

Proto-Industrialization, Sharecropping, and Outmigration in Nineteenth-Century Rural Westphalia

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This article examines proto-industrialization and the social relations of production in a rural parish in eastern Westphalia that experienced large-scale outmigration to the American Midwest in the mid-nineteenth century. Relying on local and individual-level Prussian tax and emigration records, the study identifies and analyses the socio-economic background of the migrant cohort in terms of proto-industrial activity and peasant economy. Preceded by the downfall of domestic textile industries due to British industrial competition, outmigration was highly selective, drawing individuals from specific socio-economic niches. Landless sharecroppers – linked by debt and labour obligations to better-off peasants and landlords – were underrepresented in the migration, while smallholding peasants and day-labourers – ‘free’ to commodify their labour power through the sale of home-produced textile products or seasonal migratory labour – were overrepresented. The findings of the study have implications for an understanding of the localized nature of the relations of production in proto-industrial regions, the historical nature of German emigrations, and the dynamics of the German transition to industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century.

INTRODUCTION

Much of the academic literature dealing with migration from Europe to the United States written before the 1970s employed traditional push-pull

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explanatory concepts in attempting to problematize the forces driving overseas migration. But such explanations are often heavily imbued with the romantic and idealistic imagery characteristic of the Turnerian view of American history.¹ Marcus Lee Hansen [1940], for example, argued that nineteenth-century peasant immigrants were pushed out of Europe not only by overpopulation and poverty, but by the constrictions placed upon individual liberty by despotic monarchies as well. For Hansen, lack of individual freedom acted as the primary 'push' factor, and the twin promises of democracy and individual freedom offered in the United States functioned as a chief 'pull' factor. Even in Oscar Handlin's [1951] classic study, members of an alienated European peasantry became an 'army of emigrants', pushed and pulled by unseen forces at work beyond their control who found collective success in the United States by shedding their peasant past and embracing American individualistic ideals.

Such overly simplistic views of historical processes, viewed through a 'narrow lens of nineteenth-century American nationalism', reduced the power of individuals in making rational economic decisions and has tended to cloud our understanding of the socio-economic forces behind past overseas migrations [Faragher, 1992: 90]. Much of this vagueness has resulted from the failure of an earlier generation of social scientists to take into full account the socio-economic milieu from which the immigrants came, or to investigate fully the social, economic and geographical origins of immigrants at the local and regional level. In short, traditional studies tended to view overseas migration as a one-way street, and largely from only the American point of view – immigration rather than emigration *and* immigration.

The shortcomings of such studies inspired historian Frank Thistlethwaite [1960] to challenge social scientists to lift the 'salt-water curtain' separating immigrant communities in the United States from source regions in Europe, urging detailed socio-economic analyses of both sending and receiving regions. In response, highly comprehensive studies written primarily by social historians and historical geographers began to appear in the mid-1980s that followed relatively small groups of migrants from source villages in Europe to rural immigrant communities in the American Middle West, tracing individual migrants from place of birth to place of death [Gjerde, 1985; Saueressig-Schreuder, 1985; Kamphoefner, 1987; Ostergren, 1988; McQuillan, 1990; Anderson, 1994; Knowles, 1995; Lubinski, 1997; Reich, 1997; Aengenvoort, 1999]. Through the analysis of individual-level data and set within a transatlantic context, such studies have gone far towards lifting the curtain that shrouds the total migration experience. Each of these studies details the life-cycles of the landless or land-poor peasant from what might be termed proto-capitalist villages in

rural north-west Europe to a fully market-driven agricultural frontier in the Middle West during the nineteenth century. Each study is also preoccupied with social and economic conditions in the sending region as a means towards understanding the underlying reasons for the migration itself. Concern over the lack of attention paid to social theory in such studies has led critics towards other explanations for the overseas migrations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Working within a world-systems context, both Morawska [1989] and Sione [1994] have forwarded explicitly theoretical analyses that explain migration as the movement of surplus labour within a supranational world market; and Mac Laughlin [1994] has argued that peripheral regions such as Ireland functioned as emigrant 'nurseries', supplying core regions such as Great Britain and the United States with surplus labour required for core formation, resulting at the same time in the further 'peripheralization' of such economies.²

I argue that each of the research methodologies discussed heretofore have certain pitfalls and in the end fail to explain fully the phenomenon of overseas migration from north-west Europe to the United States in the nineteenth century. Clearly, early treatments of the subject appearing before the 1950s were written within the context of a strong American nationalism and offer overly simplistic explanations, casting immigrants as passive and disempowered. The cadre of transatlantic studies that have appeared since Thistlethwaite's intervention in 1960 have revolutionized the way in which students of historical overseas migrations view their subject and offer much in terms of in-depth analyses of the socio-economic background of migrants and the acculturation process in America. Too often, however, these studies lack a theoretical basis or anchor that might bridge the gap between the local, the regional, the national and the global. In such empirical studies we learn much about local peasant economies in Europe and their adjustment to capitalist agriculture in America, but what of the role played by peasants in the world economy? What of the role played by local economies in the global economy? The final genre offers overtly theoretical treatments of the subject, but more often than not reduces migrant peasants to automata that respond to purely economic stimuli, powerless against forces bigger than themselves that drive them to migrate.

This article analyses the migration of a group of peasant farmers from eastern Westphalia, who migrated to rural central Missouri in the mid-nineteenth century. It suggests that an adequate understanding of the forces driving the migration process is most fully facilitated when the migration experiences of individuals and groups of individuals are placed within a broader theoretical construct. The study investigates local and regional socio-economic conditions to which individuals in the migrant-sending region were exposed while viewing the migration through the lens of the

capitalist world-system and the international geopolitical context within which it took place. It posits that such international phenomena can be fully understood only within the broader context of the world economy and argues that fundamental shifts in labour organization and capital accumulation in core regions of the world economy during industrialization resulted in the proletarianization of large numbers of marginal peasants involved in domestic industries in parts of the semiperiphery. Overseas migration to emerging core regions such as the northern United States was one solution to this problem. Migration to emerging domestic industrial districts (such as the Ruhr district) was another. Overseas migration was most often chosen when ties of kinship, friendship and community linking source villages in Europe to immigrant communities in the United States became well established, resulting in chains of migrations between specific locales over time.

DOMESTIC INDUSTRY IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY SEMIPERIPHERY

Wallerstein's world-system model derives its spatial structure from three primary defining criteria: (i) a single capitalist world market within which all of the world's polities operate; (ii) a multiple-states system in which individual polities compete for market control and economic and political hegemony at the global level; (iii) the presence of an ever-changing, three-tiered global economic geography (core, semiperiphery, periphery) differentiated by variance in dominant economic processes, economic 'development', and labour control systems [Wallerstein, 1979; Taylor, 1993]. The centrality of spatial differentiation within the model is one of its primary strengths, allowing for both a theoretical and historical explanation for the role played by various economic regions in the agrarian-capitalist world economy and how they came to play those roles.

According to the world-system model, the standing of any particular state or region in the world economy is a function of the degree to which it is surplus-extracting (core) or surplus-producing (periphery). Since surplus production and extraction depend to a large degree upon control of labour, it follows that a region's standing in the world system is also a function of the system of labour control employed there. While the core employed 'free' wage labour, slavery and other forms of coerced labour dominated in the periphery. Consistent with its characterization by Wallerstein [1974: 102-3] as a 'midway point on a continuum running from the core to the periphery', the semiperiphery developed sharecropping as an intermediate form in which a large proportion of the agricultural workforce owned neither house nor land, but rather rented such from either landed peasants or landowners who were more often than not members of the aristocracy.

Wallerstein [1974: 105] argues that sharecropping had distinct advantages over slavery and peonage in regions where ample surplus labour predominated. Compared to full tenancy (as it developed in the core), sharecropping was an efficient way to minimize risk for large landowners. Full tenants, as members of the bourgeoisie, usually enjoyed enough political clout to secure fixed long-term contracts, allowing them to reap gains in times of inflation. Peasant sharecroppers had no such political power and were subject to increases in rent during inflationary periods and agricultural depressions in order to compensate for decreasing rates of profit on the part of landowners. Such a characterization is not altogether inconsistent with the classical Marxist interpretation of sharecropping as an intermediate or transitory form of labour control that emerged out of slavery in regions where such social relations of production could not keep pace with increasing demand or demographic growth, but which in the long run is gradually replaced with wage labour concomitant with the development of full-on capitalist relations of production [Pearce, 1983: 43–4]. Others, most notably empirically-minded social historians, have rejected this view, arguing that sharecropping as a form of labour organization exhibits an essentially pre-capitalist character [Gaido, 2000: 55–6].

While sharecropping characterized the division of labour, a particular mode of production known as the putting-out system came to dominate the economic life of the semiperiphery of Europe in an arc stretching from Scandinavia, south through the German lands and rural France and south and east into the Mediterranean and Bohemia and Moravia. Because these states controlled no colonial territories, they had no sources of bullion or tropical raw materials and therefore were forced to rely on indigenous industrial and agricultural enterprises. Wallerstein [1980: 193–4] argues that the solution to such a situation was the widespread development and establishment of the putting-out system (German *Verlagssystem*), which was certainly known as early as the Middle Ages, but whose significant expansion came only during the sixteenth century [Braudel, 1982: 316–17]. In the putting-out system of production, the direct producer owned the means of production and the tools of his or her trade, and most often worked out of his or her own living quarters. The necessary raw materials, however, were supplied by an urban-based merchant-entrepreneur (*Verleger*) who ‘put out’ work to artisans and craftspeople in the countryside by placing orders for the production of a certain quantity of a certain good. The merchant then purchased the goods at a predetermined fixed price and had the responsibility of transporting them to market. In effect, then, the direct producers could be characterized as contract labourers, largely dependent upon merchant-entrepreneurs for cash income that they often supplemented with agricultural activities.

This system carried with it distinct advantages for the merchants who controlled it. First, the system represented an efficient form of labour control that maximized profits for the merchants who exercised control over the quantity of goods produced and the price of labour needed to produce it. Second, the system allowed for a means of overcoming the monopoly on the production of handmade speciality goods held by urban guilds, replacing high-wage labour with the semi-skilled labour of peasants who represented a much cheaper source of labour because they were willing to work for lower wages out of economic necessity. This semi-skilled and cheap workforce 'lured' and 'tempted' merchant capitalists to move much of their activities to the countryside. Under the putting-out system, peasant producers who owned the means of production became *de facto* employees working on commission for the merchant-entrepreneur [Braudel, 1982: 314-320].

A concurrent and rather widespread variation on the *Verlagssystem* on the Continent was the so-called *Kaufsystem*, which differed most significantly from putting-out in that the direct producer produced goods not on commission from merchant-entrepreneurs, but rather on his or her own accord, entering the market as both buyer and seller [Schlumbohm, 1981: 98-101]. The direct producer owned the means of production and more often than not produced the necessary raw materials at home or, alternatively, purchased them from within the peasant community. Although the peasant producer retained the independence of control over the kind and quantity of goods produced, he or she remained indirectly dependent upon merchant capital, which controlled regional, national and international trade in the goods being produced [Medick, 1976: 296]. Whereas the *Kaufsystem* involved what Schlumbohm [1981: 99] calls 'petty commodity production', the *Verlagssystem* involved a much more tightly-controlled form of managerial control of production by means of contracted low-wage labour. Rural industry of this sort is what Franklin Mendels [1972] termed 'proto-industrialization', conceptualized later by Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm [1981] as 'industrialization before industrialization'. The central feature of proto-industry was the widespread growth of rural domestic industries involving peasant participation in handicraft production for the market. Domestic industry provided necessary supplemental cash income and was usually seasonal, meshed in with the rhythm of agriculture, although in its extreme form it may have been a full-time activity. The market for the goods produced by such activity was most often located outside the region of production. As such, rural producers were inexorably drawn into the economic vagaries of the world economy. There was also a fundamental link between such production and agricultural activities. Landless peasants who worked very small plots of land were unable to earn

enough cash income to supply all their needs and thus supplemented agricultural production with the sale of home-produced goods. Mendels [1972] also showed that proto-industry in his study area of Flanders brought with it certain demographic consequences, lowering the age of marriage and engendering an increase in the fertility rate, leading to rather large population densities in regions where it predominated.³

Mendels viewed the cottage industries that dominated the *Kaufsystem* and putting-out modes of production as vitally linked to the rise of modern factory industry, a necessary step in the proletarianization of an industrial workforce pre-trained in the production of handicraft articles and pre-disciplined through the organization of the putting-out system. Some critics have questioned the supposition that domestic industry was a necessary step in the development of modern factory industry, noting that some proto-industrial regions suffered de-industrialization with the advent of modern machine industry, falling back on agricultural production [Schremmer, 1981]. Others question the demographic consequences of proto-industry, citing regions where marriage and fertility appear to have been unaffected by it [Coleman, 1983; Mager, 1988; Mager, 1993]. Wallerstein [1980: 196] objects to the term 'proto-' because it seems to imply that rural domestic industry was 'not the real thing' in spite of the fact that it was just as exploitative of labour as factory industry.

Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm [1983; 1992; 1993] have replied to these criticisms in a series of articles, arguing that critics have focused on specific local examples, neglecting the broader implications of the concept as a whole. They submit that proto-industry differed from locale to locale and therefore exhibited different characteristics depending on local socio-economic conditions. The consensus on the subject seems to be that proto-industry played a prefiguring role in providing what became an industrial workforce but that this was by no means a necessary one. Despite critiques, the concept of proto-industrialization seems to describe accurately both the division of labour (sharecropping) and mode of production (domestic industry within the *Kaufsystem*) that was characteristic in many parts of the semiperiphery from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

Where domestic industry became entrenched, it tended to produce distinctive socio-economic results over time. First, populations came to be numerically dominated by landless peasants, sharecroppers who rented small parcels of land from either landed peasants or landlords who were members of the aristocracy. Second, such regions tended to specialize in one specific type of domestic industry producing for extra-regional markets – high-quality cutlery around Solingen, linen-weaving in Silesia and linen-spinning in eastern Westphalia, for example. Third, proto-industrial regions often became densely populated. Since the means of production were often

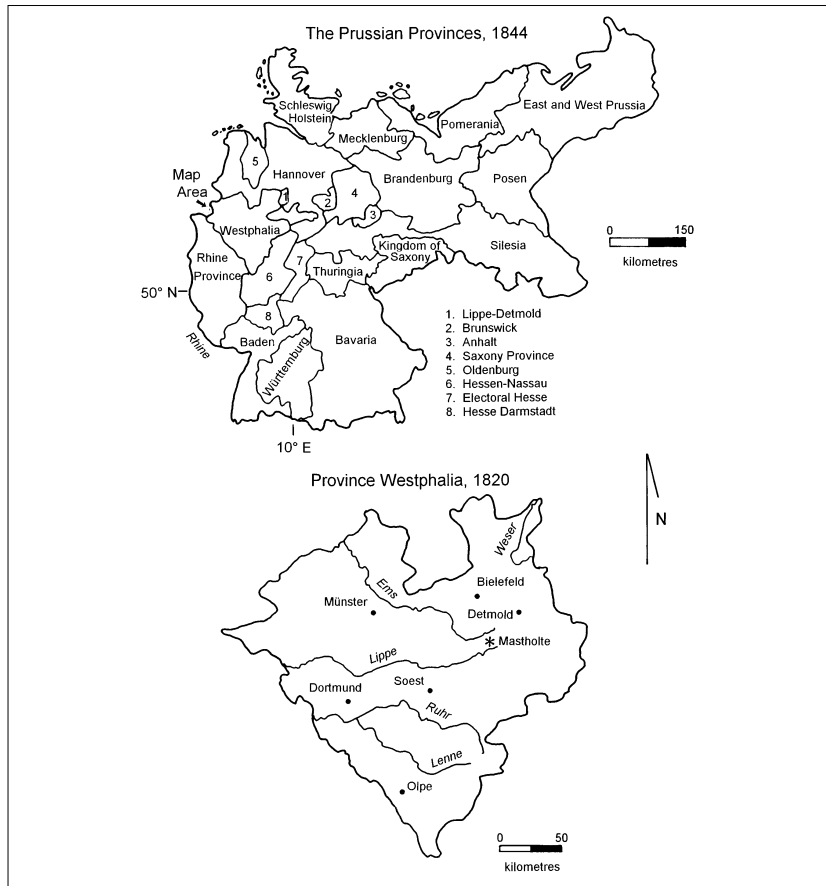
quite easy to come by – a spinning wheel or a blacksmith's hearth, for example – peasant producers could enter into business, marry young and start a family with little capital outlay. This encouraged early marriages and led to an increase in fertility rates. Fourth, because proto-industry tended to become entrenched in rural areas over long periods of time, its way of life engendered an inherent resistance to change, especially in terms of the acceptance of new technologies and techniques. Over time this situation could produce economic backwardness and a relatively low standard of living [Schremmer, 1981].

Discussions concerning the nature of proto-industrialization are also significant within the context of the larger debate about the dynamics of a capitalist transformation in Germany that is generally held to have occurred after unification in the 1870s. While Lenin viewed dispossession of the peasantry as a necessary accompaniment in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, proponents of the proto-industrialization thesis argue that such a transition is compatible with peasant retention or resettlement. Hans Medick [1981], for example, argues that proto-industrial relations of production provided low-wage employment for the underemployed rural poor who did not possess sufficient land for a subsistence, allowing them to eke out an existence with one foot in agriculture and the other one in rural industry. Whether or not proto-industrialization contributed to or held back German industrialization proper is not yet clear. The debate about German national 'exceptionalism' – that Germany industrialized 'late' owing (among other things) to the continued power of a feudal landlord class in Prussia well into the nineteenth century – has been examined most recently by Renton [2001]. The proto-industrialization thesis offers the possibility of an alternative explanation: that Germany's 'late' industrialization stemmed in part from the continued survival of a peasant economy due to the presence of rural industries that enabled smallholders to remain on the land. Only when external competition undermined rural industry did a proletariat on which industry depended, together with an industrial reserve of labour required for expanded capital accumulation, come into being.

PROTO-INDUSTRIALIZATION IN RURAL EASTERN WESTPHALIA

Proto-industrial economies became commonplace in many locales and regions in the German lands by at least the seventeenth century; several have been documented in detailed case studies that have shed much light on the social, economic and demographic consequences of proto-industrial relations of production.⁴ Eastern Westphalia was a region where a proto-industrial socio-economic structure became fairly entrenched by the seventeenth century and lasted well into the nineteenth (Fig. 1). Here, the

FIGURE 1
THE GERMAN LANDS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY



economy was dominated by the rural, domestic production of linen thread and woven goods from home-grown flax, which was initially sold at regional markets but was eventually exported by urban merchants [Reekers, 1966]. Prussian government statistics clearly indicate the importance of linen production (as opposed to wool, cotton, or silk) in the rural textile industry of Westphalia, especially in the two districts of Münster and Minden. In the Minden district in 1834, for example, just over 12,000 linen hand-loom were enumerated while only 192 cotton and 14 woollen looms were counted [Dieterici, 1838: 471]. At the county (*Kreis*) level, data indicate that *Kreis* Wiedenbrück in the Minden district was a region where the spinning of linen thread predominated. Allowing an average of five

TABLE 1
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATISTICS, *GEMEINDE* MOESE, PARISH OF MASTHOLTE,
1847

Class/Occupation	N ¹	Family Size ²	Land Ownership ³	% ⁴
Landed				
Small Peasant	35	5.1	6.6	12.8
Cottager	20	3.1	3.1	7.3
Cottager/Day-Labourer	13	5.9	1.4	4.8
Large Peasant	11	6.2	45.3	4.0
Medium-Large Peasant	8	6.1	28.2	2.9
Medium Peasant	6	6.2	21.2	2.2
New Farmer & Day-Labourer	5	4.6	1.0	1.8
Landed Share-Cropper	1	2.0	5.0	0.4
<i>Subtotal</i>	99			36.2
Landless				
Share-Cropper/Day-Labourer	51	4.5	0.0	18.7
Day-Labourer	28	4.1	0.0	10.3
Spinner	26	2.7	0.0	9.5
Pensioner	9	2.6	0.0	3.3
Pensioner/Day-Labourer	5	4.2	0.0	1.8
Merchant	1	3.0	0.3	0.4
Teacher	1	1.0	0.0	0.4
Priest	1	1.0	0.0	0.4
<i>Subtotal</i>	122			44.7
Servants				
Maid	31	1.0	0.0	11.4
Male Farmhand	21	1.0	0.0	7.7
<i>Subtotal</i>	52			19.1
<i>Total</i>	273 (Total Population = 1,075)			100.0

¹Number of households in category

²Mean household size in category

³Mean size of holding in class/occupation category, in hectares

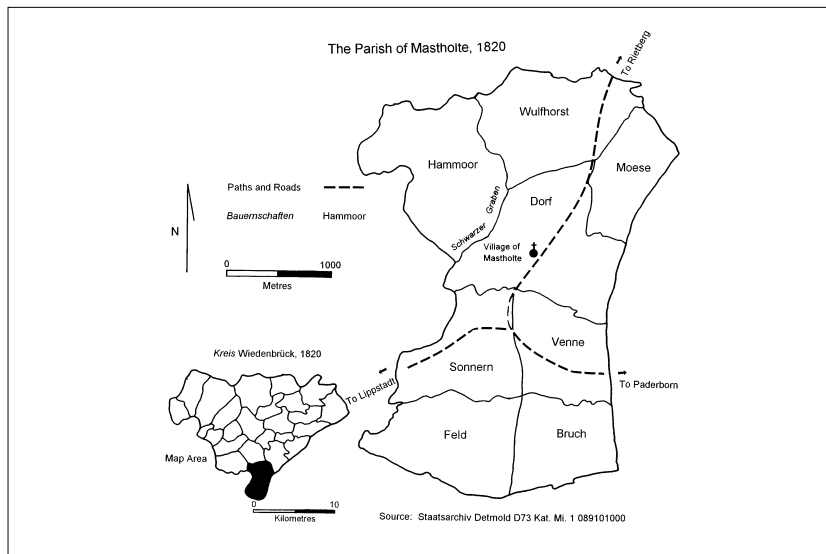
⁴Percentage of all households

Source: Stadtarchiv Rietberg, Best. 1083

persons per family, nearly 60 per cent of the population of the county relied on spinning in 1838 [Mooser, 1984: 155].

Detailed Prussian tax-roll data (*Klassensteuerliste*) from the parish of Mastholte in this county reveal a typical highly stratified proto-industrial socio-economic community structure (Table 1). Comprised of the two *Gemeinden* (towns, in the New England sense of the word) of Mastholte and Moese, the parish was numerically dominated by cottagers (*Kötter*) and

FIGURE 2
THE PARISH OF MASTHOLTE, 1820



Source: Staatsarchiv Detmold D73 Kat. Mi. 1 089101000, Parish of Mastholte, 1820.

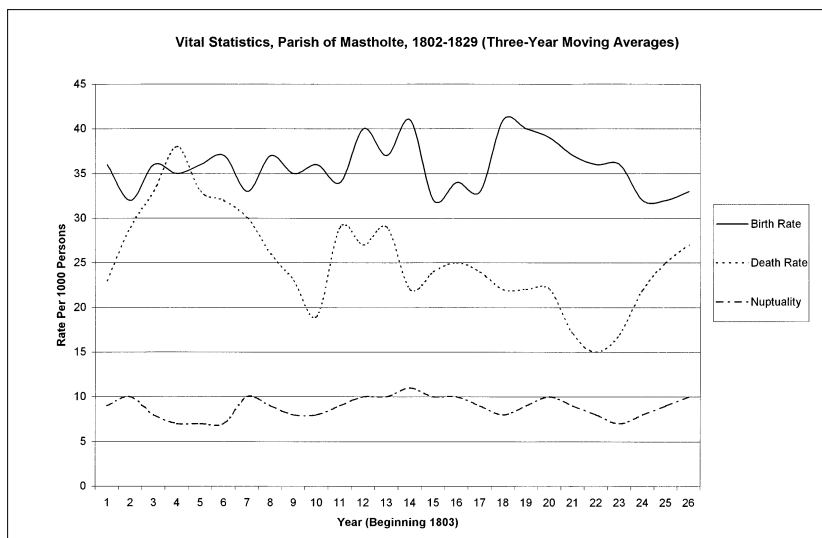
sharecroppers (*Heuerlinge*) well into the nineteenth century (Fig. 2). In Mastholte and much of the rest of eastern Westphalia cottagers and sharecroppers typically owned neither house nor land, but rather rented a small cottage or outbuilding and a small plot of land, generally less than two hectares, from a landed peasant or landlord for whom he or she was also obliged to work from time to time, often without cash remuneration (the so-called *Heuerlingsssystem*).⁵ Contracts between landless sharecroppers and cottagers were often drawn up outlining the conditions of rent and any labour requirements [Mooser, 1984: 489]. For such peasants, subsistence came from any wage earned on the farm and, in the parish of Mastholte as in much of eastern Westphalia, was supplemented by the sale of domestically produced linen thread at regional city- or state-controlled markets (*Leggen*).

In the *Gemeinde* of Moese in 1847, 33 per cent of the households held over 97 per cent of the arable. Of the 1,175 hectares of arable, the 11 large peasant farmers (*Vollmeier*), who collectively accounted for just four per cent of all households, held 498.3 hectares, about 42 per cent.⁶ Likewise, medium-large peasant farmers (*Halbmeier*) numbered only eight, about three per cent of all households, but they held just under 20 per cent of the arable collectively. Small and medium peasant farmers (*Eintäger* and

Zweitäger, respectively) comprised roughly 15 per cent of the households in the parish. Although the *Eintäger* collectively held almost 19 per cent of the arable in 1847, this was divided among 35 farmers (about 15 per cent of the population) such that the mean holding was only 6.6 hectares. Landed peasant cottagers (*Kötter*) made up 12 per cent of all households. Collectively, the 33 cottager households held only about seven per cent of the arable, the size of holdings averaging between one and three hectares. In Mastholte, many of these cottagers, although landed, were quite marginal. The tax-roll data indicate that a significant number did not own their holdings outright, but rather rented them from other landed peasants, and thus could also technically be considered sharecroppers. In addition to income garnered from the sale of home-produced linen thread, the majority of the peasant landholders are also listed as day-labourers (*Tagelöhner*) in the tax rolls, supplementing agricultural incomes with day-work on larger farms and seasonal extra-regional migratory work, often in Holland (these were known as *Hollandgänger*).

While the landed classes accounted for just over 36 per cent of the 273 heads of household in Moese, the remaining majority were those with no land holdings at all. Numerically, this proportion of the population was dominated by sharecroppers, day-labourers, or those who took part in both

FIGURE 3
VITAL STATISTICS, PARISH OF MASTHOLTE, 1802-29
(THREE-YEAR MOVING AVERAGES)



Source: St. Jakobus Catholic Parish, Mastholte, Germany, Birth, death, and marriage registers.

activities (about 30 per cent of all households). A contemporary first-hand report by a visiting Prussian government official in 1804 reiterates this extreme stratification in land ownership – 54 per cent of the households in the district around Mastholte were landless cottagers and sharecroppers and another 23 per cent were peasant farmers with holdings of less than five hectares, together accounting for 77 per cent of all households in the parish [Schwertener, 1804].⁷ The *Heuerlinge*, like many of the more marginal cottagers, rented tiny parcels of land, usually only enough for a small garden and a small cottage or outbuilding. They also often supplemented minimal agricultural incomes with day-labour, seasonal migratory work, and spinning. The remaining part of the landless population comprised those who made their living entirely from day-labour and young, single maids (*Mägde*) and male farmhands (*Knechte*). A typical daily wage for a day-labourer during the early nineteenth century was around 0.2 thaler (about 14 US cents), a sum that allowed for only a minimal existence [von Laer, 1912: 177]. If a day-labourer had a family, his financial situation was pushed to the limits of existence and the slack had to be made up for with an increase in the output of linen thread, extra seasonal migratory work, or both.

Data from the parish of Mastholte in the form of birth, death and marriage records reveal that the *Heuerlingssystem* appears to have engendered demographic consequences (Fig. 3). In spite of the economic limitations afforded the landless in such a stratified society, they consistently accounted for a large share of the population – nearly six out of ten households – well into the nineteenth century. The birth rate in the parish remained rather high, between 30 and 47 per thousand, and well above the death rate during the first three decades of the nineteenth century. This resulted in a 66 per cent increase in the population during the same period, from 1,441 in 1802 to 2,181 in 1843, interrupted only during the 1840s and 50s by emigration to the United States.

The socio-economic and demographic patterns observed in proto-industrial regions like Mastholte and eastern Westphalia are best explained by the widespread development of sharecropping and the *Heuerlingssystem* as a characteristic form of labour control in the semiperiphery of the world-economy, a system in which landed peasants and landless sharecroppers were economically bound together. Land-holding peasants needed the cheap (or even free) labour of the cottager or sharecropper on the farm, as well as the income generated from the rental of cottages and small tracts of land. Conversely, the landless cottager or sharecropper needed a cottage in which to live and a piece of land to rent. Sharecropping met the needs of both [Schlumbohm, 1992].

The *Heuerlingssystem* and the domestic linen industry allowed a large landless class of peasants to subsist by providing a dwelling in which to live

and a parcel of land to rent. Necessary supplemental income was provided by the linen industry, day-labour on the farms of landed peasants or cottagers and seasonal migratory work in Holland. Spinning was increasingly turned to as a source of income, since it required little initial capital outlay and because a well-developed market for such products had become established in north-west Germany. All that one needed to enter into business and start a family was a spinning wheel (affordable for nearly everyone), and a place to undertake the activity (the peasant cottage). As such, landless peasants and the sons and daughters of landed peasants who were not heirs to the family farm could enter into the *Kaufsystem*, selling home-made linen thread at regional markets. Early and more universal marriage became common, and since children were seen as an economic asset (they could be put to work spinning at an early age), family size steadily increased. Indeed, in the *Gemeinde* of Moese in 1847 the mean cottager household was 5.9, the mean sharecropper family size 4.5. Because the *Heuerlingssystem* could support a relatively large landless class of peasants, and because the *Kaufsystem* allowed individual participation in the linen industry, there were few disincentives to curtail marriage and reproduction. Over time this tended to produce a large and densely settled population of peasants whose subsistence came not wholly from agricultural activities, but rather from agricultural combined with domestic industry.⁸

DOMESTIC INDUSTRY, INDUSTRIALIZATION AND OVERSEAS MIGRATION

As long as a reliable market existed for domestically produced linen products and as long as the technology used in their production remained fairly static and inexpensive, the *Heuerlingssystem* and domestic industry could support and absorb a large landless population that was unable to early a wholly agricultural living. Beginning in the 1830s, however, two profound changes in the textile industry rapidly upset the balance between subsistence and poverty that the *Heuerlingssystem* and the *Kaufsystem* provided. First, cotton from the periphery of the world system (mainly the American South, India and Egypt) replaced linen from the semiperiphery (continental Europe, Ireland) as the fabric of choice in the global market. Second, mechanized production of textile products in a centralized factory setting in the core (Great Britain) undercut hand production organized through decentralized domestic industry in the semiperiphery.

In 1838 C.F. Dieterici, the senior economic advisor to the Prussian government, estimated that as early as 1780 linen cloth had accounted for over one-third of Prussia's total non-agricultural output. Data compiled by

Bondi [1958] substantiate this estimate – in 1828 one-half of Prussia's exports were finished textile goods, and linen goods accounted for nearly one-half of that figure. A census of industrial production in Prussia and the *Zollverein* in 1837 recorded 282,221 linen hand-looms in use, compared to only 31,759 cotton hand-looms, a ratio of 8.1 to one. In Westphalia the difference was yet starker, with 32,331 linen looms and 2,118 cotton looms, or 15.3 to one [Kux, 1842]. That linen was the fabric of choice in the German hand textile industry is hardly surprising. Flax, the crop from which the raw material was obtained, did well in the low, poorly drained districts of northern Germany, and cottagers and sharecroppers could produce it themselves on rented parcels of land. Cotton, on the other hand, was a subtropical crop that was imported and whose cost was beyond the means of most spinners and weavers.

Before the introduction of labour-saving mechanical techniques during the first industrial revolution that highlighted the first Kondratieff wave (1787–1845), Germany's textile industry, with its hand-spinners and weavers and decentralized organization of labour through the *Kaufsystem*, held a distinct advantage over other countries in terms of production. Wages of hand-spinners and weavers in Saxony, for example, averaged only one-third that of wages paid to workers in cotton and linen mills in England and Scotland [von Reden, 1838: 147]. Since German linen producers could grow the raw material themselves locally, the raw material costs were also considerably lower than that of the cotton industry.

The introduction of organizational and mechanical innovations in the late eighteenth century revolutionized the textile industry, upsetting traditional modes of production and any inherent German advantages. Crompton's spinning mule (1779) represented the culmination of several new mechanical innovations in spinning technology, combining the features of the spinning jenny and the water frame to draw, twist and wind thread in one operation, producing a very fine yarn. When this machine was introduced into a factory setting in Great Britain, centralizing all facets of production under one roof, it drastically reduced the costs of production, overcoming the labour and raw material cost advantages of German decentralized production in the countryside. Further, Great Britain, a core country with overseas colonies and a large merchant fleet, possessed the means to move large quantities of American and Indian cotton to factories in Lancashire and Scotland, where it could be transformed into exportable goods. Cotton held several advantages over linen. It was more conducive to machine production than flax because linen thread tended to break easily on the rapidly moving spindles, and whereas hand produced linen goods required a production process lasting up to six months from start to finish, cotton could be imported steadily, allowing year-round production.

Mechanized techniques and factory organization of labour allowed British textile factories to produce cotton goods quicker and at a cheaper rate than German hand-spinners and weavers. Germany's textile industry, never very efficiently organized anyway, was undercut and quickly began to lose overseas export markets to British competitors [*Milward and Saul*, 1979: 396–8]. Contemporary German observers seem to have been well aware of the threat that mechanization of the cotton industry in Great Britain posed to such a substantial part of the German export economy [*von Reden*, 1838]. But while there were attempts to establish mechanical cotton mills in Germany in response to the flux in the industry, the German response was uneven and delayed. The British guarded new technology early on by prohibiting the export of machines, models and drawings (lifted only in 1843) and later by placing high export tariffs on such technology [*Henderson*, 1965]. Further, even though some technology did reach the Continent legally (sold under licence) and illegally, the German textile industry was organized in such a decentralized fashion that without government subsidies few individuals or firms possessed the capital to purchase and install equipment on the scale necessary to compete effectively with British exports.

The German response to British competition, typical of the semiperiphery, was a protectionist policy with regard to its home textile industry under the auspices and leadership of the *Zollverein* [*Taylor*, 1993]. Hoping to encourage domestic production, the *Zollverein* placed heavy tariffs on the import of manufactured cotton goods. In 1837, for example, no tariff was placed on the importation of raw cotton but a six-thaler-per-hundredweight tariff was placed on imported cotton thread, along with a 50-thaler tariff on the import of manufactured cotton goods [*Kux*, 1842]. The goal of such tariff politics was for German merchants to import raw cotton from British interests in order to manufacture it into goods that would meet domestic needs. But with few mechanical spinning mills, Germany was forced to rely on hand-spinners and weavers and, in spite of high tariffs, domestic production could not keep up with the growing demand for cotton goods. Cotton-thread production did in fact increase in the *Zollverein* states during the 1830s and 1840s, but the consumption greatly exceeded that which could be supplied by hand production in the countryside [*Junghanns*, 1848:184–5]. British manufactured cotton goods met this demand. In the 11 years between 1834 and 1845 raw cotton imports more than doubled and cotton-thread imports increased by 160 per cent. At the same time, linen cloth exports by 1845 had dwindled to almost half those of 1834 [*Kühne*, 1846:13–14].

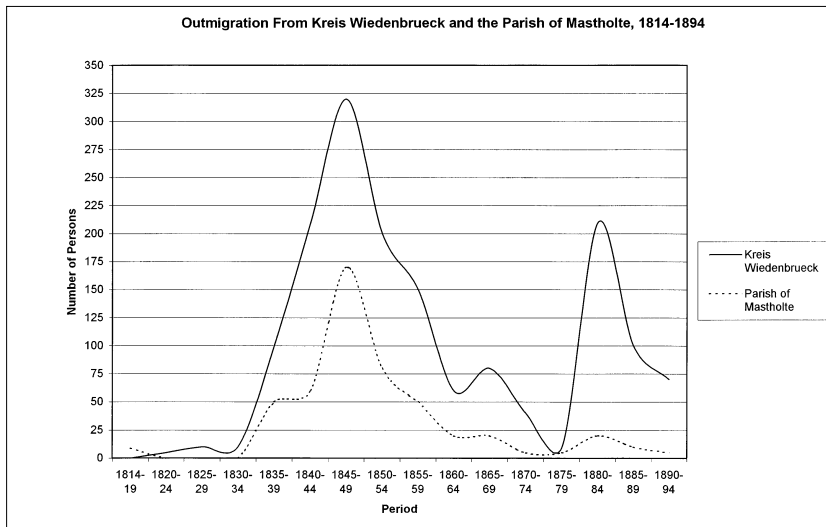
It was not until after the mid-century that large-scale mechanized production on the order of that of Great Britain began to appear in the

German states. Even by as late as 1845, however, Great Britain far outdistanced all competitors in the number of cotton factories and in cotton-goods production and consumption. In that year 14 million mechanical cotton spindles were in service in the country. Although there were some 153 mechanical cotton factories in the *Zollverein* states, they were small undertakings in terms of output and in the number of spindles (only 815,000) [Dieterici, 1848:348]. As the hegemonic core power, Great Britain controlled a large share of the world trade in cotton. By 1843 two-thirds of the raw cotton imported into Europe went to British ports [Dieterici, 1844: 236] and by 1860, just before the American Civil War interrupted supply, the hundreds of mills dotting Lancashire and eastern Scotland were consuming nearly 500,000 metric tonnes annually [Mitchell, 1978: 251–3].

The advent of mechanized production led not only to the mechanized production of cotton goods, but of linen goods as well, cutting into the market share for hand-produced goods. During the critical years of the 1830s and 1840s, British exports of mechanically produced linen products expanded dramatically. For example, the value of linen-thread exports rose from £8,705 in 1832 to £1,021,796 in 1844 [Schmitz, 1967: 109]. By 1832 the *Zollverein* was already a net importer of raw linen and by 1834 of manufactured thread [Dieterici, 1838:103-4, 412]. British mechanically produced goods met the demand that could not be met by German artisans, cutting into and finally reducing to insignificance the market share held by artisan producers in the countryside.

Eventually, British competition and hegemony in the textile industry and the substitution of cotton for linen nearly completely eroded the importance of the linen industry in Germany, producing a crisis in the *Kaufsystem* mode of labour control. Hardest hit were landless peasants most dependent upon the cash income from the sale of linen products. In the Westphalian district of Minden, a centre of spinning and weaving, the value of linen thread exported from the area fell dramatically from nearly 650,000 thaler in 1838 to less than 50,000 in 1850 [Mooser, 1984: 480]. The price of linen yarn began to fall as early as the 1830s and reached a low point in 1848, unfortunately during a disastrous harvest year in Europe that saw prices for most grains bottom out. During this low point in 1848, linen exports from north-west Germany came to a virtual standstill [Adelmann, 1974: 116]. A sharp decline in the number of spinners during this period is registered in government censuses and reports. Whereas just over 84,000 linen spinners were enumerated in Prussia in 1849, only 14,500 were counted just 12 years later in 1861. The Minden district alone registered a decline in the number of spinners from 19,300 to 5,000 during the same period [Biller, 1906: 143]. For the peasant producers in those areas traditionally dependent upon linen-spinning and weaving, these circumstances resulted in a drastic drop in the

FIGURE 4
EMIGRATION FROM MASTHOLTE AND *KREIS* WIEDENBRÜCK, 1814–1899



Sources: Friedrich Müller, 1980–81, 'Westfälische Auswanderer im 19. Jahrhundert – Auswanderung aus dem Regierungsbezirk Minden, I. Teil, 1816–1900', *Beiträge zur westfälischen Familienforschung*, Vol.38–39, pp.3–711; Friedrich Müller, 1989–90, 'Westfälische Auswanderer im 19. Jahrhundert – Auswanderung aus dem Regierungsbezirk Minden, II. Teil, Heimliche Auswanderung, 1814–1900', *Beiträge zur westfälischen Familienforschung*, Vol.47–8, pp.7–762.

demand for their product and, consequently, a rapid loss of necessary cash income. In effect unemployed, such individuals tended to respond to the crisis in three different ways. Some turned to a greater reliance on day-labour or migratory work during the summer in the fishing industry or on large farms in Holland. Others chose to migrate to emerging industrial districts in Germany in order to work in mines and factories. In his study of the socio-economic background of workers at two mining firms in Bochum in the Ruhr valley, Rothert [1981] found that six out of every ten workers that migrated to work in the firms between 1850 and 1900 hailed from villages in eastern Westphalia, a region of heavy proto-industry. Nearly all of these migrants came from landless families in villages with similar highly stratified socio-economic profiles similar to that of Mastholte's, in counties that are known to have been prominent regions of linen-producing domestic industry (such as Lübbecke, Büren, Bielefeld and Herford). Still others appear to have chosen not to become proletarianized by emigrating, primarily to the United States where most became actively involved in commercial farming in various parts of the Midwest. Such was the choice for some 300 families from the parish of Mastholte who left for rural

Missouri in the 1840s and 1850s.⁹

The timing of the emigration from eastern Westphalia correlates well with the downfall of the linen industry and with a general downturn in the economy due to the flux in the semiperiphery caused by industrialization in, and competition with, the core. Emigration from the parish of Mastholte began in earnest in the mid-1840s, reaching its zenith in 1846 with an emigration rate of 112 per thousand, correlating well with the significant loss of overseas markets to Great Britain during the 1830s and 1840s (Fig. 4). Emigration from the German lands in general reached a high point during the same period – in the nine years between 1845 and 1854, just over one million emigrated overseas [Archdeacon, 1983: 38–44]. Figures at the national level, however, tend to mask the effects of emigration on smaller regions and locales. Even a cursory examination of emigration data reveals that emigration varied substantially from region to region and from locale to locale such that some areas were disproportionately overrepresented in terms of the number of emigrants that left. For example, the Minden district in eastern Westphalia lost about nine per cent of its population to emigration between 1844 and 1871 [Königlichen Statistischen Bureaus, 1874: iv–v, xix], but over 40 thousand emigrated from the neighbouring principedom of Osnabrück between 1832 and 1858, a figure that accounts for over 20 per cent of the population [Adelmann, 1974: 122]. Similarly, the parish of

TABLE 2
EMIGRANT COHORT CHARACTERISTICS, PARISH OF MASTHOLTE, 1800–1900

Class/Occupation	N1	%	Family Size ²	Age ³
Medium Peasant	2	0.7	1.0	28.5
Medium-Large Peasant	2	0.7	8.5	n.a.
Pensioner	3	1.0	2.5	58.5
Large Peasant	10	3.4	7.0	49.8
Small Peasant	11	3.7	6.0	45.6
Sharecropper	13	4.4	3.4	39.4
Maid	25	8.4	1.0	22.9
Male Farmhand	34	11.5	1.0	26.0
Day Labourer	46	15.5	1.0	25.8
Other ⁴	64	21.5	n.a.	n.a.
Cottager	87	29.3	2.0	30.3
<i>Total</i>	297			100.0

¹Number of heads of household

²Mean size of emigrant families in class/occupation category

³Mean age at emigration of head of household

⁴Persons listed in emigration lists but not found in tax roll data

Sources: Stadtarchiv Rietberg Best. 1050, Best. 1057, Best. 1064, Best. 1083, Best. 1090; Müller [1980–81]; Müller [1989–90].

Mastholte accounted for only five per cent of the population of the county of Wiedenbrück, yet emigration from the parish accounted for 34 per cent of the county total during the nineteenth century. As Walter Kamphoefner [1987] has shown statistically, such localized intensity can best be explained by the relative intensity of proto-industrial activities.

An analysis of the socio-economic background of individuals that emigrated overseas, facilitated by information detailed in Prussian tax rolls and official emigration lists, reveals that the propensity to migrate varied according to socio-economic standing (Table 2). Seven out of every ten emigrant heads of household from the parish of Mastholte were either landless sharecroppers or cottagers who rented very small tracts of land – that part of the population most dependent upon supplementary income from domestic linen production. Peasant cottagers, followed by day-labourers, farmhands, maids and sharecroppers, numerically dominated the emigrant cohort. The data also show that a clear majority of the emigrants were young and single. Young, married couples with no children comprised the average cottager emigrant household. On average, maids were 23 years old at the time of emigration, day-labourers and male farmhands 26, and cottagers about 30. Just over 26 per cent of the emigrants who were listed in official government emigrant lists either gave no occupation to officials or could not be located in local tax-roll records, thus precluding a definitive classification of their socio-economic standing. It is safe to assume, however, that most in this group probably came from socio-economic backgrounds similar to those of the majority of the other emigrants, that is from the landless classes.

This detailed examination of individual socio-economic standing offers some explanation as to why some chose to migrate overseas while others remained at home or migrated to emerging industrial districts within Germany. It is clear that the poorest of the poor did not, on average, choose the option of overseas migration. While landless sharecroppers (*Heuerlinge*) accounted for a large share of the population of Mastholte, they are underrepresented in the emigrant population. These persons most likely remained at home, either turning to a greater reliance on day-labour or seasonal migration or migrating to places like the Ruhr valley where wage labour was available. This poorest stratum of the population could not, in all likelihood, afford the cost of the transatlantic passage, especially if they had a large family, which most in fact did. The lowest stratum of peasant farmers, the cottagers (*Kötter*), at least rented large enough parcels to realize some agricultural income. Even so, cottagers with large families did not migrate from Mastholte. While the average cottager family numbered 6.9 persons, virtually all the cottagers that migrated had no children. Maids, male farmhands and day-labourers, as wage earners who

usually lived with their employers and thus paid no or little rent, had the opportunity to save for the cost of travel. Moreover, as friends and family members became established in growing immigrant communities in the United States, as was the case with emigrants from Mastholte in Osage County, Missouri, the economic and social costs of overseas migration were significantly lessened.

CONCLUSION

This article has presented an alternative explanation for past overseas migration from north-west Germany that views such migration from a world-systems perspective and utilizes a combined proto-industrialization and world-systems analysis as an explanatory device. This formula conceptualizes overseas migrants as individuals in the semiperiphery adversely affected by changes in the world economy, especially in the core, during a period of critical flux and adjustment; such individuals made critical and rational decisions as to how to remedy such adverse conditions. This conceptualization avoids the pitfalls of both overly romantic explanations, which see migrants as freedom-seekers pulled from Europe by democratic ideals in the United States, and overtly theoretical treatments that portray migration as primarily a response to economic stimuli, reducing migrants to economic automata. A world-system perspective coupled with a proto-industrialization approach involving detailed analysis of localized individual socio-economic data bridges the gap between these two extremes and offers a fuller and sounder understanding of the migration process.

The Westphalian parish of Mastholte is presented as a rather typical nineteenth-century proto-industrial emigrant source village with a characteristic semiperipheral socio-economic structure. By the seventeenth century, sharecropping had emerged as the distinguishing form of labour control throughout much of northern, western and central Continental Europe while the *Kaufsystem*, a decentralized form of petty commodity production in the countryside in which peasant producers entered the market as producers of export-oriented goods, emerged as the dominant mode of production. In Westphalia the dominant proto-industrial activity involved the production of textiles, mostly linen goods. Over time, such rural proto-industrial populations came to be numerically dominated by large numbers of landless peasant sharecroppers and cottagers. The *Heuerlingssystem*, by providing a rented cottage and a small tract of land, allowed a subsistent existence for this large landless class, and proto-industrial domestic industry provided a supplemental income. No absolute dispossession occurred.

The precarious balance between subsistence and poverty provided by the *Heuerlingsystem* was upset by immense flux in the world economy during the Industrial Revolution. The factory mode of production and division of labour dominated by low-wage proletarians that emerged in industrial Great Britain (core) centralized and streamlined the production of textiles, especially with the introduction of new mechanized technology, outperforming the German (semiperipheral) decentralized mode of production and form of labour control in the countryside. When cotton became the fabric of choice in the world textile market, German linen producers quickly lost overseas export markets and the industry was reduced to insignificance by the 1840s and 1850s. Landless peasant sharecroppers and cottagers in proto-industrial districts in the semiperiphery were most adversely affected by such developments, since they relied most heavily on the supplementary income garnered from domestic industry. Such developments confronted peasants with the possibility of poverty, forcing them into the ranks of the proletariat as local or long-distance migrants.

The *Kaufsystem* was one in which neither agriculture nor industrial production dominated, and in which domestic producers were relatively free from direct capitalist control. Working within the bounds of the system, peasant producers exercised control over how much and when they would produce and at which markets to see their products. To take a job in a factory or mine would result in a loss of such independence. Most sharecroppers and day-labourers, the poorest members of such proto-industrial societies, generally did not possess the financial resources necessary for overseas passage. They tended either to stay at home and eke out a more purely agricultural living or to become proletarianized by taking a factory job in emerging industrial districts. Small peasant cottagers and peasant farmers with more substantial land holdings, however, appear to have been able to garner enough capital through minimal agricultural activities, or through the sale of any land they might have held, to purchase overseas passage. For these individuals, then, a conscious choice not to become proletarianized seems to have been made by leaving for a place where they believed they would not be under direct capitalist control, in this case the Missouri agricultural frontier.

NOTES

1. Though it is now widely discredited as overly simplistic and deterministic, Frederick Jackson Turner's [1894] 'frontier thesis' influenced an entire earlier generation of American social scientists. One could argue that its ideals still colour the perceptions that American lay persons have of their western past. Seeking to explain what he viewed as the uniqueness of the American experience and how an American culture developed from

old-world antecedents, Turner argued that the social, economic, political and environmental vagaries (above all, the presence of 'free' land) of life in a succession of western frontier regions forced Europeans to abandon their peasant past in favour of individualism and democracy, 'creating' Americans out of Europeans. Now somewhat dated, the two collections of essays edited by Taylor [1956] and Billington [1966] nevertheless effectively convey the essential elements of Turner's thesis and the debates surrounding it. For more recent treatments see Matson and Marion [1985] and Bogue's excellent biography of Turner [1998].

2. Such micro-level transnational studies of the sort described here have not been limited to treatments of European immigrants and ethnic groups. Thistlethwaite's call for transnational analyses and perspectives with respect to American immigration, together with the New Social History's emphasis on the study of economic and kinship networks within which immigrants operate, has influenced a plethora of studies by American social scientists charting the transnational, diasporic experiences of a number of different groups between their homelands and North America. See Gjerde [1999] for an overview of the historiography of the subject and a fairly comprehensive inventory of recent micro-level studies involving non-European immigrants. Outside of North America, micro-level studies of migration by historians, sociologists and anthropologists enjoy a long history, and have often been grounded in discussions concerning the nature of linkages between sending and receiving areas resulting from long-distance migration. Perhaps the most exhaustive survey of migrations in a variety of global settings to date is the recent collection of essays edited by Robin Cohen [1995]. For debate about the consequences for sending regions of forced migration from Africa and Asia to the Caribbean and the United States, see Williams [1944], Rodney [1974] and especially the rich collection of essays edited by Inikori [1982]. On the methodological application of network theory in ethnographies about Africa and Latin America written by anthropologists in the 1950s and 1960s, see Kuper [1973]. On the application of network theory towards the understanding of labour migrations in Africa see Watson [1958]. The collection of essays edited by Seddon [1978] presents an overview of Marxist approaches to economic anthropology in which theoretical treatments of migration and the articulation of the 'mode of production' (on which see Coquery-Vidrovitch [1976]) in peasant societies figure prominently.
3. For a thorough overview of proto-industry and proto-industrialization in Europe, see Ogilve and Cerman [1996], especially chapters 1–3, which summarize theories of proto-industrialization and the historiography of the subject. Although the study of proto-industrial relations of production has been prolific, a number of issues surrounding the concept are as yet unclear. Perhaps most significant is the question as to whether or not proto-industrialization even qualifies as a distinctive mode of production, since to qualify as such it would need to exhibit relations and forces of production that are specific to it; the literature on the subject is not always in agreement as to whether or not this is indeed the case. Coleman's [1983: 447] critique of the proto-industrialization concept raises this issue, along with several other shortcomings. Further, proto-industrialization is employed almost exclusively as a descriptive term in the context of the European past, but contemporary treatises on relations of production in parts of the developing world [Patnaik and Dingwaney, 1985], and even parts of the 'industrial' world [Benton, 1990], describe productive relationships that are very similar to those described in the proto-industry literature, illustrating that it appears to be a form of production which is not specific to a given historical period. Referred to variously as 'globalization' or 'the new international division of labour' (involving 'downsizing', 'informalization' or 'outsourcing' analogous to the 'putting out' processes involved in rural industry), contemporary processes of this sort correspond to capitalist restructuring involving the relocation of production to the periphery where goods can be produced more cheaply by a workforce (composed sometimes of unfree labour) that is paid less and lacks rights to form trade unions. Such processes are occurring in many different places, not just in the

- developing world (China, India, South-East Asia) but also in some of the core capitalist countries such as the UK and the USA [Chapkis and Enloe, 1983; Cohen, 1987; Deyo, 1989; Portes, Castells, and Benton, 1989; Benton, 1990; Stalker, 1994].
4. For example, see Mager [1982] on the domestic weaving industry in Minden-Ravensburg, Kriedte [1986] on the silk industry in Krefeld, and Schlumbohm [1992] on the Osnabrück and Bielefeld region.
 5. Social and institutional relations of production varied significantly from place to place in early modern Germany, often over very small geographical distances. See Ogilvie [1996: 129–31] for an explanation of the *Heuerlingssystem* in various parts of the German lands during this period. In the literature on the subject the term *Heuerling* is usually used to describe what is known as a cottager in English, that is a landless or land-poor peasant. In the small study area under consideration in this article, however, Prussian tax rolls clearly differentiate between *Kötter*, landed peasants who usually held less than three or four hectares, and *Heuerlinge*, landless peasants who more often than not worked either as sharecroppers or day-labourers on a landed peasant's farm.
 6. The terms *Vollmeier*, *Zweitäger* etc., are descriptive class terms of medieval origin that referred to the number of days' labour-rent per month. While up to 90 per cent of the German peasantry west of the Elbe had been freed of manorial dues very early, these terms continued to be employed by Prussian officials for tax assessment purposes as descriptive and legal categories. While such terms are confusing and difficult to directly translate into English they nevertheless are illustrative of the intense stratification and differentiation in German peasant societies, even among the cottager and sharecropping classes.
 7. Several other analyses of communities in this region reveal very similar socio-economic community structures. For example, see Josef Mooser's [1984] study of several villages in eastern Westphalia, Jürgen Schlumbohm's [1992; 1994] work on the nearby proto-industrial parish of Belm near Osnabrück, and Christoph Reinders-Düselder's [1995] analysis of three parishes in the Dammer Berg region in Lower Saxony.
 8. It is tempting to see the *Heuerlingssystem* as described in this article (and elsewhere) as a form of economic debt bondage. But the distinguishing relations of production operating within the system in nineteenth-century Germany often varied considerably from locale to locale, and determining the extent to which such relations were free or unfree is problematic. Historically, characteristics such as labour-rent, non-receipt of cash wages and a tied-cottage system have all signalled the presence of unfree relations of production, and labourers involved were often unable to sell their labour power elsewhere in response to higher wages or better conditions. A contemporary report from Tamil Nadu in India [Vidyasagar, 1985] describes interconnected agricultural and non-agricultural forms of debt bondage in which master weavers and landowning merchants employ lower-caste artisans and farmers, who are by law and contract not allowed to offer their labour-power to other higher-bidding employers in the vicinity, thus perpetuating a system in which low-wage, unfree productive relations are dominant. The relations of production involved in the combination of the *Heuerlingssystem* with the *Kaufsystem* in eastern Westphalia appear to exhibit both free and unfree characteristics: landless sharecroppers, and some cottagers, lived in tied cottages and cultivated leased holdings (suggesting unfreedom), but also sold linen products on their own account to the highest-bidding urban textile merchants and were allowed to work as day-labourers, either on farms in the vicinity or in the herring industry in Holland during off-peak agricultural seasons (indicating freedom to commodify their own labour power). *Heuerlinge* (landless sharecroppers) were in essence unfree in the sense that they were in perpetual debt to the landowner (and thus were very rarely able to escape through outmigration), but *Kötter* (very small-scale landed peasants) were less 'unfree' due to the fact that they were often able to realize some profit through the sale of both agricultural and textile products and, if they could save enough for the expenses of travel, move to a place offering better conditions.
 9. In a seminal article published over 25 years ago, Colin Newbury [1975: 235] described

most of Europe's 50 million emigrants to the Americas as 'labour recruits, destined for positions as wage-earners in the small towns and cities of the New World, rather than as prairie homesteaders or out-back sheep farmers. For most of them land settlement remained, perhaps, a desirable goal, but not one frequently achieved in the first generation'. But an array of micro-level studies since then appear to undermine the validity of such an overarching characterization, if not directly contradict it. Newbury's generalization of immigrants as proletarian migrant labourers operating within the global market, destined to work for pittance wages in the cities of the New World, may be most applicable in the case of those from the British Isles and southern and eastern Europe. For example, in his exhaustive study of nearly 10 thousand emigrants who left Scotland and England for North America in the 1770s, Bailyn [1986: 150–51] found that about 73 per cent were employed as either artisans or labourers; only one out of every five were farmers. Bailyn does not document what kinds of jobs these immigrants took in North America in nearly as much detail, but many other micro-studies have done so, illustrating the transition from a rural-peasant lifestyle in the Old World to an urban-industrial proletariat life in the United States experienced by immigrants from the British Isles (especially Ireland), and later by those from southern and eastern Europe [*Diner*, 1983; *Nugent*, 1992; *McCaffrey*, 1997]. But Knowles's [1997] recent study of Welsh immigrants in nineteenth-century southern Ohio calls even this generalization into question. In this example, a large group of immigrants avoided proletarianization by pooling their collective resources to invest in the charcoal iron furnace industry, in which they came to be significant and successful owner-entrepreneurs. Newbury's characterization seems less valid when considering the case of the millions of Germans, Dutch and Scandinavian immigrants who settled in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To be sure, some entered the proletariat as wage labourers in urban locations such as New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Louis [see *Ward*, 1971; *Conzen*, 1976; *Bretting*, 1995; *Kamphoefner*, 1995; *Galema*, 1995], but dozens of micro-studies have shown that a clear majority came with aspirations for land ownership in the Middle West, and that many indeed were able to achieve this goal within a relatively short time after initial immigration, thus largely avoiding proletarianization. In the case of the Osage County immigrants that are the subject of this article, roughly 80 per cent of heads of household were able to become landholders almost immediately upon their arrival in Missouri due to the differential cost of land between Germany and the United States (160 acres could be purchased for as little as 10 dollars in the 1840s and 1850s). Those who lacked the financial resources to purchase land straight away (usually young, single men and women) often worked for and lived with friends or family who were already established on farms of their own, but appear to have been able to save enough money to marry, start a family and become landowners themselves after a few years. By 1880, 90 per cent of the arable in Osage County was owned by either first- or second-generation German immigrants (purchased either from the federal government or Americans), and data from the federal agricultural census of that year show that Germans fared as well or better than their American neighbours in terms of farm size and value of livestock and real estate [*Anderson*, 1994]. The best study to date illustrating the quick and relative success of German farmers in market agriculture in colonial America is Fogleman [1996]. On the social and economic experience of nineteenth-century German immigrant farmers in the Middle West, see Kamphoefner [1985] and Aengenvoort [1999]. For a concise overview of the status of the study of German immigrants in the United States, see Adams [1993] and Kamphoefner's 'Introduction' in Kamphoefner, Helbich, and Sommer [1991].

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