

# POVERTY AND ENDANGERED SOCIAL TIES

## An Introduction

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Political theorists tend to describe modern Western societies as ones characterized by a direct relationship between the individual and the state; whereas in traditional societies people belonged primarily to clans, estates, guilds, religious groupings and local communities, the modern nation state is composed of autonomous and equal citizens. Yet despite the rise of this notion of the state as the dominating sociopolitical entity over the past two and a half centuries, more immediate social ties have remained of eminent importance. Humans need palpable, face-to-face relationships for their happiness and well-being, and the state too relies on the social networks of everyday life for its stability and smooth functioning. One sphere in which the interdependencies – and also contentions – between ‘large’ and ‘small’ social entities are particularly evident is in the treatment of poverty. The state, as represented by central government, took on ever greater responsibility for securing the welfare of its citizens in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and although the process of welfare state-building was not in the first place designed to relieve the smaller units of society of their original duties, there has been frequent controversy over whether state intervention in the social sphere may not unintentionally loosen the ties that bind societies together. Apart from state citizenship, three types of social tie have remained crucial in the debates on poverty and welfare: first the family, second the ‘home’ in the double sense of a dwelling and of a home town, and third, the workplace.

This book addresses the history of welfare in modern Europe from a vantage point that highlights the relevance of social ties for the prevention, interpretation and relief of poverty. First drafts of the chapters were

discussed by the meeting ‘Poverty in Modern Europe: Micro-Perspectives on the Formation of the Welfare State in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’ at the German Historical Institute London in May 2012,<sup>1</sup> which was organized in cooperation with the Collaborative Research Centre ‘Strangers and Poor People: Changing Patterns of Inclusion and Exclusion from Classical Antiquity to the Present Day’ based at the University of Trier, Germany. The book focuses on three specific categories among the poor, whose bonds with society can be described as particularly precarious. These are: (1) abandoned or neglected children; (2) the vagrant or homeless; and (3) the unemployed. In case studies that cover Britain, Germany, France, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Romania, and Russia, the volume explores the ways welfare agencies and wider society responded to these groups, and how disadvantaged people themselves perceived their situations.

Our starting point is the assumption that the social ties of family, home and workplace were of persistent importance in the context of debates on poverty and welfare in modern Europe, but that their sociocultural valuation was contested and served varying interests and goals. For most humans, the family is certainly essential, both materially and emotionally, in a taken-for-granted way. At the same time, however, highly moralistic images of the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ family have been projected onto this ‘natural’ unit, with shifting attitudes towards gender, breadwinner roles, parental authority and standards of adequate childcare, as well as pragmatic demands on the family’s resources to keep public expenditure low. Similarly, a decent place to live in, with an accompanying sense of belonging, is something people normally perceive as a necessity; but the idea of ‘home’ has deeply ideological connotations too. ‘Home’ can be a status symbol and a means of drawing boundaries against ‘strangers’, while the modern state has taken great interest in recording fixed abodes of its citizens in order to keep track of them. Stable work has equally ambivalent implications. On the positive side, it is the source of income that enables an individual to provide for a home and a family; moreover it is a central source of recognition, companionship and self-esteem. But satisfactory jobs are often hard to find, and an unsteady working biography quickly provokes the accusation of ‘shirking’. In short, family, home and work represent both desires and obligations; they empower individuals and they control them. People who drop out of one, or several, of these basic social ties are highly vulnerable to material distress, and they tend to be regarded as morally suspect, as somehow deficient and as a potential element of social disorder. Consequently they have been targeted by manifold endeavours to offer them ‘rescue’.

In current debates on pressing social problems, the breakdown of social ties looms large as an explanatory factor. Failing families, dysfunctional neighbourhoods and bleak job prospects feature prominently, for instance, among the reasons given for urban riots such as those that occurred in France in 2005 and Britain in 2011. They also feature prominently in more general debates on the ‘crisis’ of welfare states and the reappearance of an ‘underclass’ in affluent Western societies.<sup>2</sup> But concerns about poverty and demoralization being engendered by a breakdown of basic social ties reach back to the onset of capitalist industrialization at least, and their frequent recurrence points to a crucial dilemma in modern societies: these societies encourage individualistic, competitive values that threaten to undermine the very stabilizing bonds they depend on. This volume cannot attempt a full account of how this dilemma developed from the early nineteenth century to the late twentieth; yet it contributes to a better understanding of its implications by assembling new historical research on the three named groups among the poor. Ranging over diverse national and political settings, and working with different methods, the chapters are united by their common interest in a set of overarching questions. How did societal perceptions of neglected children, the homeless and the unemployed change over time? In what ways were these perceptions shaped by shifting images of national citizenship, on the one hand, and the family, the home and the workplace as basic integrating units, on the other? How did welfare agencies define the specific vulnerabilities of those whose immediate social ties appeared deficient? How did they try to ‘rescue’ them; on what grounds, by what measures and to what ends? And finally, how did the poor themselves speak about their relationships and voice their claims of belonging?

The remainder of this short introduction provides a framework for reading the coming chapters. It does so in three steps. A first section elaborates a little further on the relevance of ‘small’ social entities in the context of welfare state development, focusing on the concept of ‘subsidiarity’. Although this concept represents only one strand within the corpus of sociopolitical thinking that has expanded so much during the past two centuries, it seems particularly suited to illustrate the disputes provoked by state intervention into the social sphere and the continuing insistence on the pivotal role of immediate social ties in dealing with poverty. The second section sketches some recent trends in historical research on childcare, vagrancy and unemployment. The third section outlines the structure of the volume and the approaches taken by the individual chapters.

## Who Rescues the Vulnerable? Contested Responsibilities

When sociology emerged as an academic discipline at the turn of the twentieth century, one of its obvious purposes was to explain what holds societies together in times of dramatic change. How could social ties survive in an increasingly unstable world, experienced by many as ruthlessly materialistic, individualistic and torn by sharp class antagonism? Émile Durkheim, the founding father of French sociology, was deeply occupied with this question, formulating it as a problem of ‘solidarity’. Traditional societies, he believed, were kept stable by what he termed ‘mechanical solidarity’, rooted in a powerful ‘collective conscience’. How could the rapidly industrializing societies of his day maintain cohesion and order when this kind of solidarity seemed to be waning so fast? Durkheim’s answer was that the very socio-economic process that was dissolving the old ties simultaneously laid the foundations for a new type of solidarity: modern societies are held together by ‘organic solidarity’, rooted in the social division of labour. Notwithstanding transitional phases of ‘anomie’, characterized by the erosion of guiding norms under the strain of rapid change, the division of labour was gradually creating new networks of cooperation and new socio-moral regulations to replace the bonds and controls of the premodern world. In the modern constellation, Durkheim argued, the individual had become more autonomous and had a much higher standing, while nevertheless being more tightly integrated into the social whole.<sup>3</sup>

According to this largely optimistic interpretation of modernization, solidarity could successfully shift from small units bound by personal closeness, common beliefs and repressive laws against rule-breakers to the large and complex social entities of nation states tied together by the interdependency of increasingly differentiated individuals. The idea of organic solidarity supported a positive evaluation of the productive logic of industrialism and a legitimization of new sets of rules, which together, as necessary corollaries of each other, made progress possible towards a re-stabilized organization of society. Although highly academic in tone, Durkheim’s interpretation of social evolution was implicitly a programmatic statement as well: it was not by chance that he picked up on the key concept of ‘solidarity’, a catchword in the heated sociopolitical debates of the French Third Republic.<sup>4</sup> His theory rejected the dogmas of *laissez-faire* liberalism as well as conservative denunciations of modernity, socialist dreams of revolution and authoritarian schemes of state-imposed order. Organic solidarity, he held, would grow naturally out of the division of labour, so long as it was accompanied by a regulatory system that reflected and reproduced a fundamental social accord. In this way,

the ‘anomalies’ that troubled the industrializing societies of his day could be overcome.

In historical retrospect, Durkheim’s vision fits well with the master narrative of the emerging democratic welfare state as it has been repeatedly recounted over the past century. But he did not spell out a practical path for reform policies, nor was there any consensus among his contemporaries on how a new regulatory system capable of moderating social disparities should be structured or on how it could come into being. Particularly controversial was what role central government should play. In the late nineteenth century, it became increasingly evident that more had to be done to restrengthen social cohesion, and that this necessarily included more consideration for the poor. But it was by no means yet decided if state intervention was a viable or desirable way to achieve such goals. In the 1880s, the first national workers’ insurance acts were passed by the German Reichstag, but only after fierce discussions and after substantially reducing the state control originally envisaged by Chancellor Bismarck. In France and the United Kingdom, resistance against similar legislative regulations was even more pronounced.<sup>5</sup> Most commentators on the ‘Social Question’ had other (but widely varying) views on how ‘organic solidarity’ should be correctly understood and on how it might be enhanced.

The concept of ‘subsidiarity’ can be used to illustrate a broad strand of sociopolitical argument strongly opposed to state intervention. Subsidiarity is an organizing principle proposing that any matter should be handled by the smallest entity capable of dealing with it; a central authority should therefore only perform tasks not manageable at a more immediate level. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the English term ‘subsidiarity’ was adapted from the German *Subsidiarität*, which, in turn, has its main root in Catholic social doctrine.<sup>6</sup> Although the concept was explicitly developed by Catholic social thinkers (like the German Jesuit Oswald von Nell-Breuning) in the interwar period, it was, as a world view, already vibrant in Catholic writings of the nineteenth century. In this context, it had a decidedly anti-state stance, defending the autonomy of traditional entities like the family, the household, the workshop, professional corporations, voluntary associations and, of course, the Church against the new regulating aspirations of central government. In opposition to the revolutionary idea that society was made up of equal citizens directly linked to the state, Catholic writers insisted on an image of a society that was organically composed of these ‘natural’ intermediate entities, which assigned each individual his/her place and stabilized all people’s lives through a network of mutual obligations.

Catholic social thinkers were particularly opposed to state intervention in the care of the poor. As late as 1882, *Wetzer and Welte’s Kirchenlexikon*,

the quasi-official German-language encyclopaedia of Catholic doctrine, vigorously criticized ‘state poor relief’, including the statutory public relief provided by municipalities. Compulsory assistance, the lexicon contended, was incompatible with true charity. It perverted a purely ethical Christian duty and even came close to the ‘very dangerous’ communist-socialist programme by implying that the poor had a ‘right’ to the property of their co-citizens. With compulsory assistance, all feelings of compassion on the part of the wealthy and of gratitude on the part of the needy would be destroyed. The ‘sweet relationship’ between benefactor and pauper would be replaced by a materialistic one like that between creditor and debtor, and the demands of the poor would continuously increase:

The certain expectation of receiving relief weakens the consciousness of moral and economic responsibility, encourages a frivolous lifestyle without making provisions for the future, and dulls the sense of duty of relatives to care for their impoverished family members ... If one considers further that economic ruin is very often caused by ethical and moral aberrations, and that hence it has to be treated primarily by moral means; then state poor relief is totally powerless in the face of these facts, and instead of reducing the causes of poverty it only contributes to augmenting them, and thus to endangering the whole of the state. Indeed, it is precisely state poor relief that offers workshy, depraved, but nonetheless assisted individuals a welcome opportunity to completely evade the moralizing influence especially of the Church. Finally, the bureaucratic, stereotyped manner in which state poor relief treats the poor, its cold disinterest in their fate, chokes off their confidence.<sup>7</sup>

By this interpretation, state intervention into the care of the poor did not enhance solidarity, but rather hollowed out its meaning. It undermined the cohesion of families, the integration of individuals via work, the emotional bonds between wealthier and poorer citizens, and the moral influence of religion. The *Kirchenlexikon* did not propose a return to uncoordinated almsgiving, but rather an organized system of voluntary charity that was locally based on the parish and was led by the Church. The state was to confine itself to welfare tasks these entities could not accomplish; for example, prudent fiscal legislation, or support in case of general calamities.

Such ideas were not only upheld by Catholics throughout Europe, but also by Protestants, particularly reformed or Calvinist Protestants like those in Switzerland, the Netherlands and Scotland. And, at core, they were also shared by liberals, although with a different emphasis, putting more weight on individual liberty, self-help and civic self-government. The common ground all these schools of thought shared was a conviction that state intervention in the sphere of welfare endangered the fabric

of society and thus carried the risk of increasing pauperism instead of reducing it. Around the turn of the twentieth century, such objections were in part attenuated and in part transformed, but by no means had they disappeared. In Germany, for instance, the ‘free’ providers of charity – above all the Church-related welfare associations – staunchly championed an independent, although increasingly state-subsidized role for themselves within the rising welfare state, a role that was legally acknowledged by the Weimar Republic.<sup>8</sup> Social legislation of the post-war era went even further, actually granting the voluntary sector precedence over the public one. Thus the Federal Social Assistance Act of 1961 stipulated that public welfare agencies should not create any new institutions if suitable institutions were or could be provided by the ‘free’ welfare sector.<sup>9</sup> By now, the concept of subsidiarity was explicitly being used to underpin the privileged position of voluntary assistance ideologically. Though the umbrella organizations of the voluntary welfare sector had long since ceased to be small or local entities, they still claimed that their social services were better capable of rescuing the vulnerable than the public administration, due to an ethos that guaranteed a more personal, individualizing approach.

Although the principle of subsidiarity was most explicitly mobilized by Catholic social doctrine, in resistance against state intrusion into an ancient domain of the Church, it was, in fact, central to public poor relief too. Drawing on the practice of medieval cities, early modern states had assigned the duty of care for the poor to local communities, and they were not at all eager to take on any direct responsibility in this area. Each community was obligated to assist its own impoverished members and had, in turn, the right to turn away non-members who might become a burden to the local coffer. This remained basically the same till well into the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> Though the rules on who was to be considered a community member changed substantially over time, and the powers of local bodies to remove non-members were gradually restricted, poor relief remained assigned to the local sphere of the home town or place of settlement as a matter of principle. Fiscal interests loomed large behind this arrangement, of course, but there were also moral reasons: the face-to-face ties of community life were regarded as an essential means to keep the ‘deserving’ poor socially integrated and to improve those who had gone astray. This conviction was expressed perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the so-called Elberfeld system of poor relief, established in the Prussian city of Elberfeld in the 1850s. Its main feature was close supervision of pauper households by a large number of honorary guardians recruited from among the better-off inhabitants of the neighbourhood. In many respects, the system was not really new, but it nonetheless met with wide and long-lasting international attention as a model for community-based assistance.<sup>11</sup>

At first glance, the English poor relief system appears to represent a very different ideological outlook. It was not only regulated by central authorities to an extent unknown on the European continent, but with its preference for indoor relief, it seemed much less concerned about the social ties of the poor, forcing them to separate from their neighbourhoods and even from their spouses and children when they entered the workhouse. However, this can be understood as a difference in method rather than in aims. Just as on the European mainland, English poor relief was locally based, with local ratepayers and boards of guardians taking a direct interest in its administration. Personal contact between rich and poor was deemed vital for the functioning of the system, and where it was no longer in evidence, due to residential segregation, this appeared to endanger social stability.<sup>12</sup> The deterrent threat of the workhouse was, in turn, specifically designed to strengthen the primary social bonds of work, home and family. It was supposed to coax the poor into remaining self-reliant in nearly all circumstances, with poor relief only stepping in as a very last resort.

The regulations of public poor relief were clearly founded on an idea of subsidiarity reaching down to a level below the local community. In the first place, individuals were responsible for maintaining themselves and their dependents, while public assistance had only a subsidiary function in cases where the family failed. Whether families should be broken up in such cases or whether, conversely, they should be induced to stay together even under the most adverse circumstances was a matter of frequent dispute. But in any event, individuals were, whenever possible, to contribute to the costs if a family member became a charge to the public. Civil and social legislation has maintained this principle to the present day. Lawmakers' insistence on the caring obligations of relatives aims at bolstering the family as an autonomous unit bound together by affection. When force has to be used to make relatives fulfil their obligations, however, it is usually the taxpayers' interest that comes to the fore. This was recently re-emphasized by a verdict of the German Federal Court, passed in February 2014, stating that adult children are liable to pay for the care of their aged parents even if the parent has refused all contact for decades and has thus 'annulled the family bond'.<sup>13</sup> The legal ties constituted by kinship remain intact irrespective of actual personal ties.

These brief remarks on the importance of social ties in debates on social policies should remind us not to regard the rise of the welfare state as happening inevitably, in a smooth and linear way. Over the past two centuries, the state has increasingly assumed responsibility for the welfare of its citizens, but the process was heavily contested, and smaller social entities retained vital functions. Their role remained particularly relevant

when it came to describing and dealing with vulnerable groups such as poor children, the homeless and the unemployed.

### **Waifs, Vagrants and the Unemployed in Historiography**

The three categories of the poor brought together in this volume shared the fate of having (at least temporarily) dropped out of social relationships considered to be normal and essential. But despite having this in common, they varied greatly in social standing and in how welfare agencies treated them; and by and large they have been considered separately and unevenly by historiography.

Poor and abandoned children have been (and remain) a key issue in expert and public debates on poverty and welfare – an issue that has also been explored extensively by historical research. No other group among the poor was regarded as more vulnerable, and with no others was the notion of ‘rescue’ invoked more explicitly. During the nineteenth century, changing conceptions of childhood gave rise to the idea that children have rights and that they have to be protected.<sup>14</sup> ‘Neglected’ and ‘deserted’ children became the privileged objects of public, philanthropic and religiously inspired welfare programmes. A complex field of child welfare, including a wide range of different institutions, foster care arrangements and child emigration schemes, emerged – reflecting a growing willingness of society to intervene in the lives of families.

Philanthropic and state intrusion in the familial space and in the parent-child relationship was a highly disputed issue, because the family was regarded as the basic unit of society and parental authority considered sacrosanct. But as the social reformers’ engagement was primarily with poor families, who according to popular representations lacked any kind of domestic life, a powerful rescue ideology quickly gained ground.<sup>15</sup> The child rescue movement, closely associated with names like Johann Hinrich Wichern (in Germany) and Thomas Barnardo (in Britain), changed the pattern of child welfare significantly. By characterizing poor parents as abusive and as a ‘deadly virus’<sup>16</sup> threatening the nation, middle-class reformers, philanthropists and social workers legitimized the separation of poor children from their impoverished backgrounds and turned poor families into ‘problematized units’.<sup>17</sup> As recent research has shown, the majority of institutionalized children were not parentless.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, popular reform literature portrayed poor children as deserted or orphaned and stressed the urgent need for extrafamilial care. That, for its own protection, society had the right and obligation to remove ‘neglected’ children from poor and inadequate homes became a core principle of child welfare policies in the second half of the nineteenth century. In

an article published in 1911 the matron of a neglected children's home summarized the dominant understanding of child care and the nature of the pauper child:

What can you expect from a child who has only the worst examples and environment and no sort of restraint or discipline. There is only one possible course for him. But supposing you take that child at three years, and train him carefully, then place him in the country beyond temptation, with good surroundings, the chances are that he will prove a man of use to the community.<sup>19</sup>

By this definition, widely shared among social reformers, the 'neglected' child was described primarily as an innocent victim, who supposedly lacked discipline, instruction and affective family bonds. Left in an unsuitable environment, however, the poor child would endanger public order.<sup>20</sup> Despite growing criticism of such 'rescue' practices and a shift to day care and preventive forms of poverty policy, removal from the family remained a dominant strategy of child welfare well into the twentieth century. In the name of 'Christian duty' and 'national efficiency', private and state officials continued to dismiss the rights of poor parents and to divide children (geographically and morally) from their families, by transferring them to specialized institutions, foster families and even foreign countries.<sup>21</sup>

That reformers' attempts to sever ties between institutionalized children and their biological parents often failed in practice, is highlighted by recent research. Focusing on individual welfare organizations, primarily in Britain and the United States, the expanding literature on the 'welfare child'<sup>22</sup> has shown that there was a significant discrepancy between the dominant fundraising narrative of child 'rescue' and the practical functioning of child welfare institutions. Not only had most institutionalized children at least one parent, but many poor families did their best to maintain contact and to oversee the care of their children.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, recent studies exploring the interactions between parents and welfare officials demonstrate that impoverished families used institutional child care as just one resource within their complex makeshift economies to overcome times of crisis caused by unemployment, ill health or the death of a partner.<sup>24</sup> Most often, it was not the child 'rescuers' but impoverished parents themselves who temporarily institutionalized their children with the aim, in the long run, of keeping family ties intact.

There is a general trend within the historiography on poverty and welfare to look beyond expert debates and state regulations, and in this context some studies have begun to use a 'child-centred perspective' to explore the experiences of children who were removed from their families.<sup>25</sup> This new surge of academic interest in the lives of institutionalized children, foster

children, child migrants and ‘discarded children’ has been encouraged by current public debates on the abuses they suffered up to very recent times. Some of the former ‘welfare children’ are themselves pressing for public recognition of their distress.<sup>26</sup>

Vagrants were in many respects the very antithesis of destitute children. While the latter have usually been considered innocent victims, vagrants were for centuries seen as the prototypical vicious poor – people who had wilfully violated the social bond.<sup>27</sup> ‘The field of welfare and legal treatment of the poor that, up to today, is most closely related to the term of culpability, and on which theoretical reflections are always pervaded by this term, is the field of begging and vagabondage’, wrote the German social expert Christian Klumker in 1910,<sup>28</sup> concisely summing up a long tradition of blaming the vagrant poor. Historical research has focused mainly on the early modern period. Most works on the history of poverty in early modern Europe devote much space to the issue of vagrancy, and a considerable number of specialized case studies have further enlarged our knowledge. They explore in particular depth the manifold attempts the authorities made to repress begging and vagabondage, but increasingly they look too at cultural representations of the vagrant poor and at their everyday lives.<sup>29</sup> It is now well established that the phenomenon of vagrancy played an essential role in the design of social policies, above all in the differentiation between the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’ poor, and more generally in the definitions of order, citizenship and belonging that evolved during the early modern period.

Historiography has taken much less notice of the persistence of vagrancy in modern Europe. Frequently it has been assumed that the problem subsided due to the fundamental transformation of political, legal and economic conditions. Especially in Central Europe, the early modern vagrancy problem had been to a large extent produced by territorial fragmentation, by restrictive settlement laws and by tight guild regulations that had driven considerable segments of the population out of stable community life. These causal factors gradually disappeared after the turn of the nineteenth century.

Vagrancy, however, did not disappear. Rather, it became once more a heatedly debated social issue, especially from the 1870s up to the 1930s. In these times of capitalist industrialization, rapid urbanization and massive labour migration, the causes were different ones from those that had prevailed under the *ancien régime*; and consequently the composition of the wandering poor changed too. Now, it was primarily single men in search of employment, or allegedly so, who constituted the core of the problem as it was described by the authorities, social experts and the media. Historical research on the ‘modern’ version of vagrancy

is most advanced with regard to the United States, where the nouns 'tramp' and 'hobo' gained currency at the end of the nineteenth century to designate the seemingly bondless, penniless men then roaming the country.<sup>30</sup> For Europe, the historiography is still comparatively sparse, though national and regional case studies are gradually increasing.<sup>31</sup> A related, but nevertheless separate strand of research is the history of 'gypsies' and other travellers, who were distinguished from the general mass of poor wanderers by their family structure, their mode of mobility and their (perceived) ethnical otherness. The special experiences of these itinerant groups constitute an important facet of the topic of vagrancy, but one we were unfortunately not able to address in this volume.

Next to the old issue of vagrancy the relatively new issue of homelessness (in the more precise sense of having no roof) began to emerge in the nineteenth century, engendered by the housing shortage and soaring rents in the rapidly growing cities. Public awareness of this social problem, which affected not only 'undeserving' single men but whole working-class families, was periodically raised. In Germany, for example, it came to the fore with the economic boom of the early 1870s, when evictions, the tearing down of unauthorized barrack camps and harsh police treatment of homeless families sparked riots in the new imperial capital of Berlin.<sup>32</sup> But generally speaking, the issue of rooflessness tended to remain in the shadow of the debates on vagrancy right up to the interwar period.

After the Second World War, by contrast, while highly mobile wanderers quickly vanished from European country roads, the disturbing phenomenon of urban homelessness leapt into prominence. It came to be considered one of the more scandalous social ills affecting the margins of affluent Western societies. There is an extensive historiography on housing reform movements and on their aims, which almost invariably included 'improvement' of the working-class family; but less has been written on the people most cruelly affected by housing problems: the actual homeless. However, a vast social research and social policy literature clearly demonstrates how much homelessness continues to trouble contemporary minds.<sup>33</sup> People with no fixed abode are no longer criminalized as in earlier times, but their seeming disaffiliation from normal society still baffles the post-industrial welfare state.

Reformers' attempts to control vagrancy and to discern between legitimate and illegitimate forms of job search contributed decisively to a new understanding of 'unemployment' at the turn of the twentieth century in the capitalist societies of Western Europe and North America.<sup>34</sup> The new category of 'unemployed' gave particular groups of out-of-work people an individual status that distinguished them from the 'work-shy' and the 'pauvres de toujours'.<sup>35</sup> The unemployed were identified as

the ‘involuntarily jobless’, and unemployment came to be understood as a central problem of modern labour markets. In the context of the emerging welfare state, it was recognized as a collective social risk and as a ‘category for public action’.<sup>36</sup>

At the turn of the century, a controversial process of defining ‘unemployment’ began on the borderline of science and politics: scores of reformers, bureaucrats and social scientists attempted to categorize the different reasons for being out of work, and to design countermeasures. New labour market instruments like unemployment insurance and public labour exchanges aimed at including the ‘real’ unemployed (and at controlling them too). But they excluded those who were supposedly work-shy. Thus, from the start, the status of the ‘unemployed’ was deeply ambivalent. The term implied willingness to work, but at the same time this willingness was called into question.

Since the late nineteenth century, researchers from various disciplines have explored the nature of the unemployed. The image of the politically radicalized rabble-rouser, prevalent throughout the nineteenth century, was challenged by new sociological research carried out against the backdrop of the Great Depression.<sup>37</sup> From the 1930s, the demoralizing effects of long-term unemployment were stressed in the literature. The classic study by Lazarsfeld and Jahoda on the unemployed of Marienthal<sup>38</sup> rooted the topos of the apathetic unemployed firmly into scientific and public discourse, a topos that remained powerful well into the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>39</sup> With the return of mass unemployment to Western industrial countries in the 1970s and 1980s, the unemployed once again became the chosen objects of scholarly and political intervention.<sup>40</sup> A shift of focus towards the ‘unemployed individual’ – manifest both in social research from the 1970s onwards, and in the ‘activating’ welfare policies that have been introduced throughout Europe during the last two decades – seems to have partially revived the traditional distinction between the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’ poor. The unemployed person remains a ‘deficient’ being, in danger not only of losing working morale but of dropping out of society.<sup>41</sup>

Historical research on unemployment has shown only limited interest in the ‘unemployed individual’. Instead, historians have focused on the political and legal regulations on unemployment, on discourses at the national level and on attempts the political parties have made to organize the unemployed.<sup>42</sup> The genesis of unemployment insurance schemes in Western Europe and the history of labour administration and unemployment policies in the interwar period have been particularly extensively explored.<sup>43</sup> Studies on the ‘birth’ or the ‘invention’ of the unemployed have widened our understanding of the origins of modern

unemployment and the formation of new social categories.<sup>44</sup> But we still know little about how those out of work used these categories and how they contributed to the emergence of a new understanding of unemployment. While, in the last two decades, the expanding historiography on poverty and welfare has increasingly sought to reconstruct the voices and lives of the poor by using sets of sources largely ignored in earlier welfare history, the experiences and strategies of the unemployed still remain to be explored.<sup>45</sup>

### Structure of the Volume

Focusing on the specific vulnerabilities of abandoned children, the homeless poor and those out of work, this volume offers new insights into the ambivalences of social policies and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. The assembled case studies, which present the (different) perspectives of reformers, welfare institutions and the poor themselves in a wide range of historical settings, are grouped into four sections.

Part one deals with children who were without a family or, at any rate, without a family that seemed capable of raising them adequately. The contributions to this section examine the competing concepts and practices of child welfare and how public representations of poor children have changed over time. Nicoleta Roman analyses the situation of abandoned children and orphans in the city of Bucharest and the evolution of Wallachian child welfare policies during the nineteenth century. In the following chapter, Katharina Brandes examines the child care system in Hamburg at the turn of the twentieth century and stresses the discrepancy between the popular narrative of institutionalized children as ‘orphans’ and the reality: most children in residential care had at least one living parent and family ties were not completely broken. Focusing on the *Armenerziehungsvereine*, private Swiss charities, Ernst Guggisberg takes a close look at the practices of foster care in the canton of Thurgau between 1848 and 1965. He shows that the permanent separation of poor children from their biological parents was seen as a legitimate strategy to tackle poverty at its very roots, and this lasted far into the twentieth century. The last chapter of the section, by Friederike Kind-Kovács, focuses on Hungary after the First World War and traces the practices and the (visual) narratives of international child welfare campaigns. It highlights how images of suffering children issued in the context of international humanitarian aid served also as a political projection screen.

Part two turns to the vagrant and homeless poor, who often lacked not only a fixed abode but also stable work and, sometimes, family. Andrew Cusack analyses the writings of Jeremias Gotthelf, showing how

this Swiss pastor used literary forms to intervene in the debate on mass poverty of the 1840s. Central is Gotthelf's novel about the wanderings of a young journeyman who, although still rooted in craft tradition, comes dangerously close to sliding into vagrancy in an era of economic and political upheaval. Taking Germany, England and France as examples, Beate Althammer reconstructs societal responses to the phenomenon of vagrancy in the decades around 1900 in a comparative perspective. She shows how a transnational discourse on vagrancy emerged, though there were significant differences in the treatment and perception of vagrants in the three countries. Tehila Sasson explores representations of homeless families in Britain after the Second World War and argues that the broad public debate on homelessness revealed a new attitude towards citizenship and the welfare state.

Part three focuses on the unemployed, who by definition lacked remunerative work. The first of its chapters, by Elizabeth Scott, traces experiments made in early twentieth century Britain to restore unemployed urban families back to the land, and examines the debates that surrounded such schemes, taking the training farm at Hollesley Bay in England as an example. Next, in a case study on the Southern Rhine Province of Prussia, Tamara Stazic-Wendt deals with the new social figure of the 'welfare unemployed' that emerged during the interwar period. The study sheds light on rural unemployment and the practices of poor relief in rural areas. Drawing on autobiographical sources, Irina Vana then looks at the introduction of labour exchanges and unemployment benefits in Austria after the First World War. She investigates how these influenced the self-perceptions of those who lost their jobs and how a new hierarchy was created amongst the workless. The last chapter of the section, by Wiebke Wiede, examines the research conducted by social scientists in Britain and West Germany during the 1970s and 1980s on the connection between unemployment, poverty and mental well-being. The chapter highlights the importance of social stereotypes as a means of controlling not only the unemployed as such, but also the social and political impact of mass unemployment on society.

These first three sections trace how the authorities and various welfare agents viewed the respective target groups and how they acted towards them. Though most chapters take account of the perspectives of the targeted and of interactions between the two sides, it is left to part four to place the views and strategies of the poor themselves at centre stage. Here letters and petitions are analysed in which impoverished individuals describe their situations and appeal for support, thus voicing claims of belonging. Focusing on Russia in the nineteenth century and drawing on various forms of petition, Hubertus Jahn shows how poor people

attempted to secure their social status and how they appealed to figures of authority, thereby writing themselves into the prevalent paternalist model of society. Analysing pauper letters from nineteenth-century Germany and Britain, Andreas Gestrich and Daniela Heinisch deal with old age poverty. They take a close look at the negotiations over poor relief made between officials and elderly paupers and highlight the importance of family ties within the makeshift economies of the aged. The last chapter of this section, by Dorothee Lürbke, compares letters from Freiburg in West Germany and Schwerin in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) between 1950 and 1975. It analyses the narratives and strategies of those seeking support in the two very different societies.

The four parts of the book are preceded by an opening chapter in which the sociologist Serge Paugam develops a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between the poor and society via the crucial role of social ties. His framework is based on present-day sociological observations and it is aimed at explaining variable patterns of poverty and social exclusion in present-day Western societies. Therefore it may not seem to fit easily with the historical case studies that are situated in more or less differently structured social contexts. The bonds of local and religious communities, for example, are conspicuously absent in Paugam's typology of attachment regimes. Nevertheless, he offers an inspiring framework for thinking about the meaning of social ties in a systematic and comparative manner. The conclusion to the book, by Lutz Raphael, takes up this point: it sums up the findings of the case studies, discussing both their interconnections with Paugam's sociological approach and their relevance for future historical research on poverty and welfare in modern Europe.

## Notes

1. An exception is the chapter by Andrew Cusack, who stepped in later to replace another contribution that could not be included in this volume. We would like to thank Alysa Levene, Sylvia Hahn, Matthias Reiss and Gabriele Lingelbach, who acted as commentators, for their valuable input.
2. For conceptions of the 'underclass', see Katz, *'Underclass' Debate* and Welshman, *Underclass*.
3. Durkheim, *De la division du travail social*. For a concise summary, see Müller, 'Social Differentiation'. On Durkheim's conception of solidarity and social bonds, see also Serge Paugam's chapter in this volume.
4. Audier, *La pensée solidariste*.
5. Hennock, *British Social Reform*; Mitchell, *Divided Path*; Ayass, Tennstedt and Winter, 'Einleitung'; Smith, *Creating the Welfare State*, 13–50; Hennock, *Origin of the Welfare State*.
6. 'Subsidiarity', in *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> (online) edition, June 2012. Retrieved 20 March 2014, from [www.oed.com/view/Entry/193007](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/193007). On the evolution of the concept in Germany, see Sachße, 'Subsidiarität'.
7. Stein, 'Armenpflege', col. 1371–72.