

In the meantime, the many probing hypotheses contained in essays in this volume reaffirm the importance of establishing this new field of study within a broad frame of reference. It may be that this book, because it is a collection and lacks an overarching thesis, will not itself generate debate. But single articles in it surely should, and for that we are greatly in debt to the editors, John Brewer and Roy Porter.

Victoria de Grazia

EGMOND, FLORIKE. *Underworlds. Organized Crime in the Netherlands 1650–1800.* Polity Press, Oxford 1993. x, 256 pp. £39.50.

One of the central topics in the history of crime, as distinct from the history of justice and punishment, is the question of the extent and nature of professional, organized crime; the question of whether there was a criminal “underworld”. Literary sources often indicate that underworlds, amounting to full-fledged alternatives to established society, can be found in two of the most ungovernable parts of European society in the past: its largest cities, and its border areas. Recent archival research has, however, deemphasized the importance of such underworlds: in England, John Beattie found few professional criminals in eighteenth-century London, and Alan MacFarlane characterized the activities of the Smorthwait gang in Westmorland in the late seventeenth century as highly unusual. And, although the bandits inhabiting Europe’s frontier regions were solidly entrenched, criminal gangs in other parts of the countryside have been characterized as fleeting and composed of constantly shifting memberships.

Florike Egmond’s painstaking reconstruction of Dutch criminal bands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sheds new light on this issue. From her trawl through a massive body of judicial records, Egmond has discovered extensive evidence of professional criminal activity in the Netherlands, involving gangs of up to 300 members which remained active for years. This was not a single, organized underworld, but a changing collection of gangs which, although they occasionally formed connections, are more notable for the numerous differences between them: differences in territory (based in towns or the countryside; in Holland or Brabant); the extent of kinship connections among the membership; the role played by women; criminal styles (types of crime perpetrated, degree of violence); and social and economic causes (war, economic hardship, ethnic persecution). One of the most impressive aspects of the book is the discussion of the participation of Jews and gypsies in some of the bands, and Egmond’s comments on their activities and distinctive lifestyles adds to our knowledge of the history of these groups in the Netherlands as well as our understanding of organized crime. While gangs were active throughout the period, in the second half of the eighteenth century there was an increase in cooperation between groups, which ultimately led to the formation of the Great Dutch Band in the 1790s, which involved extensive cooperation between Jews and Christians and “drew upon nearly the whole range of criminal traditions and cultures in the Netherlands” (p. 150).

For Egmond, the diversity of this underworld is her most important discovery, and indeed this adds an important new dimension to our understanding of the subject of organized crime. But what most impressed this reviewer (from an English perspective) is the sheer scale of this organized criminal activity. Egmond

documents the activities of over thirty separate bands, most of which had dozens of members, which were able to act with relative impunity, committing robberies and murders over most parts of the country. This is not what one would expect from one of the most advanced countries in Western Europe and, as Egmond argues, this calls into question the accepted image of Dutch society in this period as placid and ordered. Yet, perhaps because the book lacks a comparative perspective, she does not attempt to explain *why* criminal underworlds were so prosperous in the Netherlands. Some obvious explanations can be rejected: it was not the result of the disorderliness of frontier regions, since gangs can be found active in Holland as well as in the border region of Brabant; it is not social protest, since gangs did not receive much active local support; it is not widespread economic hardship, since gangs flourished throughout this period, not primarily during periods (such as the late eighteenth century) of particular poverty.

One possibility is that Egmond has exaggerated the extent of criminal organization. She includes within her analysis "all groups numbering more than four people which committed property crimes [. . .] and went about their business in an organized, professional way (assuming specialization, planning, and some measure of continuity)" (p. 5). Contrary to its modern usage, the term "professional" has been used to include people who were not involved full-time in crime (indeed, many spent much of the year working in odd jobs), and indeed Egmond points out that "'crime' never constituted a constitutive element of [the] group culture" of bands (p. 182). Nonetheless, Egmond contends that the extensive range of activities performed by these gangs justifies the use of the label "professional". Although this definition of the term possibly suggests a greater degree of organization to criminal activity than in fact existed, it is perhaps a more appropriate definition for early modern societies than that used by other historians. It is unclear, however, how the evidence of this extensive criminal activity was compiled. Little is said about the research methodology used to identify the members of bands (how, for example, were problems of record-linkage addressed?).

Furthermore, in an inquisitorial legal system in which judicial officers actively searched for incriminating evidence against suspects, how can we be confident that the descriptive evidence of "underworld" activity is reliable? Egmond assures the reader that she has been able to see through the attempts made by the judicial authorities to "construct" the diverse category of criminals as "a homogeneous category of marginal and dangerous people" (p. 193). She argues that "the records disclose [. . .] how a particular stereotypical representation took shape in practice and thereby allow the discovery that we are dealing with one. Court records [. . .] cannot completely mask aspects that do not (or only partly) fit the stereotype" (p. 197). Thus, despite the judicial stereotype of gypsies as "lawless people who belong outside in the woods, like animals [. . .] we can still trace a few of their own customs as well as the infrequent urban sojourns of some gypsy groups" (p. 198). In the end, however, the book is based largely on one type of source, judicial records, and in this post-modern age such confidence that the biases of the records can be so easily surmounted may seem misplaced. Despite some evidence of local ties, for example, Egmond largely accepts the judicial stereotype of constant criminal mobility, and without further evidence from other sources it is difficult to evaluate this conclusion.

Returning to the problem of explaining the extent of organized criminal activity in the Netherlands, more attention should be given to the social and legal contexts in which crime occurred. In many cases Egmond notes that bands depended on local connections: gypsy bands, for example, were "heavily dependent on indigenous innkeepers, informants, and fences" (p. 104), despite the fact they continually plundered local inhabitants. Indeed, a general theme running through the book is the fact that professional criminals did not inhabit a separate "counter-culture", but instead lived on the fringes of the dominant culture, and indeed spent much of their lives in legitimate (if casual) employments. Local inhabitants must have known about the illegal activities of their neighbours. Why did they tolerate them? We need to know more about the social structure and social dynamics of these communities, and their relations with law enforcement officials, in order to understand the conditions which allowed such crime to flourish. Did gangs have such a hold on local communities that inhabitants were too intimidated to complain? Or were victims and informers discouraged from reporting crimes due to distrust and social distance between communities and judicial officials? The problems caused by the considerable fragmentation of Dutch criminal justice in the period (there were over 200 separate jurisdictions in the area covered) also need to be considered. Indeed, it is remarkable how quickly organized crime declined once judicial centralization occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Having done so much to document the extensive range of criminal bands in operation in this period, it is to be hoped that the author will now turn to address some of the questions about social relations and the nature of law enforcement which allowed organized crime to flourish.

Robert Shoemaker

KIRK, NEVILLE. *Labor and Society in Britain and the USA*. Vol. 1. *Capitalism, Custom and Protest, 1780–1850*. Vol. 2. *Challenge and Accommodation, 1850–1939*. Scholar Press, Aldershot 1994. viii, 226 pp.; ix, 424 pp. £39.50; £49.50.

More than ten years have passed since the Open University first presented its innovative and immensely successful thematic course on comparative British and American History. Taking a set of historical phenomena – industrialization, concepts of constitutionalism and democracy, citizenship and social class, nationality and the nation state, urbanization and economic development – the course sought to explore the responses of the two societies to these phenomena and the changes resulting from their exposure to them. In it labour history loomed large. We were concerned to identify the salient characteristics of organized labour in Britain and America and to consider some features peculiar to each country. Industrialization came earlier in Britain, enfranchisement later. Both affected labour's prospects. The social and cultural environment within which industrial society was born in America was significantly different from that of Britain before and during its industrial revolution. Britain entered the Industrial Revolution as an hierarchical society within which a landed aristocracy exercised social and cultural hegemony and paternalist supervision over a pyramid of ranks. The United States, by contrast, entered its industrial revolution with an