skilled workers but was instead tied directly to processes of obtaining qualifications. Recent studies of pewterers of Italian descent who spread out throughout Europe, for example, have shown that there was no pewtering or pewterware trade in the small, clearly defined region west of Lake Maggiore from where they originated. Training as a pewterer was generally acquired through an apprenticeship migration, that is, after leaving the homeland. This was true also of brickmakers from Lippe, the leading

brickmakers in north-western Europe. No notable brickwork trade had existed in the small principality of Lippe-Detmold, their place of origin. Over the course of generations the specific 'migrant occupation' of brick-maker was learned in the areas to which they migrated.¹³ Aside from long-distance migrations, there was also a variety of forms of migrant movements over short or intermediate distances. This included countless migratory cycles between small and medium-sized cities and their rural surroundings, in which there was sometimes a blurring of the boundaries between apprenticeship, subsistence and employment migrations.¹⁴ This diversity of migratory patterns will recede to the background in our examination of the two larger movements of employment migration. It should always be kept in mind, however, that alongside and even within major migration cycles, there were usually also many smaller active cycles.

With respect to medium- and long-range labour migration and itinerant trade, migration cycles could become consolidated into structurally stable, long-term 'migratory systems'¹⁵ with firmly established migratory traditions that often continued over generations. Migration networks in and between the regions of origin and destination were extremely important, not so much for their geographical dimensions as for their communicative and social aspects, which defined the direction of migrations and ensured the continuity of their traditions.¹⁶ Selected examples from the history of labour migration and itinerant trade in Europe at the end of the early modern age will be used to discuss such major systems. In both cases, an overview of the general contexts will be presented first, then some systems will be considered in different European regions, and finally one example of each will be selected and described in detail. Both examples, the North Sea system (labour migration) and the *Tödden* system (itinerant trade), come from north-western Europe and have been chosen because they have been particularly well researched in all their complexity.

Labour migration

Common ground

In rural regions with heavy population growth and insufficient job opportunities, a wide range of labour migrations expanded in the early modern age, and especially since the mid-eighteenth century. Few statistics are available in this area for early modern Europe. A rare exception is the questionnaires on *migration temporaire* drafted towards the end of the period by the French interior minister Comte de Montalivet and used

by the prefects under Napoleon. These questionnaires were designed to make it easier to recruit cannon fodder for the insatiable French army. In his classic study on systems of labour migration in early modern Europe, Jan Lucassen evaluated extant questionnaires in Paris with answers from the years 1808–13. His findings provide the basis for the following discussion.

From around 20 verifiable migratory labour systems around the turn of the nineteenth century in the European realm, Lucassen was able to reconstruct seven larger systems that had been formed significantly earlier. Around the turn of the century, more than 300,000 labourers migrated over distances up to 250–300 kilometres, even across national borders. The questionnaires on home regions and migration destinations enabled Lucassen to distinguish between movements out of ‘push areas’ and into ‘pull areas’ and to devise migratory labour systems of large groups with a work cycle determined by phases of fixed and distant residences, that is, by domestic and non-domestic phases. It was also possible to discern ‘neutral areas’ that were left untouched by the bulk of such systems or any migratory movement whatsoever. Lucassen worked at three analytical levels: macro (home regions/destinations), meso (work cycles) and micro (households). He modelled mirror-images between each of these to demonstrate the ‘symbiotic’ nature of migratory labour systems fixed by established migration traditions.¹⁷ These findings, elaborated through further research and supplemented by other studies, lead to a kind of ideal typology of relationships between home regions and destination regions in migratory labour systems at the turn of the nineteenth century which reveals the following overall picture.

Home regions were generally characterized by structurally deficient options for work owing to environmental, economic, demographic and social factors; insufficient agricultural yield potential, in barren mountainous areas for example, yet also in lowlands with poor-quality soil; inefficient small businesses; excessive land prices; high rents for additional leased land that could be paid only through supplementary earnings; high population density with an upward trend due to high natural growth, and at the same time highly polarized land distribution with large fertile areas in few hands and small infertile areas in many. A decisive factor for seasonal labour migration with a fixed annual rhythm was the existence of a main, if insufficient, financial base in the place of origin with periods when one or more potential workers were available.

For poor subsistence farmers, the time between the end of the spring planting and the late summer harvest was just such a period, when stores were dwindling and food prices were rising. In terms of work yield, in the households of labour migrants the main income in the home region and the supplementary income in the seasonal destination properly balanced

each other out, though as noted above the relationship could also be reversed. Sometimes small farms changed their forms of cultivation and crop rotations in order to improve availability for labour migrations. On the other hand, adapting one's own production to counter the seasonal cycle of large nearby farms with additional labour needs could also serve as an alternative to labour migration, such as in the north of Brabant province and the south of the provinces of Antwerp and Limburg. Sedentary small farmers near major grain farms that offered supplementary income focused on market production of vegetables and potato crops for their own consumption.¹⁸

The predominantly agricultural destinations of rural labour migrants were generally in fertile, high-yield flatlands where market production by large farms was mostly based on monocultures. For grain production and vineyards, for example, the need for year-round labour was limited, but at harvest time labour demand was very high. In order to cover this demand, farmers were willing to pay relatively high wages, which could rise to many times the wages paid in the regions of origin. Such major market-producing farms were frequently located near river or sea ports to facilitate export trade, or larger cities to provide markets. These offered labour migrants additional, often also seasonal, work opportunities, from construction to various services to market gardens.

Migratory labour systems were maintained through long traditions of seasonal migration. In the regions of origin there were additional needs for income which could be satisfied under poor wage conditions, if at all, and a seasonally available labour pool. In the destinations there was, conversely, a large additional seasonal need for labour and, as a rule, wages were clearly often many times higher than in the place of origin. The heart of this structural 'symbiosis' (Lucassen's term) was a reciprocal dependence through the labour market that had a different weight for each of the two sides. In the destination regions, which tried to lower their risks through planned labour recruitment, it was an economic question of yield for the family households; in the home regions, on the other hand, it was a matter of survival. Migratory traditions that became established often over generations led to fixed migration routes over long distances, frequently hundreds of kilometres, and just as fixed migration forms. The dominant form was groups or work brigades, many of whom stayed together in the destination, often under the direction of a brigade leader who knew the country and was an experienced negotiator.

To a different extent in the individual systems, there were often transitions from seasonal labour migrations to definitive immigration in the destinations, which in turn could trigger chain migrations. This was more the case with labour markets for urban trades than with agricultural labour markets, in which the additional need for labour and wages

generally declined in the off season. The temporary nature of the high wages and the permanently high standard of living in the destinations were essential factors for the long-term continuation of seasonal labour migration. They provided the background for the notable fact – one that never ceases to provoke outraged incomprehension – that areas with the highest seasonal wages and temporary high numbers of labour migrants could simultaneously experience underemployment and social impoverishment among local labourers and their families.¹⁹

Based on the Napoleonic figures, we will review six of Lucassen's seven major western and southern European systems around the turn of the nineteenth century in synchronic cross-section as part of a brief *tour d'horizon*. We will then conduct an in-depth diachronic longitudinal examination of the North Sea system in order to follow the development of a migratory labour system starting in the early seventeenth century.

Regional examples

Aside from the North Sea system there were two other examples of migratory labour systems in north-western Europe around the turn of the nineteenth century, namely in eastern England and the Paris basin. In all three systems, a total of more than 100,000 male and female labourers migrated annually. At the same time there were four active migratory labour systems in southern Europe: in Castile (*c.*30,000) and on the Mediterranean coast of Catalonia, Languedoc and Provence (*c.*35,000). The system along the Po plain was considerably larger (*c.*50,000), and about double the size of that was the system in central Italy (*c.*100,000).²⁰

Roughly 20,000 workers moved annually to eastern England, especially to the major grain farms in Lincolnshire and East Anglia that had a high seasonal demand for additional labourers. The labourers there assisted in the harvest; in the environs of London they also worked in horticulture, and in the city itself they were employed in a wide range of jobs, including municipal construction projects. They came from Scotland, Wales, England, and most of all from western Ireland, especially Connaught, where the agricultural industry was dominated by small potato farms whose oppressive and exorbitant rents could be paid only by earning additional income through labour migration. Lucassen determined that an Irish labour migrant earned about one-quarter of the entire household income in the grain season in eastern England, which fell between the sowing and harvesting of potatoes at home, while the rest of the family stayed behind and took care of the small estate. In the non-productive winter months, additional earnings were acquired

through spinning, fishing and production of seaweed ash, which was high in potash and iodine and therefore important for field fertilizers and iodine extraction.

About 60,000, or three times as many labour migrants as in eastern England, came each year to the Paris basin and especially within the Paris city limits, where there was employment in public jobs, trading and services of all kinds. In addition the *départements* surrounding Paris, which secured the food supply for the metropolis as East Anglia did for London, were dependent on a supplementary seasonal army of labourers, especially in grain cultivation. A considerable portion of labour migrants to this area came from the Alps and western France, but most were from the Massif Central, or French central highlands, where grain production was insignificant and of mediocre quality. Small farms at higher elevations thus strove to improve their insufficient yields with milk products, chestnuts and turnips; those at lower elevations, with potato crops.

The destination of the third migration system was Castile, with its urban centre in Madrid. At least 30,000 labour migrants from regions with few work opportunities came each year. They found jobs working in the grain harvest on the Castilian plateau, or as construction workers in state and municipal projects, or as servants and maids in the capital. Most of them came from the mountainous region of Galicia where, in the second half of the eighteenth century, not even half of the agriculturally productive land was cultivated; besides, most of it was in the hands of large landowners, especially monasteries. Dwarfholdings (*minifundio*), with on average hardly more than half a hectare of productive land, required additional income from outside. Usually the husband went looking for work as a labour migrant in order to pay the rent and debts. The rest of the family, under the wife's direction, continued to operate the small estate, seeking to increase its meagre income with cottage industries, especially flax spinning.

Galicia was the classic home region of the labour migrants later referred to as *golondrinas* (swallows). Not without justification were they compared to birds of passage; every spring, men as well as single women formed migrant groups called *cuadrillas* (fixed group, community or working group), often along family lines. The stages of their migration followed climate-related differences in the harvest seasons. In early summer the *cuadrillas* harvested wheat in the environs of Madrid, Toledo and Guadalajara in New Castile. The harvest ended there on 25 July, St James's Day, which the *cuadrillas* celebrated even away from home, and then continued in Ávila and Segovia and ultimately farther north in the Old Castilian city of León. Later transatlantic seasonal migrants moved between Spain (and Italy) and Argentina, which also led to the term *golondrinas*. This migration became possible in the

nineteenth century when steamers shortened the transatlantic journey time and lowered the cost so that harvest jobs could be taken in the Argentinian summer during the European winter (see chapter 2, section 2). Besides Galician workers in Castile and Madrid there were also labour migrants, although fewer in number, from other areas of northern Spain such as the mountains of León, Asturia and the Basque country, as well as from France.

Roughly 35,000 male and female labour migrants in the Spanish-French Mediterranean descended each year to the coastal regions between Catalonia, Languedoc and Provence to work, especially in the grain harvest for large farms but also in grape picking. On both the Spanish and French sides, the port cities of Barcelona and Marseilles seem to have attracted only a handful of the rural labour migrants who came to the coastal plains from Alpine regions and the Massif Central as well as from the Pyrenees. Here, too, the migratory labour system was kept intact owing to the seasonal dependence on supplementary labour, especially on the part of large farms in the plains, and the structural dependence on supplementary income on the part of dwarfholdings and cottage industries in the primarily mountainous regions of origin.

Similar conditions brought around 50,000 labour migrants, both men and women, to the Po plain from their mountainous home regions extending from the Bergamo Alps in the north to the Ligurian Apennines in the south. Work was also available in public construction and the service sector in cities such as Milan and Turin, but by far the largest portion of rural labour migrants worked in rice production on the western Po plain. This was carried out from planting to harvest almost exclusively by external labour, in which groups of six men and six women each worked as cutters and threshers, or in packing and storing.

The sixth and by far the largest migratory system, greatly exceeding even that of the Paris basin, was destined for central Italy and encompassed the southern part of Tuscany, Latium, Corsica and Elba. Around 100,000 labourers made their way to central Italy each year. A considerable portion sought work in construction and the urban service sectors, especially in Rome. Most of the labour migrants to central Italy were involved in agriculture, especially the harvest of grain and other crops, and in other areas of agricultural work, in part also in the winter months. The migrant field workers on the big *latifundios* came largely from poorer subsistence farming regions in the east and south. They offered their labour under the direction of a *caporale*, or work brigade leader, who negotiated jobs and wages. Sometimes boundaries became blurred between the destitute landless, who came in rags, and labour migrants from borderline subsistence farms. It was not uncommon for dwarfholders or tenant farmers to end up in a kind of temporary indentured

servitude with meagre supplementary earnings since profits from their small estates were insufficient to maintain their families, thereby forcing them to go into debt to purchase extra agrarian products and to pay off their debt by working in the harvest for large farms. A system of recruitment resulted that in some ways resembled indirect forced labour, and the agents who granted credits on behalf of the *latifundio* owners earned a premium for each labour migrant they mustered in this way. Harsh working and living conditions, intensified by climatic conditions and malaria, which was widespread, were the subject of repeated yet fruitless complaints by prefects in the destination regions in the largest migratory labour system of the time.

The North Sea system and the Holland migrants (Hollandgänger)

An extensive migratory labour system existed from the early seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries in the coastal region of north-western Europe, with its centre – based on today’s national boundaries – in the coastal areas of the Netherlands and north-western Germany and its areas of departure in Germany, Belgium, the Dutch interior and France. We shall now carry out a detailed longitudinal examination of what Lucassen called the ‘North Sea system’.

The system’s destination area was a commercial magnet, including one of the wealthiest trade and industrial areas in Europe, covering more than 200 cities; its tax revenue once brought the Spanish crown seven times the value of the silver it acquired from Central America. Rotterdam and Antwerp were the hubs of European world trade, with a total share of 50 per cent of all goods; Antwerp’s stock exchange was also the centre for the European money market. During the prolonged Dutch war of independence against Spanish rule, which started in 1568 with the uprising of William I (the Silent, Prince of Orange) and ended in 1648 when Spain recognized the Republic of the Netherlands in the Peace of Westphalia, the centre of trade and commerce gradually shifted north to Amsterdam, especially after Spain’s pillaging of Antwerp in 1585.²¹

The North Sea system developed in the final decades of the Netherlands’ struggle for independence, in which the Dutch colonial empire also assumed firm structures through the founding of the Dutch East India (1602) and West India (1621) Companies. We shall return later to the Dutch empire with respect to its labour systems. Both the shifting of industry and commerce to the north and the global expansion of the Dutch labour market to include the colonies were definitive in establishing the migratory cycles of the North Sea system. The destination region of the North Sea system extended from Calais to Bremen; it had a number of sub-centres and continued beyond zones in between that

were scarcely affected by the migration. By far the majority of labour migrants, male and female, in the North Sea system came from north-western Germany. There were also migrants from the Dutch provinces of Gelderland, Overijssel and Drenthe, from Flanders, Brabant and Limburg, as well as from the lower Rhine region and the environs of Lille.

Let us examine more closely the largest group of labour migrants, the *Hollandgänger*, or 'Holland migrants',²² from north-western Germany. The first traces of 'Holland migration' in this area go back to the late Middle Ages, but a clearly defined migratory labour system did not develop until the early seventeenth century, when for the first time larger numbers of workers from the prince-bishopric of Osnabrück and the northern part of the bishopric of Münster migrated to Holland and West Friesland. After the Thirty Years' War ended in 1648 with the Peace of Westphalia, which was drawn up in Münster and Osnabrück, the Holland migrants' home regions in north-western Germany continued to expand. A similar situation occurred in the eighteenth century when the destination area along the coast expanded to the south-west and north-east.

The classic symbiotic character of labour market relations between a densely populated home region with insufficient work opportunities and destinations with a seasonal need for additional labourers that offered, in this case, wage levels four times higher at a piece rate also existed with respect to Holland migration. There were diverse other reasons for labour migration in addition to the dominant pressure to support the family through external supplementary income. Young, unmarried migrant workers, both men and women, wanted to earn the means to start their own family household, and the search for a spouse itself also played a role.²³

The total proportion of Holland migrants in the regions of origin in north-western Germany was generally around 3 per cent, but in isolated cases it could also reach 12 or even 26 per cent. In evaluating the French figures, Lucassen discovered, on the one hand, major home regions in Westphalia and Lower Saxony; on the other hand, there were also 'neutral' areas with hardly any migration in either direction. This was the case, for example, in the Ruhr valley, which would later overtake the North Sea system in the course of industrialization, and in the Bielefeld 'corridor', Halle and Warendorf, as well as east of Tecklenburg. This was due to the great expansion of proto-industrial cottage production in these areas, which needed workers even outside the agricultural season. In addition to metalworking, other important fields were flax spinning and linen weaving, as in the Bielefeld (and Flemish) 'corridor'. There were about 50 looms to 1,000 inhabitants there, amounting on average to a loom for every fourth household, which, including setting up the

loom, required at least four workers in the family. In addition, six to ten spinners were needed to supply enough raw materials for weaving.²⁴

In the home regions, however, there were distinct differences between, and even within, villages with regard to the ratio of sedentary to travelling labourers, even in cottage industries providing supplementary income to the main agricultural work. This was presumably due to milieu-specific differences in cottage production. Intensive cottage production of linen, which was often a main source of income for non-landholding families or had become the main source of income where agricultural subsistence production was insufficient, seems generally to have been incompatible with labour migration for months at a time. Holland migrants, however, came predominantly from households whose supplementary income was earned not through weaving but through spinning. Unlike the cottage linen industry, spinning was possible without capital investment and was the more poorly paid cottage industry of poor households. It was carried out mostly in the winter and thus did not overlap with seasonal labour migration. This was significant, for example, for the tenant farmers who made up a large share of Holland migrants. In the early nineteenth century, they still cultivated barely more than an average of one hectare on their small leaseholdings. They were obligated to work on the farms that their leaseholds belonged to, but could arrange with their farmers to be available between planting and harvest to migrate to Holland in order to supplement the family income.²⁵

Before the era of mass overseas emigration and the coal and steel industry or repeated and temporary shuttle migrations ('industrial hirelings') in the nineteenth century, small tenant farmers in rural north-western Germany who required supplementary income had several options. In addition to intensive cottage industry production and seasonal migration to Holland, another possible source of income outside the home was itinerant trade. Let us look more closely at this type of migration based on the *Tödden*,²⁶ itinerant traders from the northern Münster region, also a region of origin of Holland migrants. A report by District Councillor Culemann, who was commissioned by the Prussian king to travel through the Tecklenburg region in 1749–50, confirms that Holland migration and *Tödden* migration were significant and often completely distinct sources of income in the communities of origin in the eighteenth century. The report states that in towns with *Tödden* migration there was hardly any Holland migration, and vice versa.²⁷

The North Sea system, spanning roughly three centuries, was primarily a rural, agrarian migratory labour system with a seasonal structure. This was particularly true for the Holland migrants from north-western Germany, more than three-quarters of whom worked in agriculture or peat bogs. Most of the agricultural workers did grass pasture work in dairy