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SELLING IN THE SHADOWS:
PEDDLERS AND HAWKERS IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

Danielle van den Heuvel

Introduction

Street sellers were ubiquitous in early modern Europe. They sold a large array of products, from fresh foodstuffs to fashion accessories, and catered to a great variety of customers, serving not only the urban poor and middling sorts, but also the wealthy in their country houses.¹ With shopkeepers and stallholders, street sellers formed the principal actors in pre-industrial retailing. In most towns, the shopkeepers and stallholders formed guilds, which governed large sections of the retail trade. These guilds generally were not open to those who solely sold from the streets and they prohibited street vending to take place without their authorization.² This resulted in constrained selling opportunities for those involved in ambulant trading, such as hawkers, peddlers and chapmen, who therefore often resorted to operating illegally, or semi-illegally.

Strikingly, even though many peddlers and hawkers operated in the margins of legality, little attention has been paid to how this affected them and the economy more widely. Whereas there is an intense and ongoing debate on how regulations and the attitude of local and national governments have had an impact on the position of street vendors in present-day developing economies, historians have largely ignored this issue.³ This is

¹ Fernand Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce. Civilization and Capitalism 15th–18th Century*, vol. 2 (2002; original edition 1982), pp. 75–9.

² Vanessa Harding, “Shops, markets and retailers in London’s Cheapside, c. 1500–1700,” in Bruno Blondé, Peter Stabel, Jon Stobart and Ilya van Damme (eds), *Buyers and Sellers. Retail Circuits and Practices in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 155–70, Peter Stabel, “From the Market to the Shop. Retail and Urban Space in Late Medieval Bruges,” in Bruno Blondé et al., *Buyers and Sellers*, pp. 79–108, Danielle van den Heuvel, “Partners in Marriage and in Business? Guilds and the Family Economy in the Urban Food Markets in the Dutch Republic,” *Continuity and Change*, 23, 2 (2008), pp. 217–36.

³ An exception is Anne Montenach, “‘Schattenarbeiterinnen’. Frauen im Lebensmittelkleinhandel im Lyon des 17. Jahrhunderts: Ressourcen und Strategien,” *L’Homme. European Journal of Feminist History*, 2 (2006), pp. 15–36, and Anne Montenach, *Espaces et pratiques du commerce alimentaire à Lyon au XVII^e siècle. L’économie du quotidien* (Grenoble,

especially surprising, as there seem to be great similarities between people who sell in the street in current-day Africa, Latin America and Asia, and those who peddled their wares in Europe some 300 years ago.⁴ Like today, many of the street vendors in early modern Europe were people, such as migrants, women, and the poor, who struggled to make a living. Moreover, both in contemporary societies and in pre-industrial Europe, street vendors are subject to intense scrutiny from the authorities and are constantly targeted by the governing bodies of stationary retailers.

This chapter addresses the questions of why relatively little attention has been paid to informal street vending in pre-industrial Europe and what we could gain from greater insight into this issue. I will identify the main issues in debates on peddling and hawking in contemporary contexts, and then move on to address the similarities and differences between informal street trading in the pre-industrial and contemporary world. I will do so by combining new evidence from the Northern Netherlands with findings previously reported by historians of peddling, retailing, the urban poor, migration and women's work. The goal of this chapter is not to give an extensive summary of all that has been uncovered on street vending by historians in the past, but rather to give a comprehensive overview that provides us with direction on how to proceed in studying street vending in a wider context of the position of street vendors within the early modern economy. However, before investigating possible overlaps between street vending in an early modern and in a 21st-century context, I will start by giving an overview of how historical street vending has been studied in the past.

The historiography of early modern peddlers and hawkers

Although there has been remarkably little attention in historical studies on the question of how informality impacted upon street vendors in pre-industrial Europe, street selling has been studied by a number of promi-

2010). See also the remarks by Sheilagh Ogilvie on informal street selling in pre-industrial Germany, Sheilagh Ogilvie, *A Bitter Living. Women, Markets, and Social Capital in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 302–3.

⁴ Hernando de Soto earlier pointed to similarities between informal workers in early modern Europe and twentieth-century Peru. Hernando de Soto, *The Other Path. The Invisible Revolution in the Third World* (New York, 1989), pp. 212–3. An inspiring work in which contemporary and early modern practices of selling are compared is Laurence Fontaine (ed.) *Second-hand Circulations from the Sixteenth Century to the Present* (Oxford, 2008).

ment scholars since the last decades of the twentieth century. In the 1970s it was Fernand Braudel who recognized the importance of street vendors in early modern distribution networks. In his seminal work *The Wheels of Commerce* Braudel acknowledged that whilst peddlers were usually poor itinerant merchants, the sheer numbers of peddlers and the areas they covered meant that they “stimulated and maintained trade, and spread it over a distance.”⁵ Braudel also pointed out the crucial influence peddlers had on the distribution of certain consumer goods, such as Bohemian glassware, almanacs and popular literature.⁶ Perhaps not surprisingly, it is precisely in the area of book history that we find the importance of itinerant vending most readily reflected. A pioneering work in this respect is Margaret Spufford’s *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, in which Spufford devoted a full chapter to the chapmen who peddled popular literature.⁷ The exploration of the activities of petty chapmen in books and pamphlets who travelled around England was extended in 1984 when Spufford published *The Great Reclothing of Rural England*.⁸ In this work, Spufford took her investigation of the identities and activities of itinerant traders in pre-industrial England even further. Central to this work was the question of how novel consumer goods, especially textiles, clothing and accessories, had spread through the country, and how they had ended up in the houses of ordinary workers in particular. By analysing the movements and activities of itinerant traders in rural England over a longer period of time, Spufford convincingly showed that it was thanks to various peddlers and hawkers that cheap goods were distributed to rural areas. Whilst Braudel’s assumptions on the importance of itinerant small-scale trading had been largely based on scattered evidence, Spufford’s work for the first time showed that it was indeed possible to systematically study the people whose existence had been largely on the margins of the economy, and thereby offered an inspiration for several historians who would follow in her footsteps.⁹

⁵ Braudel, *Wheels of Commerce*, p. 76.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 76–7.

⁷ Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 111–28.

⁸ Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1984).

⁹ Spufford’s work on chapmen in books was for instance followed by Margaret Hunt, “Hawkers, Bawlers and Mercuries: Women and the London Press in the Early Enlightenment,” in Margaret Hunt et al. (eds), *Women and the Enlightenment* (New York, 1984), pp. 48–68, by Laurence Fontaine’s *History of Pedlars in Europe* (Cambridge, 1996) and Jeroen Salman, “Peddling in the past. Dutch itinerant bookselling in a European perspective,”

A characteristic of peddlers that Braudel signalled in his work on early modern commerce additional to their decisive role in the distribution of specific consumer goods to rural areas was that many of them were seasonal migrants.¹⁰ Indeed the second strand of history that has devoted substantial attention to peddlers and other itinerant traders is that of migration history.¹¹ In 1984, the year that Spufford's *Great Reclothing* appeared, Jan Lucassen's book on seasonal migrants in early modern Northwest Europe *Naar de kusten van de Noordzee* was published.¹² Lucassen was the first to systematically analyse one of the most important migration systems of early modern Europe: that of migrant laborers who moved in large numbers to the coasts of the North Sea, and especially to the Dutch provinces of Holland and Friesland. Among these migrant workers were also itinerant traders. In his book, Lucassen exposes the character and functioning of the networks of itinerant traders who visited the North Sea region, and compares these migrants to other migrant laborers operating in the same area, such as grass mowers and peat diggers. His findings show that whilst the migrant laborers who were active in commerce did share some characteristics with the other migrant laborers, such as their agrarian background, their regions of origin, and, to some extent, the seasonality of their activities, there were also some striking differences. Lucassen found that in contrast to migrant laborers working in other occupations, those active as itinerant traders often belonged to family networks in the same occupation, had greater financial means, and, while they occasionally visited the coastal regions of the Dutch Republic, most travelled to other areas, such as Denmark, the eastern and central parts of present-day Germany, and France.¹³

Publishing history, 53 (2003), pp. 5–21. Spufford's work on sellers of textiles found followers in Beverly Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory 1660–1800* (Oxford, 1991), and Harald Deceulaer, "Second-hand Dealers in the Early Modern Low Countries: Institutions, Markets and Practices," in Laurence Fontaine *Second-hand Circulations*, pp. 13–42.

¹⁰ Braudel, *Wheels of Commerce*, pp. 78–9.

¹¹ Despite the attention of historians of migration for peddling they have largely ignored the (sales) activities of travelling groups. See: Leo Lucassen, "A Blind Spot: Migratory and Travelling Groups in Western European Historiography," *International Review of Social History*, 38 (1993), pp. 209–35.

¹² Jan Lucassen, *Naar de kusten van de Noordzee. Trekarbeid in Europees perspectief, 1600–1800* (Gouda, 1984).

¹³ Lucassen, *Naar de kusten*, pp. 11–7. His work inspired (amongst others) Marlou Schrover, "Women and long-distance trade migration in the nineteenth-century Netherlands," in Pamela Sharpe (ed.), *Women, Gender and Labour Migration* (London, 2001), pp. 85–107; Hannelore Oberpfennig, *Migration und Fernhandel im Tödden-System. Wanderhändler*

A final characteristic of early modern itinerant traders that was highlighted by Braudel was their marginal position in society, expressed both in their income levels and in their activities, which were often on the fringes of legality. Interestingly, whilst most scholars who have written about peddlers and hawkers in pre-industrial Europe address issues regarding licensing, and the often strenuous relationship between peddlers and stationary retailers, for a long time their inferior status was left relatively unexplored. In the mid-1990s, this changed with Laurence Fontaine's *History of Peddlars in Europe*.¹⁴ Although Fontaine was not the first to question the supposedly marginal position of itinerant traders, her work was the first that focussed on testing that assumption.¹⁵ Fontaine studied the role of itinerant traders, especially those selling books, in Central Europe. As such, her work overlapped with both Spufford's and Lucassen's work on this topic, and indeed Fontaine's very rich findings largely reflect the conclusions for Northwestern Europe as put forward by the previously mentioned authors. According to Fontaine, the itinerant trade of early modern Europe was not marginal but a "multifaceted activity and a vital phenomenon in past communities."¹⁶ Fontaine showed that, as was demonstrated earlier for Northern Europe by Lucassen, the itinerant trade was also highly organized in Central Europe, with long-established relationships between traders, customers, and suppliers, as well as between itinerant traders and their landlords.¹⁷ In addition, Fontaine made the

aus dem nördlichen Münsterland in mittleren und nördlichen Europa (Osnabrück, 1996); Wilfried Reininghaus, *Wanderhandel in Europa. Beiträge zur wissenschaftlichen Tagung in Ibbenbüren, Mettingen, Recke und Hopsten van 9–11 Oktober 1992* (Dortmund 1993).

¹⁴ An earlier version of this book was published in French in 1993: *Histoire du colportage in Europe* (Paris, 1993). See Spufford, *Reclotching*, pp. 6–13.

¹⁵ Olwen Hufton had earlier identified this issue. Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-century France* (Oxford, 1974).

¹⁶ Fontaine, *Peddlars*, p. 202. Interestingly, the issue of economic and social marginality is much less of an issue in the work of Lucassen. Instead he addresses the perception of itinerant traders as reflected in the Dutch historiography of the early 20th century, which assumes that the itinerant traders, especially the Germans, were highly successful businessmen, as (some of) their offspring were the founders of large department stores that sprung up in the nineteenth century. Later, the view that especially the German peddlers were such successful entrepreneurs was disputed by Marlou Schrover and Hannelore Oberpfennig, who both showed that the majority of the German peddlers were of more modest means and that only a small group founded successful retailers "dynasties." Lucassen, *Naar de kusten*, pp. 116–7; Marlou Schrover, *Een kolonie van Duitsers. Groepsvorming onder Duitse immigranten in Utrecht in de negentiende eeuw* (Amsterdam, 2002); Oberpfennig, *Migration*.

¹⁷ Fontaine's work was followed by, amongst others, Anne Montenach: Montenach, *Espaces*.

point that those sources that seem to contain most information about peddlers, such as legal and police records, only revealed the exceptional and marginal, and in order not to be misled on the nature of ambulant trading, thorough and imaginative methods are required to reveal its true character.¹⁸

Typical for the three principal strands of history that have dealt with itinerant traders in the past—represented by their pioneers Spufford, Lucassen and Fontaine—is that they looked mostly at rural ambulant traders, thereby largely ignoring the role of itinerant vending in urban areas. As such, they reflect the assumption expressed by Braudel that it was precisely in the rural areas of early modern Europe that street vendors flourished.¹⁹ The role of ambulant traders in urban contexts, therefore, remains largely obscure.²⁰ Coincidentally, whilst the history of urban retailing underwent an impressive boom in the last two decades, most of these works focus on shops, thus in this branch of history urban street trade remains in the shadows. There are a few notable exceptions in which both stationary and ambulatory retailing are studied, such as the 1989 work of Hoh-Cheung and Lorna Mui on shopkeeping in England, and a number of case studies of book selling and the second-hand clothes trade.²¹ Nevertheless, recent work suggests that the eyes of retail historians seem to be slowly opening to the issue of ambulant trading in early modern distribution networks, and various studies that have appeared over the last years integrated urban stationary and ambulant trade in their analysis.²²

¹⁸ Fontaine, *Peddlars*, p. 203.

¹⁹ Braudel, *Wheels of Commerce*, pp. 75–80.

²⁰ An exception is the attention for the depiction of urban street vendors in prints. For example: Sean Shesgreen, *The Criers and Hawkers of London: Engravings and Drawings by Marcellus Laroon* (Stanford, 1990). Vincent Milliot, *Les Cris de Paris ou Le peuple travesti: Les représentations des petits métiers parisiens (XVI^e–XVIII^e siècles)* (Paris, 1995).

²¹ Hoh-Cheung Mui and Lorna H. Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth-Century England*; Spufford, *Reclothing*; Deceulaer, “Second-hand,” Salman, “Peddling,” Bibi Panhuyzen, *Maatwerk. Kleermakers, naaisters, oudkleerkopers en de gilden* (Amsterdam, 2000).

²² For example Salman, “Peddling;” Ilja Van Damme, *Verleiden en verkopen. Antwerpse kleinhandelaars en hun klanten in tijden van crisis (ca. 1648–ca. 1748)* (Amsterdam, 2007), Danielle van den Heuvel, *Women and Entrepreneurship. Female Traders in the Northern Netherlands, c. 1580–1815* (Amsterdam, 2007), Sheilagh Ogilvie, Janine Maegraith and Markus Küpker, “Krämer und ihre Waren im ländlichen Württemberg zwischen 1600 und 1740,” *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie*, 59, 2 (2011), and various chapters in Bruno Blondé et al., *Buyers and Sellers*.

One area, which does have a long tradition of studying aspects to street vending in pre-industrial European towns, is women's history.²³ As small-scale retailing was very often practised by women, ambulant trading in studies of early modern women's work traditionally plays an important role. In contrast to the works that specifically focus on long-distance itinerant trading, these works mostly study street vending in urban areas, practised by women who were residents in the town or had travelled to the town from the surrounding rural areas.²⁴ Similarly, we find hawkers appearing in studies on early modern Europe's urban poor, many of which devote at least a small section to street vending.²⁵ In contrast to the studies on long-distance itinerant vendors, ambulant traders are generally not the focus of the works on women and the poor, but rather an outcome of an identification of what economic activities these groups engaged in. Interestingly, the studies on women and the poor that include examples of street vending raise issues that, as we will also see later in this chapter, show considerable overlap with those raised by development economists: the problem of entry barriers, illegality and the consequent sufferings of those involved in informal street trade.

A further striking difference with the historiography of long-distance peddlers is that, especially in the history of women, the position of street vendors in the economy is seen as rather marginal. It is generally claimed that female hawkers were suppressed individuals, working in trades that were hardly profitable, as they had no other option to earn a living.²⁶

²³ This started as early as 1919 with Alice Clark's seminal *Working Life* in which she dedicated a special section to street and market trading. Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1919).

²⁴ For example: Maryanne Kowaleski, "Women's Work in a Market Town. Exeter in the Late Fourteenth Century," in B.A. Hanawalt (ed.), *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe* (Bloomington, 1986), pp. 145–66, at 156; Merry Wiesner Wood, "Paltry Peddlers or Essential Merchants? Women in the Distributive Trades in Early Modern Germany," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 12 (1981), pp. 3–14.

²⁵ Hufton, *Poor*; Ingrid van der Vlis, *Leven in armoede. Delftse bedeeden in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam, 2001); Hilde van Wijngaarden, *Zorg voor de kost. Armeenzorg, arbeid en onderlinge hulp in Zwolle 1650–1700* (Amsterdam, 2000); also studies on crime often include female street vendors: Paul Griffiths, *Lost Londons. Change, crime and control in the capital city 1550–1660* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 123–34; Lotte van de Pol, *Het Amsterdams hoerdom. Prostitutie in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1996), pp. 103–4. See also the remarks by Lucassen, "Blind spot," 209–10.

²⁶ Andrzej Karpinski, "The Woman on the Marketplace. The Scale of Feminization of Retail Trade in Polish Towns in the Second Half of the 16th and in the 17th century," in Simonetta Chiaviochi (ed.), *La donna nell'economia, secc XIII–XVIII* (Florence, 1990), pp. 283–92, at 292; Sheilagh Ogilvie, *A Bitter Living. Women, Markets, and Social Capital in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, 2003), p. 169; Jannie Stegeman, "Scheveningse visverkoopsters

As we have seen, the consensus on long-distance itinerant trading is rather different and many scholars follow Fontaine in her judgment that peddlers in early modern Europe were not the marginal figures they were long claimed to be.²⁷ This difference in the appreciation of the status of street vendors can be ascribed to the different contexts the historians of (rural) peddlers and (urban) hawkers were studying, but it is also possible that it may partly be explained by the specific focus of the historians. Whilst Fontaine aimed to expose the activities of rural itinerant vendors and prove that their existence was far from marginal, many historians of (urban) women aimed to find out why women often ended up in lesser-paid jobs with low status. In addition, we must also recognise that the lack of systematic analyses of especially the position of urban street vendors makes that we currently have too little information to accurately assess how shadow work affected people in urban and rural contexts.

Despite the shortfalls in the historiography of pre-industrial street vending as pointed out here, we must commend the work of the historians who have in the past worked on this topic. Perhaps even more than for the present, identifying street traders and their activities is enormously difficult for the pre-industrial period. As in the case of scholars who study modern developing economies, we often lack official records and statistics which record informal street traders. In addition, we are further hampered by the fact that the historical figures cannot be cross-examined like the subjects of anthropologists and development economists.²⁸ The question, however, is whether we can use the insights from studies on present-day ambulant trading to enhance our understanding of street trading in historical societies such as that of early modern Europe. In order to answer this question I will now move to identifying the key issues in the debates on contemporary peddlers and hawkers.

ca. 1600–1900,” *Holland*, 21 (1991), pp. 38–53. An exception is Merry Wiesner, who argued that despite the small volume of their individual trades they were crucial, resembling the argument that was made by Braudel and by Fontaine regarding rural itinerant traders. Wiesner Wood, “Paltry Peddlers.”

²⁷ Van Damme, *Verleiden*, p. 99.

²⁸ See earlier remarks on the invisibility of street vending in the historiography by Susanne Schötz, *Handelsfrauen in Leipzig. Zur Geschichte van Arbeit und Geslecht in der Neuzeit* (Cologne, 2004), pp. 195–6; Van Damme, *Verleiden*, pp. 98–9.

Street selling in modern developing economies

In contrast to historical studies, in contemporary contexts street selling is very widely studied. Ever since the 1970s when Keith Hart published his seminal article on informal income opportunities in Ghana, the role of street vending in the overall economy of developing countries has been intensely debated by academics from different backgrounds, ranging from social anthropology to development economics and economic geography.²⁹ Large institutions such as the World Bank and the International Labor Organization (ILO) have also been studying street sellers as part of their programmes to improve economic conditions in developing countries since the 1970s.

Despite their origination in different academic disciplines and their focus on different geographical areas, most studies on street vendors deal with one central issue: the role of street vending in the enhancement of economic conditions for the poorer inhabitants of large metropolis and in economic development more widely. The early social-anthropological studies on street vendors in particular originated from studies that were aimed at increasing the understanding of the economic situation of rural migrants who moved to the cities of developing countries, such as Accra in Ghana, and Lima in Peru, in the 1960s and 1970s.³⁰ As the numbers of rural-urban migrants were exceptionally high, most of these (often) colonial cities were unable to absorb them into their infrastructures, forcing these migrants to live in shanty towns on the outskirts of the city.³¹ Not only was there a shortage of housing, also the local economy had difficulties absorbing these people, resulting in a lack of jobs for those who had newly arrived from the countryside. One of the most common ways of earning a living for the new inhabitants of the ever-growing mega-cities was street vending. With other “invented” jobs, such as working in waste collection and in transport, street selling was part of the makeshift economy that characterised most rural-urban migrants’ struggle for survival. The early studies of anthropologists working on the explosive growth of

²⁹ Earlier, Clifford Geertz had acknowledged the importance of understanding the position of small traders in an economy for economic development. His work however, does not so much focus on itinerant traders such as hawkers and peddlers, but rather on the overall system of bazaar trade. Clifford Geertz, *Peddlers and Princes* (Chicago, 1963).

³⁰ Keith Hart, “Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana,” *Journal of modern African studies*, 11, 1 (1973), pp. 61–89; De Soto, *Other Path*.

³¹ According to De Soto this was caused by hostility of urban dwellers against rural migrants. De Soto, *Other Path*, pp. 10–1.

these cities confirmed that similar patterns could be found in developing countries across the globe from Africa, to Latin America and Asia.³² Over the last four decades the debates on the informal economy, and the role of street vending within that, have gradually changed. To a certain extent, this is simply due to a greater availability of data and an increasing understanding of the phenomenon, but it also has to do with the changing world in which we live and the coinciding rise of different world views.³³ This is also apparent in the way scholars view street vending.

Based on the extensive body of literature on ambulant trading in the informal economy spanning almost half a century, what can we say about the characteristics of street vending and the actors involved in the contemporary contexts of developing economies? Firstly, if we look at the people involved in street vending, we find that most scholars would identify street vendors as relatively poor urban dwellers who are often, but not always, new to the cities they live in.³⁴ A further characteristic of the street vendors is their gender. Whilst we find both men and women engaged in street vending, in many cases the majority of the street traders are indeed women. For example, in 1999 in Benin, the Philippines, Burkina Faso and Mali, the share of women among informal traders ranged from 66% to over 90%.³⁵ Secondly, when we look at what their activities entail, we discover that enterprises of street vendors are often small family-based operations.³⁶ Both in the products street vendors sell and in the way they

³² ILO, *Incomes, Employment and Equality in Kenya* (Geneva, 1972); De Soto, *Other Path*; T.G. McGee and Y.M. Yeung, *Hawkers in Southeast Asian Cities. Planning for the Bazaar Economy* (Ottawa, 1977).

³³ An interesting exploration of these changes and how they came about is Keith Hart's paper "Bureaucratic Form and the Informal Economy," in Basudeb Guha-Khasnobis, Ravi Kanbur, and Elinor Ostrom (eds), *Linking the Formal and Informal Economy. Concepts and Policies* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 21–35. For recent and more positive views on rural-urban migration in developing economies see: E.L. Glaeser, *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier and Happier* (London, 2011), and D. Saunders, *Arrival City. How the Largest Migration in History is Reshaping Our World* (London, 2011).

³⁴ See McGee and Yeung, *Hawkers*, pp. 16–7; Narumol Nirathon, *Fighting Poverty from the Street. A Survey of Street Vendors in Bangkok* (Geneva, 2006), p. 17; Sally Christine Roever, "Negotiating Formality: Informal Sector, Market, and State in Peru," (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 2005), pp. 37–9.

³⁵ Jacques Charmes, *Gender and Informal Sector. Contribution to the World's Women 2000, Trends and Statistics* (New York, 1999). In some countries where cultural norms restrict women's role in public life their shares are lower than 10 percent. Website WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing): <<http://wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/street-vendors>> [accessed 30 October 2011].

³⁶ McGee and Yeung, *Hawking*, p. 17; Roever, "Negotiating," p. 35.

operate, interesting gender differences can be observed. Although men are more likely to sell from push-carts and bicycles, women are more likely to only have a basket or a piece of cloth which they use to carry and display their products. In addition, men are more likely to sell durable products, and women are more likely to sell perishable goods.³⁷ Finally, most street traders operate in the shadows of the official economy, are unlicensed and pay no, or very little taxes.³⁸ In sum, the typical street vendor in a modern developing country is a woman of limited means, often a newcomer to the city, who sells perishable goods from street corners, or on the edges of formal markets, sometimes assisted by family members such as her children.

When we then move on to the question of how social scientists have explained the rise and persistence of informal street selling, we find they put forward a number of explanations that are strongly linked. As has already been stated, the growth of street vending in modern developing countries was initially very much linked to the process of rapid urbanization and large waves of internal migration. In addition, according to many scholars, it was also caused by processes of modernization, industrialization and bureaucratization. Whereas bureaucratization and subsequent increased regulation are mostly seen as a negative feature forcing people out of formal jobs and enterprises and into activities such as street vending, in the discussions on the informal economy, modernization has a dual face.³⁹ On the one hand, it is argued that modernization led to increased regulation and therefore to more limited opportunities for the urban poor, hence resulting in high levels of informal workers. On the other hand, the process of modernization in itself was long regarded positively, as it would eventually lead to resolving the problem of informal workers as it was assumed that the stream of new migrants arriving to the city would simply dry up.⁴⁰ However, forty years on it has turned out that the phenomenon

³⁷ Monique Cohen, *Women Street Vendors: The Road to Recognition* (New York, 2000), p. 3; Martha Chen, "Rethinking the Informal Economy: Linkages with the Formal Economy and the Formal Regulatory Environment," in Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur, and Ostrom, *Linking the Formal and Informal Economy*, pp. 75–92, at 79.

³⁸ De Soto, *Other Path*; Chen, "Rethinking," p. 81, Ray Bromley, "Street Vending and Public Policy: A Global Review," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 20, 1/2 (2002), pp. 1–28, at 8–9.

³⁹ The strongest advocate of the idea that regulation had a negative effect on the opportunities of the poor and indeed created an informal economy is Hernando de Soto. De Soto, *Other Path*.

⁴⁰ L. Benería and M. Floro, "Distribution, Gender, and Labour Market Informalization: A Conceptual Framework with a Focus on Homeworkers," in N. Kudva and L. Benería

of informal street trading has not disappeared, and that it is likely to remain a feature of most countries in some form or other, despite changes in regulatory regimes, and the decline in rural-urban migration.⁴¹ Indeed it is increasingly recognized that the large numbers of street vendors in, for instance Asian cities, are (at least partly) caused by the great demand for prepared food to be readily available on the streets as many people lack the time or space to prepare a meal at home. Thus, it is not solely due to an overabundant supply of new informal workers.⁴² It is furthermore also acknowledged that the extent of informal street trading depends on the functioning of the labor market as a whole and that in times of economic decline, and related increased pressures on the labor market, the number of street traders increases.⁴³ Apart from the fact that scholars are gradually recognising that changes in informal street trading are not the result of a linear process, they have also been acknowledging the role of micro-economic factors in explaining why street vending exists and persists in so many developing economies. In addition to the impact of regulation, and limited opportunities in other segments of the economy, the street sellers themselves often stress that street vending is an occupation that suits them and their families well. A commonly mentioned reason for being a street vendor is the flexibility it provides. Many female street vendors indeed claim that being a street trader allows them to care for their families and to earn an income at the same time.⁴⁴

A question that has proved even more difficult to answer than why street selling is such an important feature in the cities of many developing economies, is the question what effect informal street vending has on the people involved and on the wider economy. As one can imagine, the debates on this question are very intense and views on this issue range

(eds), *Rethinking Informalization: Poverty, Precarious Jobs and Social Protection* (New York, 2005), pp. 9–27.

⁴¹ Chen, "Rethinking." John C. Cross, "Street Vendors, Modernity and Postmodernity: Conflict and Compromise in the Global Economy," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 20, 1/2 (2000), pp. 29–51. See also Leo Lucassen, "To Move Or Not to Move. A Global Review of Migration to the City Since the 18th century," unpublished paper, p. 7, for the newly developed argument that in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia rural-urban migration was not one-directional but rather a "rural-urban continuum".

⁴² T.T.-F. Lam, "Food for the City: The Role of the Informal Sector," *Geojournal*, Supplementary Issue, 4 (1982), pp. 49–59, at 57–8.

⁴³ Nirathon, *Fighting Poverty*, pp. 15–6; Zoe Elena Horn, "No Cushion to Fall Back on. The Global Economic Crisis and Informal workers," at <<http://africancentreforcities.net/papers/43/>>, pp. 12–14.

⁴⁴ Cohen, *Women Street Vendors*, p. 2; Nirathon, *Fighting Poverty*, p. 17.

from very positive (regarding it as a way for marginal groups to make a living and eventually to enter the formal sector) to very negative (seeing it as a dead end, jobs with no protection, very little income and opportunities). Over the last few years, scholars have started to recognize that much of the rather black-and-white thinking is not very helpful in understanding the phenomenon and acknowledge that despite the difficulties informality can result in for certain groups, working as an informal trader can mean some form of economic enhancement. Nevertheless, it is clear that this is a question that social scientists are increasingly struggling to answer, as both optimistic and pessimistic views on informality as well as its effects have not come true.⁴⁵ Indeed, we find that development economists more and more stress the historical nature and therewith the persistence of the phenomenon, especially in urban contexts. However, the question is to what extent are the modern street trader and the historical street seller similar? Let us investigate this by looking at early modern Europe.

Identities of early modern street traders

As already became clear from the overview of the historiography on early modern peddlers and hawkers, the identities of ambulant traders in pre-industrial Europe differ according to the discipline of history. The impression from the most dominant line of works on ambulant trading is that most itinerant traders were male migrants with a rural background. These male peddlers migrated to places other than their home regions to sell their wares, but they would generally not settle in those localities. For large parts of the year, they were more or less continuously on the move. If women were involved in ambulant trading, they would do so as family members of male peddlers, such as Westerwald pottery vendors who travelled throughout Northwestern Europe, as part of Gypsy groups, or as hawkers who lived and operated locally.⁴⁶ The latter we can derive mostly from other fields of history such as women's history, which points to the significant levels of activity of women in local hawking. Interestingly, there is generally no mention of the origins of female hawkers, which probably

⁴⁵ Chen, "Rethinking," p. 75.

⁴⁶ On Westerwalder pottery vendors in the Netherlands see Schrover, *Kolonie*, 264. On female gypsies see: Leo Lucassen, Wim Willems and Annemarie Cottaar (eds), *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups. A Socio-historical Approach* (Basingstoke, 1998), especially the chapter by Cottaar. On local women as hawkers in early modern cities see for instance: Merry E. Wiesner, *Working Women in Renaissance Germany* (New Jersey, 1986), p. 119.

indicates that these women were local (or at least that that was what the historians who wrote about them assumed).⁴⁷ This dichotomy between male long-distance ambulant traders and female local ambulant traders is very striking as it not only seems to bear very little resemblance to the world of the street vendor in the 20th- and 21st-century developing world, but also because it presents an image that is rather neatly organized and static. I am not claiming here that these two very distinct types of ambulant traders are not accurate reflections of the world of early modern European street vending. However, since they originated from two different fields in history, and because there has not been a holistic study into street vending in the pre-industrial past, it is rather risky to assume that these two types fully capture peddling and hawking in 17th- and 18th-century Europe.

Indeed, when one looks more closely at studies on the urban economies of early modern Europe, one notices much more variation in the identities of street vendors than a first glance at the historiography would suggest. It is true that many of the accounts of street sellers operating in the streets of towns and cities concern women, but we find women from a great variety of backgrounds, different marital status, and age. In sixteenth-century Munich, we encounter widows of day laborers, wives of semi-skilled laborers, and women married to men employed in major crafts as street vendors.⁴⁸ Many of the male, and some of the female street vendors were of Jewish origin, especially in the urban rag trades, but also among those who peddled through town and country.⁴⁹ In addition, we also find children hawking goods in the street.⁵⁰ For instance, in France,

⁴⁷ Also, it is not always made explicit what the gender of migrants is, and the historians seem to be assuming that it is often male. For instance: Laurence Fontaine, "The Exchange of Second-hand Goods between Survival and 'Business' in Eighteenth-century Paris," in Laurence Fontaine (ed.), *Second-hand Circulations from the Sixteenth Century to the Present* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 97–114, at 103. Rommes does provide some insight into the origin of newcomers who settled in the Dutch city of Utrecht and set up a retail trade in the eighteenth century. Although not always explicitly stated it seems, however, that this mostly concerned stationary retailers. Ronald Rommes, *Oost, west, thuis best? Driehonderd jaar migratie en migranten in de stad Utrecht (begin 16e-begin 19e eeuw)* (Amsterdam, 1998), pp. 161–2.

⁴⁸ Wiesner, *Renaissance*, p. 138.

⁴⁹ Panhuysen, *Maatwerk*, pp. 249–54, 268–72; Cf. the identities of those arrested for street selling without permission in the Dutch towns of Arnhem and The Hague in the eighteenth century: Gelders Archief, 2001, inv. nos. 1457 and 1464, Gemeentearchief Den Haag, Archief Ambachtsgilden en Bussen, inv. nos. 133–8.

⁵⁰ Hufton, *Poor*, pp. 110–1; Wiesner, *Renaissance*, pp. 113–4, 121, 138; J.C. Streng, *Vrijheid, gelijkheid, broederschap en gezelligheid. Het Zwolse Sint Nicolaasgilde* (Hilversum, 2001), pp. 75, 76, 89; Van Damme, *Verleiden*, p. 85.

children from poor rural farmers were sent out as peddlers of pins and needles, and in Strasbourg, urban children also hawked in the streets.⁵¹

Moreover, it appears that greater overlaps between the past and the present migrant peddler can be established than initially assumed. Firstly, as Olwen Hufton stressed in her work on the poor in eighteenth-century France, seasonal migrants could turn into permanent migrants when not enough work was available and in those cases, they would look for work in agriculture, building, or, indeed, as a trader.⁵² Moreover, in Southern Europe we find non-seasonal migrants moving from regions in France to Spain, where they would settle for periods between two and nine years. Many of those non-seasonal migrants worked in informal jobs in retailing, as lemonade sellers, vendors of fancy breads, and as peddlers of haberdashery.⁵³ According to Hufton, these permanent displacements from home communities became more common during the eighteenth century.⁵⁴ Such examples closely correspond to the experiences of informal peddlers in the modern developing world.

Finally, evidence from Northern Europe shows that all these different groups of ambulant traders sometimes came together and shared one specific trade or marketplace. In 1749, the guild of old clothes sellers in the medium-sized Dutch town of Den Bosch complained about the foreigners and other needy people at the market selling old clothes, as well as about the increasing numbers of door-to-door sellers, which were both locals and people coming from elsewhere.⁵⁵ Similarly, in the urban fish trade we find that whilst fish was sold in the official fish markets by citizens, locals, or both, female hawkers from surrounding coastal villages offered fish from door to door, a practise that is also reflected in the trade in produce.⁵⁶ Rather than being destitute inhabitants of large metropolis (either male or female), it is likely that the latter were generally better off than ambulant traders who lived in the cities, or on its outskirts. In sum, mapping the identities of early modern peddlers and hawkers shows that very different groups were active as ambulant traders, each with different patterns of movement. We find both those who were on the move

⁵¹ Hufton, *Poor*, pp. 110–1, Wiesner, *Renaissance*, p. 125.

⁵² Hufton, *Poor*, pp. 73–4.

⁵³ Hufton, *Poor*, pp. 89–90.

⁵⁴ Hufton, *Poor*, pp. 70–1.

⁵⁵ Panhuysen, *Maatwerk*, p. 267.

⁵⁶ Ian Archer, Caroline Barron, and Vanessa Harding (eds) *Hugh Alley's Caveat: The Markets of London in 1598* (London, 1988); Ariadne Schmidt, *Overleven na de dood. Weduwen in Leiden in de Gouden Eeuw* (Amsterdam, 2001), p. 131; Van den Heuvel, *Women*, p. 113.

permanently and those more incidentally, and that despite seeming to be occupying completely separated worlds, all these traders regularly shared the same markets.

Activities of early modern street traders

When establishing the activities of peddlers and hawkers in what goods they sold and how they operated, we find a wide array of undertakings. Because of the great diversity of goods and services offered by street vendors, it is helpful to systemize their activities, which I have tried to do below. This is not a scheme without any fluidity, as that would simply not do justice to the historical complexity of street vending.

Firstly, there were the predominantly male itinerant traders who were highly specialized and offered unique products to their customers. Many, but not all, of the seasonal migrant peddlers sold wares that were specific to the regions they originated from. Examples are peddlers from Sauerland who would sell wooden utensils including wooden toys, the West-erwald traders who sold earthenware and the sellers of straw hats from the Jeker valley.⁵⁷ These ambulant traders would sometimes also include other goods in their stock, for instance, in times when supply of their principal product was limited, but overall we can regard these traders as specialized dealers offering unique products which could not easily be obtained in the areas they peddled their wares. Equally specialized, but in a slightly different manner, were the chapmen of books, who travelled throughout Europe selling popular literature from door-to-door. Like the Westerwalders and the traders from the Sauerland and Jeker valley, they too provided their customers with highly specialised wares that were difficult to come by via other channels. However, rather than producing the books themselves, they would obtain them from publishers in the cities.⁵⁸ These specialized traders would travel long-distances, serving urban, but mostly rural areas, and as such seem to bear little resemblance to the rural-urban migrants turned street sellers in current-day developing countries.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Lucassen, *Naar de kusten*, p. 111; Schrover, *Kolonie*, pp. 219–35, 255–6. Annemarie Cottaar and Leo Lucassen, “Naar de laatste Parijse mode. Strohoedenmakers uit het Jekerdal in Nederland 1750–1900,” *Studies over de sociaal-economische geschiedenis van Limburg/Jaarboek van het Sociaal Historisch Centrum voor Limburg*, 46 (2001), pp. 45–82.

⁵⁸ Spufford, *Reclotching*, pp. 69–83; Salman, “Peddling,” pp. 13–5.

⁵⁹ Although in the academic literature on ambulant trading in modern developing countries this type of peddling is largely ignored it does exist in a similar form to the early

Secondly, other groups of male migrant peddlers sold a large variety of goods, and combined selling with offering a wide range of services.⁶⁰ Migrant peddlers from the Auvergne for instance, “peddled anything that could possibly be sold, such as pins, needles, laces, combs, lace-bobbins, rabbit skins and mole pelts.”⁶¹ Other groups, such as the Teuten and Tödden also sold a wide variety of products, but in their cases, the choice of products on offer was less random. Most of the items they sold can be classified as homewares: household textiles, such as table linens and napkins, and housewares, such as sifts, pots and pans, formed the principal products in their packs.⁶² Contrary to the migrant peddlers referred to above, the majority of the products peddled by Teuten, Tödden and Auvergnats were sourced from urban wholesalers and rural producers, rather than home-made.⁶³ The goods and services these traders offered came as a package, and their services were sometimes even more important trademarks than their goods. The Savoyard chimney sweeps are good examples, as their main livelihood consisted of sweeping chimneys, but they additionally also sold small wares such as precious stones and spectacles.⁶⁴ Other types of “services” offered by these peddlers are various forms of entertainment. Indeed, Hufton claims that many itinerant vendors from the Auvergne would turn to storytelling when trade was bad.⁶⁵

A third category of early modern street vendors consists of those who sold on the streets on a daily basis, and, if they moved at all, only moved very short distances, generally within one town. These were mostly women who very often sold from more or less designated areas, and tended to sell items that were not for sale through any of the regular channels of stationary retailers, for example exotic fruits, pamphlets, or, at the other

modern European cases described here. In the late 1990s I visited Guatemala where rural men from the highlands would travel in kinship groups to Costa Rica for several months a year to sell their home-produced woodwork to wealthy Costa Ricans and foreign tourists.

⁶⁰ These groups of street traders seem to resemble those peddlers who work in the streets of European cities after migrating from Asia and Africa, such as sellers of sunglasses and DVDs in current-day Barcelona, see: Uma Kothari, “Global Peddlers and Local Networks: Migrant Cosmopolitanisms,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 26 (2008), pp. 500–16.

⁶¹ Hufton, *Poor*, p. 83.

⁶² Cf. the traders from these groups who were fined in The Hague in the eighteenth century. Gemeentearchief Den Haag, Archief Ambachtsgilden en Bussen, inv. nos. 133–8.

⁶³ Oberpfennig, *Migration*, p. 68.

⁶⁴ Van Damme, *Verleiden*, p. 83. Other examples are knife grinders and tinkers, see for example: Moch, *Moving*, p. 80.

⁶⁵ Hufton, *Poor*, p. 84; see also Van Damme, *Verleiden*, pp. 83–4.

end of the spectrum, home-produced goods such as bread and cakes.⁶⁶ The reason for their choice of products probably lies in the fact that they were forbidden by the local councils, guilds, or both, to sell items that were sold by local shopkeepers.⁶⁷ For example, in early modern Germany, women who sold imported Mediterranean fruits were specifically forbidden to sell fruit that was grown closer to home.⁶⁸ When locally operating street vendors would sell products that were also on offer by local stationary retailers, such as vegetables and fish, they were generally obliged to sell at different, and mostly unfavourable, times.⁶⁹

Lastly, we find people who only hawked occasionally, and when they did, they generally sold in small quantities. Housewives sold small pieces of cloth, small home-produced goods, or cooked foods.⁷⁰ Young men and women who were arrested for vagrancy were active as hawkers, and others were arrested for stealing and reselling items of clothing.⁷¹ Overall, the impression one gets is that in early modern European economies, perhaps even more than in current developing economies, street vendors filled gaps in the market. They sold very specific items, new and exotic wares, or very cheap goods. Although this is sometimes explained by underdeveloped distribution systems, I think it is fair to argue that their choice of products was probably partly due to restrictions on which goods they were allowed to sell, and partly due to their entrepreneurial spirit.

⁶⁶ Streng, *Vrijheid*, pp. 75, 95; Wiesner, *Renaissance*, p. 118; Salman, "Peddling."

⁶⁷ Streng, *Vrijheid*, p. 75.

⁶⁸ Wiesner, *Renaissance*, p. 120.

⁶⁹ Wiesner, *Renaissance*, pp. 117, 121; Archer, *Hugh Alley's Caveat*, p. 6; Betty R. Masters, *The Public Markets of the City of London Surveyed by William Leybourn in 1677* (London, 1974), p. 13; Van den Heuvel, *Women and Entrepreneurship*, pp. 103–4; Regionaal Archief Leiden, Archief van de Gilden, Beurzen en de Rederijkerskamers, inv. no. 1215.

⁷⁰ Wiesner, *Renaissance*, p. 177; Streng, *Vrijheid*, p. 67; Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, pp. 123–34; Annette de Wit, "Zeemansvrouwen aan het werk. De arbeidsmarktpositie van vrouwen in Maassluis, Schiedam en Ter Heijde (1600–1700)," *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, 3 (2005), pp. 60–80; 74; Ogilvie, *Bitter living*, pp. 302–3.

⁷¹ Anne Winter, "'Vagrancy' as an Adaptive Strategy: The Duchy of Brabant, 1767–1776," *International Review of Social History*, 49 (2004), pp. 249–77, at 263–4; Lemire, *Dress*, pp. 145–6; Thera Wijsenbeek-Olthuis, "Gestolen goed. Diefstal van textiel in Den Haag 1600–1800," *Textielhistorische bijdragen*, 47 (2007), pp. 42–63, at 47–8. In the case of reselling of stolen goods we also find people who were part of professional gangs who stole textiles and clothing for resale on a more permanent basis.

Reasons for entering into street selling in early modern Europe

We have seen that in modern developing economies, entry into street vending depends on a combination of macro- and micro-economical factors. On the one hand, it is caused by the combination of large-scale rural-urban migrations and the existence of dual labor markets. On the other hand, we find that of the various jobs available to newcomers to the mega-cities as well as others who failed to gain access to formal types of work, street selling is mostly favoured by those who appreciate its flexibility. To what extent can such mechanisms (or parts of them) explain the extent and different types of street vending we have observed in early modern Europe?

Let us start with the factor that is most commonly mentioned in the academic literature on developing economies: the impact of rural-urban migration. At first sight, the situation in pre-industrial Europe seems similar to that of the present, as many ambulant traders were indeed rural migrants. However, we have also seen that most of the rural peddlers, even when they visited cities, generally did not settle there, and moreover, many worked as ambulant traders only part of the year. Indeed, a closer look reveals that the situation for many of these rural migrant-peddlers seems very different from many street vendors in the 20th- and 21st-century. Although most of them needed the income from peddling and hawking, not all of them did it out of sheer economic desperation. For the German Tödden, peddling was part of their annual cycle of work, as was the case with the itinerant traders from the Auvergne, although the economic circumstances of the latter group were clearly direr.⁷² This sometimes forced them to abandon their plans to return to their home regions, and become someone who may indeed have closely resembled the street sellers of present-day Africa or Latin America.⁷³ Nevertheless, we can conclude that for substantial groups of long-distance itinerant traders, migration was not the cause but rather a consequence or, perhaps even more accurate, a necessary tool to be able to engage in street vending.⁷⁴

Does this mean that mass migration to the early modern cities did not lead to higher numbers of street vendors and that there were no rural-urban migrants among the urban street vendors? Interestingly, the

⁷² Lucassen, *Naar de kusten*; Fontaine, *Peddlars*.

⁷³ See Hufton, *Poor*, pp. 70–1.

⁷⁴ Lucassen, "Blind Spot," p. 219.

available evidence only sheds oblique light on these issues. Earlier in this chapter, I pointed to the fact that local hawkers were mostly female, and that hardly any information is available on their origins, except for women who came into the cities from the surrounding countryside to sell fresh produce or fish. However, overall we are left in the dark on whether these women were (relative) newcomers or not. From what these women reported to the local authorities when requesting permission to sell, the majority seemed to live in the cities they operated in, and in terms of affluence, ranged from not the very wealthy to the very poor.⁷⁵ Moreover, whilst the available evidence on urban hawkers gives us very little clues on the role of migration in their economic activities, the historiography of early modern European urban migration also leaves the issue largely unexplored. Street selling is regularly mentioned as an employment opportunity for migrants who had recently arrived in the city, but such activities are hardly investigated in these contexts.⁷⁶ The question is whether this is simply a blind spot or whether there was no need for migrants to work in street vending and the phenomenon of ambulant trading in early modern cities should be explained differently. In the context of this chapter, it is not possible to answer this question, but it certainly deserves further attention.⁷⁷

Another very prominent feature in the debates on street vending in modern times is the impact of regulatory regimes, with some authors stressing restrictive policies, forcing especially the poor into informal trading, and others pointing to informal trade being an outcome of weighing up costs and benefits of formal versus informal work. It is clear that also in early modern European street vending regulation mattered, both in restricting access to the labor market, and therefore pushing people towards street selling, and in the decision to operate as an informal rather than a formal street vendor. We see that entry costs into formal street

⁷⁵ There is a danger to relying on such evidence to establish a social profile of street hawkers, especially regarding their levels of wealth as one can expect a greater willingness from urban authorities to let the very poor peddle some wares in order to make a living.

⁷⁶ For example Catharina Lis, *Social Change and the Laboring Poor. Antwerp, 1770–1860* (New Haven, 1986), p. 60; Jan Lucassen and Rinus Penninx, *Nieuwkomers, nakomelingen, Nederlanders. Immigranten in Nederland 1550–1993* (Amsterdam, 1994), p. 55; Leslie Page Moch, *Moving Europeans. Migration in Western Europe since 1650* (second edition, Bloomington, 2003), p. 98; Erika Kuijpers, *Migrantenstad. Immigratie en sociale verhoudingen in 17e-eeuws Amsterdam* (Hilversum, 2005), p. 247. See also Lucassen, “Blind Spot.”

⁷⁷ Issues that require further attention and that might shed more light on the character and dynamics of early modern street vending are migration of the middle-aged and the elderly, and of the existence and functioning of shanty towns in pre-industrial Europe.

selling, imposed by guilds and local governments through requiring guild memberships and sales licenses, were a significant factor in the choice to be an informal street vendor.⁷⁸ For example, those who only engaged in street selling occasionally or part-time, such as a housewife who was caught in the Dutch town of Zwolle selling a small piece of linen without a sales license, the costs of formality simply did not outweigh the benefits.⁷⁹ Indeed, when the price of a guild membership of one of the Amsterdam retailers' guilds was drastically lowered after great concerns over the high numbers of informal traders operating in the city in the mid-eighteenth-century, membership numbers soared.⁸⁰

The evidence on the impact of regulations on general access to work and the impact that they had on the character and existence of street vending is, however, less straightforward. On the one hand, historians are adamant that many rural-urban migrants and other often poor inhabitants of Europe's cities were forced into small-scale peddling because institutional restrictions meant that access to other occupations were closed to them.⁸¹ Indeed, we find that the groups whose entry into crafts and trades were hampered or sometimes fully blocked by citizenship requirements, hefty guild entrance fees and the straightforward exclusion from guilds, such as migrants, Jews and women, seemed active in street selling in disproportionate numbers.⁸² At the same time, one can find the argument put forward that precisely when institutional barriers imposed by guilds disappeared at the end of the 18th century, peddling would have increased substantially. Indeed, as was earlier stressed by De Soto, some historians of early modern European retailing claim that the end of mercantilism and the introduction of "liberal" 19th-century regulation resulted in extraordinary increases in street vending.⁸³ This assumption is confirmed in an example presented by Braudel in which he cites a Metz magistrate who in 1813 wrote to the general council on trade in Paris that because of the modest price of the Patent license, which replaced

⁷⁸ Van den Heuvel, *Women and Entrepreneurship*, p. 166.

⁷⁹ Streng, *Vrijheid*, p. 76.

⁸⁰ Clé Lesger, "De locatie van het Amsterdamse winkelbedrijf in de achttiende eeuw," *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, 4 (2007), pp. 35–70, at 60.

⁸¹ Fontaine, "Exchange of Second-hand Goods," p. 103; Panhuysen, *Maatwerk*, pp. 267, 271; Ogilvie, *Bitter Living*.

⁸² Salman, "Peddling"; Ogilvie, *Bitter Living*, p. 169; Montenach, "Schattenarbeiterinnen"; Van den Heuvel, *Women and Entrepreneurship*, pp. 214–5.

⁸³ Van Damme, *Verleiden*, pp. 97–100; Deceulaer, "Dealing," p. 192. Compare J.D.H. Harten, "De verzorging van het platteland van de Zeeuwse eilanden in de Franse tijd," *Bulletin historische geografie*, III/1 (October 1971), pp. 31–73, at 60.

obligatory guild membership, anybody could set himself up as a trader, and that the only way to put a stop to this was to re-establish the guilds.⁸⁴

The question is, whether these historians in addressing the impact of regulation are dealing with the same mechanisms. If the historians who argue that corporate restrictions were forcing people into street trading are right, then it is rather surprising that the abolishment of such restrictions would have resulted in a sharp increase in the phenomenon. One would instead expect that while some people would have perhaps entered into retailing as it became more accessible, many others would have chosen to work in perhaps more profitable occupations that had been previously closed to them. It is therefore more likely that it was not solely the abolishment of guild regimes that caused the increase, but that at the same time, the lowering of thresholds to formal forms of street selling encouraged many of those who were already active as hawkers on an informal basis to obtain official permission.

Nevertheless, and here we arrive at a third factor, it is clear from most of the available evidence that the eighteenth century, and then especially after 1750, was a time in which street vending became much more perceived as a problem throughout Europe, precisely when large parts of Europe were experiencing worsening economic conditions.⁸⁵ We see complaints about street sellers increasing, as well the numbers of arrests of street vendors. It is also in this period that in many countries, licensing systems for peddlers were introduced and we discover a concentration of changes in policies regarding street vending. Although the impact of economic downturn on the size of the informal sector is still heavily debated, the early modern European evidence seems to suggest that the need for people to engage in small-scale peddling was higher during times of economic difficulty. However, at the same time we need to be aware that economic downturn could have also lead to a greater visibility of peddlers and hawkers in primary sources as a greater urgency to protect sedentary retailers and their businesses would have led to increased legislation, and greater intensities of policing.⁸⁶ This issue clearly needs further

⁸⁴ Braudel, *Wheels of Commerce*, p. 80.

⁸⁵ Moch, *Moving Europeans*, p. 98; Hufton, *Poor*, pp. 70–1; Mui and Mui, *Shops*, pp. 135–220; Van Damme, *Verleiden*, p. 55. An exception seems to be early seventeenth-century London where complaints also soared. Griffiths, *Lost Londons*.

⁸⁶ James E. Shaw, "Retail, Monopoly, and Privilege: The Dissolution of the Fishmongers' Guild of Venice, 1599," *Journal of Early Modern History*, 6, 4 (2002), pp. 396–427, at 423; Archer, *Hugh Alley's Caveat*, p. 35.

exploration, but it is nevertheless very clear that for many street vendors, poverty was a reason to engage in hawking.⁸⁷ Indeed, in their appeals to the authorities many stress how their lives had radically degraded in quality through sickness of household members, absence of a male head of household through war and widowhood, and the like, and that they therefore needed the income from a small trade.⁸⁸ Moreover, various examples indicate that during tough economic times, and in years of war and general unrest, the numbers of street sellers went up.⁸⁹ For instance, during the Thirty Years' War, Strasbourg saw a sharp increase in the number of brandy stands in the city, as well as the number of women requesting to operate them.⁹⁰ Whilst claims of poverty can be seen as problematic evidence to fully explain which people entered into street vending, and they probably are only one side of the story, the evidence on the increase in street vending during tough times, does suggest the two were linked.⁹¹

A fourth factor proposed by social scientists to explain why people end up in street-selling is that it is an attractive alternative to other make-shift jobs. Due to the flexible hours, married women who also have the responsibility of caring for their family, would particularly find street selling appealing.⁹² The choice for street vending thus is also determined by the life cycle. Recent research on present-day Malaysia shows that many women who work as cleaners in hotels or as factory workers choose to change their job to street selling after marriage. Interestingly, this is not only because they themselves feel that street vending is easier to combine with motherhood, but also as a result of their husbands considering their previously held jobs as not suitable anymore.⁹³ Although we still have very little information on the precise identities of early modern street vendors who operated in urban contexts, the accounts we find on those who were

⁸⁷ Laurence Fontaine, "Märkte als Chance für die Armen in der Frühen Neuzeit," *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie*, 59, 2 (2011), pp. 37–53. See also: Melissa Calaresu, "From the Street to the Stereotype. Urban Space, Travel and the Picturesque in Late Eighteenth-century Naples," *Italian Studies*, 62, 2 (2007), pp. 189–203, at 197–201.

⁸⁸ Shaw, "Retail," pp. 400–1; Streng, *Vrijheid*, p. 89; Wiesner, *Renaissance*, pp. 113–4, 117, 120, 130, 138.

⁸⁹ Van Damme, *Verleiden*, p. 55; Mui and Mui, *Shops*, pp. 135–220; Wiesner, *Renaissance*, p. 117.

⁹⁰ Wiesner, *Renaissance*, p. 130.

⁹¹ Compare the remark by Catharina Lis who states that among migrant women arriving in Antwerp at the run of the nineteenth century only the "happy few" would be able to find work as a retailer. Lis, *Social Change*, p. 60.

⁹² Nirathon, *Fighting Poverty*, p. 17.

⁹³ Anja Franck, " 'I Am Too Old! Who is Going to Give me a Job.' Women Hawkers in Teluk Bahang, Penang, Malaysia," *Journal of Workplace Rights*, 15, 1 (2011), pp. 11–32.

vending in Europe's urban streets seems to confirm that also in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries one's phase in the life cycle mattered in the choice for this economic activity.⁹⁴ Although we do discover evidence for younger women operating as hawkers, most cases one comes across are of housewives and widows, who often had young children to take care of.⁹⁵ Moreover, for eighteenth-century Holland it has recently been established that opening a small retail outlet was something that was precisely done by married women with a small but growing family.⁹⁶ Interestingly, as Merry Wiesner pointed out, whilst urban authorities saw street vending as an appropriate job for older women, they were rather negative about young women hawking in the streets as they were seen as "persons who could easily do some other kind of work, like being a maid, but are causing great disorder by selling fruit."⁹⁷ The latter is a rather striking resemblance of how cultural norms on what types of jobs were suitable for women in different phases of their lives affected the choice to become a street vendor, in both present-day Asia and early modern Europe.

Concluding remarks

This chapter aimed to provide insight into the question why historians have largely ignored informal retail practices and what could be gained from studying those street vendors that operated in the shadows of the official economy. The results of looking at early modern street vending through the prism provided by insights on street selling in developing economies shows that we cannot explain this by large dissimilarities between contemporary and early modern street vendors and their position in society. Whilst at first sight the historiography seems to reveal that early modern ambulant trading was mostly a seasonal phenomenon, undertaken by rural, mostly male, migrants who peddled their wares through town and

⁹⁴ Van Damme, *Verleiden*, p. 83, stresses that many street vendors were involved on incidental and temporary basis rather than on a permanent basis.

⁹⁵ Streng, *Vrijheid*, p. 89; Wiesner, *Renaissance*, pp. 138, 113–4, 130, 117, 120; Rudolf M. Dekker, "Women in Revolt. Popular Protest and its Social Basis in Holland in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries," *Theory and Society*, 16 (1987) pp. 337–62, at 352.

⁹⁶ Danielle van den Heuvel and Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, "Huishoudens, werk en consumptieveranderingen in vroegmodern Holland. Het voorbeeld van de koffie-en theeverkopers in achttiende-eeuws Leiden," *Historisch Tijdschrift Holland*, 42, 2 (2010), pp. 102–24.

⁹⁷ Wiesner, *Renaissance*, p. 120.

country, a more diversified image appears when the various strands of history that have been studying ambulant trading in rather isolated contexts are brought together. Resulting from this enlarged view, there emerges at least a partial overlap with contemporary developing economies.

We found that no such thing as “the early modern street vendor” existed, and that a great variety of people was involved in ambulant trading, some on a permanent basis, others more occasionally. It also appeared that the various groups of ambulant traders shared selling spaces and commercial circuits and their worlds were hence probably not as separated as one might assume on the basis of the historiography. However, in classifying itinerant vendors according to their identities and activities, it became clear that interesting differences seemed to have existed between male and female itinerant sellers, with the former generally active in long-distance itinerant trading, often on a seasonal basis, and the latter covering shorter distances all year round. The question is whether this should solely be ascribed to their gender, or rather to the type of ambulant trading they were involved in (long vs. short distance, urban vs. rural), as the latter had important consequences for which people could engage in the different types of ambulant trade. Such consequences were mostly related to age and gender, and varied from practical issues such as the weight of the merchandise and the dangers on the road, combined with family care needs, as well as cultural and institutional restrictions. These issues need further investigation. In this context, it also remains to be seen whether we have fully captured the identity of early modern street vendors: many locally operating males may have simply been hidden under a different classification.

We have furthermore found that two of the most commonly cited causes for informal street vending in the context of modern developing economies, migration and regulation, also played a large role in the early modern period, but that their precise influence is as yet unclear. Whilst many long-distance peddlers were clearly migrants, it was not necessarily their migratory behavior that caused them to become a street trader. At the same time, for most of the urban hawkers, information on their origins is (still) lacking. With regard to the impact of regulation, the dynamics of restrictive regulatory regimes and the intensity of policing remain unclear, as well as how these impacted the extent of street selling and the choice for those engaging in peddling and hawking to opt for informality. Although most, if not all, historians who have studied early modern ambulant trading in the past seem to recognize the restrictions on street

traders by regulatory regimes, and the constraints that resulted from that, only a handful have addressed their implications.

From my analysis, it appeared that the lack of attention for informal street selling in an early modern context can be explained by two reasons. The first is that peddling and hawking are often immediately linked to marginality. The efforts to prove that ambulant traders were not marginal but instead crucial to the pre-industrial European economy have resulted in ignoring what the precise effects of operating in the shadows were, for the people involved and the economy at large. Whilst marginality is clearly an issue that is associated to street vending, both in the experiences of street traders and perhaps even more so in the perception of ambulant trading by social scientists and historians alike, it is, however, also a very problematic notion. Marginality holds multifaceted meanings, which likewise seem to be continuously disputed, and as such distracts from what we really want to know: what role street vending, with all its limitations and opportunities, plays in a society, either historical or modern.⁹⁸ Perhaps, it is therefore best, before we return to the issue of marginality, if at all, to start by properly describing and analysing street vending in its multiple forms.

A second reason for why we have such limited knowledge of the phenomenon of early modern informal street selling needs to be sought in the flexible character of street vending, especially in urban contexts, and the fact that (as a result) it was often performed by married women. The ad-hoc nature means that many people who would have sold in the street only part-time or occasionally may not have considered it as a “job,” and the very fact that many engaged in the trade without permission resulted in hiding it from authorities who tried to register their activities, for instance when compiling tax and population registers.⁹⁹ From a recent investigation of eighteenth-century vagrancy it appeared that whereas in criminal court cases many were simply registered as vagrants, several actually engaged in some form of economic activity, including hawking.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, whilst over the last decades important progress has been made in our understanding of women’s work in Europe’s pre-industrial

⁹⁸ See the comments by Leslie Moch, *Moving Europeans*, p. 144 and by Lucassen, “Blind Spot,” pp. 216–8.

⁹⁹ Winter, “Adaptive Strategy,” pp. 263, 268. In contrast to this assumption Hufton stresses that the authorities in 18th-century France did see colportage as a “definitive job.” Hufton, *Poor*, p. 121.

¹⁰⁰ Lucassen, “Blind Spot,” pp. 230–3; Winter, “Adaptive Strategy.”

past, it is exactly on the occupational activities of married women that we still lack information.¹⁰¹ Understanding why people were involved in informal street vending, and who precisely these people were, will therefore require not only a more scrupulous analysis of records that are all too familiar to us, such as petitions and court records, but also a greater attention to the household economies of especially poorer households and the roles that wives, as well as perhaps also sons and daughters, played in this.¹⁰² In the light of fundamentally changing roles of production and consumption within households in the run-up to the Industrial Revolution, as the hypothesis of the Industrious Revolution recently put forward by Jan de Vries suggests, fully grasping the workings of this segment of the pre-industrial economy has become ever so important.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Cf. Danielle van den Heuvel and Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, "Partners in Business: Spousal Cooperation in Trades in Early Modern England and the Dutch Republic," *Continuity and Change*, 23, 2 (2008), pp. 209–16.

¹⁰² Anne Winter's inspirational methodology to uncover more information about those arrested as vagrants in 18th-century Brabant is a good example of how one could go about finding out more on street vendors, and in a recent paper with Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk we showed that by combining wide ranges of sources it is possible to expose activities of married women, their husbands, and changes in those according to life cycle. Winter, "Adaptive Strategy." Van den Heuvel and Van Nederveen Meerkerk, "Huishoudens."

¹⁰³ Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution. Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650–Present* (Cambridge, 2008).

