

## RESEARCH NOTE

# Strategies and Tactics: The Politics of Subsistence in Berlin, 1770–1850\*

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**SUMMARY:** The possibilities that poor women and men had for earning a living were oriented not only around income and professional opportunities, but around the practical competencies they possessed in an urban culture of beseeching and begging. The reform policy of the state, which sought to integrate poor-relief officials and members of the almsgiving middle class into the poor-relief administration, was directed against “politics on the street”. The introduction of municipal self-administration promoted an institutionalization of poor-relief policy that excluded women on the basis of their sex. In the stereotypical discourses of the era, images of the “poor mother” and the “loose wench” became symbols of a new poor-relief policy. As someone who begged, the “poor mother” was the subject of a culture of beseeching and begging; as the wretched mother abandoned by her husband, she became the ideal object of an institutionalized poor-relief policy. The stylization of women as passive victims and the exclusion of women from municipal institutions worked together to establish a new order of charity.

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In German-language research on poverty in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scholars have, for the most part, uncritically accepted the assumption that women were the victims of poor living conditions and the objects of charity policy. When women’s gainful employment is considered at all in such studies, it is understood merely as additional income or a stopgap measure and is frequently evaluated as sufficient evidence of

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poverty.<sup>1</sup> The general assumption is that single women or widows had almost no possibilities for earning a subsistence living and that they thus formed, together with the elderly and the sick, the main group of poor people entitled to support. Contemporary scholarship has devoted little consideration to the practical possibilities available to poor women (with the exception of participation in social protests<sup>2</sup>) and has yet to investigate how these possibilities changed from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The recent shift in focus in poverty research from questions of institutions and the scope and causes of poverty to the possibilities of subsistence and self-help for the poor has placed greater emphasis on the actions of poor women.<sup>4</sup> However, there is still no systematic account of the changes from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century in terms of gender.

In this article, I use the example of poor-relief policy in Berlin to explore

1. See, for example, Günther Schulz, "Armut und Armenpolitik in Deutschland im frühen 19. Jahrhundert", *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 15 (1995), pp. 388–410, 393; Ilja Mieck, "Von der Reformzeit zur Revolution (1806–1847)", in Wolfgang Ribbe (ed.), *Geschichte Berlins. Erster Band: Von der Frühgeschichte bis zur Industrialisierung* (Munich, 1987), pp. 405–602, 419; Wolfgang Radtke, *Armut in Berlin: Die sozialpolitischen Ansätze Christian von Rothers und der Königlichen Seebandlung im vormärzlichen Preußen* (Berlin, 1993), pp. 23f.; Verena Schmid, *Von allem entblößt: Armut, Armenwesen und staatliche Reformpolitik in Schaffhausen (1800–1850)* (Zurich, 1993); Susanne F. Eser, *Verwaltet und verwahrt: Armenpolitik und Arme in Augsburg: Vom Ende der reichsstädtischen Zeit bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg* (Sigmaringen, 1996).

2. Michelle Perrot, "Rebellische Weiber: Die Frau in der französischen Stadt des 19. Jahrhunderts", in Bettina Heintz and Claudia Honegger (eds), *Listen der Ohnmacht: Zur Sozialgeschichte weiblicher Widerstandsformen* (Frankfurt/M., 1981), pp. 71–98; Cynthia A. Bouton, "Gendered Behavior in Subsistence Riots: The French Lour War of 1775", *Journal of Social History*, 23 (1989/90), pp. 735–757; Christina Benninghaus, "Sittliche Ökonomie: Soziale Beziehungen und Geschlechterverhältnisse: Zur inneren Logik der Hungerunruhen", in *idem* (ed.), *Region in Aufruhr: Hungerkrise und Teuerungstest in der preussischen Provinz Sachsen und in Anhalt 1846/47* (Halle S., 2000), pp. 117–158.

3. There are several English-language studies that examine this transformation from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century, from the perspective of gender. These studies have been very important for my reflections here. However, as they often take their inspiration from E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), they concentrate for the most part on craft professions and workers. See for example Anna Clark, *The Struggle for Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, CA, 1995); Sally Alexander, "Women, Class and Sexual Differences in the 1830s and 1840s: Some Reflections on the Writings of a Feminist History", *History Workshop*, 17 (1984), pp. 125–149. On the issue of transformation and gender, see the volume currently in press, Ulrike Gleixner and Marion Gray (eds), *Gender in Transition: Discourse and Practice in German-Speaking Europe, 1750–1830*, (Ann Arbor, MI, 2004).

4. See Martin Dinges's review essay, "Neues in der Forschung zur spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Armut?", in Hans-Jörg Gilomen, Sébastien Guex, and Brigitte Studer (eds), *Von der Barmherzigkeit zur Sozialversicherung: Umbrüche und Kontinuitäten vom Spätmittelalter bis zum 20. Jahrhundert. De l'assistance à l'assurance sociale: Ruptures et continuités du Moyen Âge au XXe siècle* (Zurich, 2002), pp. 21–43.

the ways in which the practical possibilities available to women changed from the end of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century. By focusing on the everyday practices of poor-relief politics rather than on institutions and edicts, we find that at the end of the eighteenth century both women and men of the urban middle and lower classes had resources and possibilities that enabled them to contribute to the making of poor-relief policy. From this perspective, the idea that “poor women” were victims of necessity and objects of poor-relief policy is a consequence of changes that occurred in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The starting point of my reflections here is that up to the first decades of the nineteenth century, the means that poor people had to secure a living were negotiated through direct communication. To a great extent, these encounters took place on the street. Poor people, however, also communicated with the authorities, both orally and in writing, about diverse matters of subsistence. The people who beseeched, begged, and demanded, those who offered alms or support, as well as authorities and official representatives – all participated in what I call the culture of beseeching and begging.<sup>5</sup> Each of these groups had not only their own tactics, i.e. reactions to official or structural measures, but their own strategies as well, namely possibilities for taking part in the making of poor-relief policy.<sup>6</sup> The positions that women occupied changed only when the location of politics was transferred from the streets to institutions.<sup>7</sup> We should not understand this transfer as an implementation of laws but rather as a cultural transformation. My thesis is that gender functioned in this cultural context as a medium for these displacements. The displacements, which occurred on a cultural as well as a discursive level, produced a gender-specific hierarchy of both politics and policy and transformed “poor women” into objects of charity. Women and men continued to beseech, beg, and demand. However, these actions lost their strategic form and became merely a tactical reacting.

The article begins with a brief introduction about poverty in Berlin and a

5. Dietlind Hüchtker, “Einvernehmen und Distanz: Auseinandersetzungen um die Bitt- und Bettelkultur in Berlin 1770–1838”, *WerkstattGeschichte*, 4:10 (1995), pp. 17–28. See also Martin Dinges, “Aushandeln von Armut in der Frühen Neuzeit: Selbsthilfepotential, Bürgervorstellungen und Verwaltungslogiken”, *ibid.*, pp. 7–15.

6. Inspiration for the distinction between tactics and strategy was drawn from Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA, 1984).

7. The term “positions” refers to discussions in feminist theory that seek to mediate between discourse and action. See for example Kathleen Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience”, *Signs*, 19 (1994), pp. 368–404; Linda Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory”, *Signs*, 13 (1988), pp. 405–436; Dietlind Hüchtker, “Deconstruction of Gender and Agency of Women: A Proposal for Incorporating Concepts of Feminist Theory into Historical Research, exemplified using Berlin’s Poor Relief Policy, 1770–1850”, *Feminist Theory*, 2/3 (2001), pp. 328–348.

review of previous analyses of the scope of poverty in the city. I then use the examples of begging and prostitution to examine how possibilities for subsistence were negotiated. I conclude with reflections about the changes that occurred in the first half of the nineteenth century.

#### POVERTY IN BERLIN

My action-oriented thesis also implies a critique of previous attempts to define poverty and to determine the extent of poverty. Social historians have focused primarily on institutions and have largely ignored the support provided to poor people outside the institutional framework. In order to address the problems resulting from this, I begin by deconstructing the significance of predominant assumptions. Berlin was the Prussian royal residence and garrison. This meant that the municipal administration was subordinate to the central royal authorities, which resulted in competition and disputes over jurisdiction between municipal and royal or state authorities, particularly in issues of poor relief.

The royal poor-relief administration pursued two goals: caring for poor people and combating begging. This care took the form of monetary and material support, or admittance to various institutions such as hospitals, workhouses, etc. The so-called workhouse beadle, later *Armenwächter* or poor-relief officers, were responsible for combating begging. Lower officials of the municipal authorities and the police supported them in their efforts. In addition to the royal poor-relief administration, there were autonomous Jewish, Catholic, and Huguenot poor-relief organizations, as well as a broad spectrum of private forms of assistance, from middle-class self-help associations and neighbourhood assistance to regular and occasional alms. The practice of giving alms, which brought aristocratic and urban middle-class almsgivers enormous social respect, conflicted with the successful combating of begging, but was also an indispensable part of caring for the poor in the face of an insufficiently funded poor-relief administration.

In addition to civil servants' families and the aristocracy residing in the city, Berlin had a large military population – not only officers but also families of soldiers, who were poorly paid or had recently been released, and thus no longer received financial support. The presence of aristocracy and civil servants in the city meant that there was a great demand for servants and services. Promoted by an absolutist economic policy, trades also influenced the urban social structure. Already, by the end of the eighteenth century, royal manufacturers produced textiles, in particular for the military. Jürgen Bergmann's studies have demonstrated that one cannot speak indiscriminately about a crisis in the craft professions during the first half of the nineteenth century, despite the economic difficulties. While a number of trades, such as joiners, cobblers, and weavers, could

hardly make a living and worked primarily in families without journeymen and apprentices or even as one-man businesses, some trades working with metals and foodstuffs did quite well.<sup>8</sup>

As a whole, studies on occupational structure in Berlin are poor. First, they tend to regard gainful employment by women primarily as stopgap and marginal;<sup>9</sup> second, analyses of male employment are oriented almost exclusively around trade and craft professions, i.e. the urban middle class, while wage labour and peddling are hardly considered at all. In a royal residence and garrison, however, providing diverse services and goods was an important part of the urban economy.<sup>10</sup>

As Joan Scott and Louise Tilly have shown, all members of a household – men, women and children – contributed to family income.<sup>11</sup> Characteristic of this “family economy” was working together and a collective thinking oriented around the needs of the community.<sup>12</sup> Gainful employment by women was something self-understood: contrary to the prevalent assumption among scholars, activities existed that enabled a woman to earn a living for herself and perhaps even for a child, as Antje Kraus’s neglected study of Hamburg demonstrated long ago.<sup>13</sup> The poor-relief

8. Jürgen Bergmann, *Das Berliner Handwerk in den Frühphasen der Industrialisierung* (Berlin, 1973). See also Otto Wiedfeldt, *Statistische Studien zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Berliner Industrie von 1720–1890* (Leipzig, 1898); Mieck, “Von der Reformzeit”, pp. 416–419, 543–551, reports that between 1829 and 1850 75 per cent of craft professions in Berlin did not pay trade tax, but that 100 per cent of butchers and bakers did.

9. The perception of gainful employment by women as a stopgap measure and a sign of poverty is presumably the result of contemporary debates about competition between men and women in diverse trades, debates that intensified with the expansion of nonguild working conditions. Male journeymen and workers, who had begun to organize themselves, regarded gainful employment by women as “dirty competition”. See, for example, Friedrich Saß, *Berlin in seiner neuesten Zeit und Entwicklung 1846*, Detlef Heikamp (ed.) (Berlin, 1983, orig. 1846), p. 160; Karin Hausen, “Wirtschaften mit der Geschlechterordnung”, in *idem* (ed.), *Geschlechterhierarchie und Arbeitsteilung* (Göttingen, 1993), pp. 40–67, 47.

10. Friedrich Wilhelm August Bratring, *Statistisch-topographische Beschreibung der gesamten Mark Brandenburg Bd. 2: Die Mittelmark und Uckermark enthaltend* (Berlin, 1805), p. 163, reports, for example, 1,636 female day labourers and 1,457 male day labourers for the year 1802.

11. Joan W. Scott and Louise A. Tilly, *Women, Work and Family* (New York [etc.], 1978), pp. 31–51; Olwen Hufton, “Women and the Family Economy in Eighteenth-Century France”, *French Historical Studies*, 9 (1975/76), pp. 117–142; *idem*, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France 1750–1789* (Oxford, 1974); Katharina Simon-Muscheid (ed.), *Was nützt die Schusterin dem Schmied? Frauen und Handwerk vor der Industrialisierung* (Frankfurt/M., 1998).

12. This does not mean that individuals did not occasionally deviate from family interests and pursue their own goals. On this issue, see the references in Dinges, “Neues in der Forschung”, p. 28. On the issue of integration in the family, see Olwen Hufton’s “Le travail et la famille”, in George Duby and Michelle Perrot (eds), *Histoire des femmes en occident, t. 3: XVIe–XVIIIe siècles*, Arlette Farge, Natalie Zemon Davis (eds), (Plon, 1991), pp. 27–57. On further strategies, see Valentin Groebner’s investigation and his term “Pfand-, Gaben- und Plunder-Ökonomie”; *idem*, *Ökonomie ohne Haus. Zum Wirtschaften armer Leute in Nürnberg am Ende des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 1993), p. 262.

13. Antje Kraus, *Die Unterschichten Hamburgs in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*:

administration also assumed that a woman was able to support herself. The instructions about who was entitled to support as well as the reports of the Poor Relief Board [*Armen-Directorium*] in the 1790s (which were published as part of a campaign for donations) made clear that widows *per se* were not to be supported. Single widows, widows with one child, and single women received nothing, as it was assumed that they were able to support themselves. Only widows with more than one child received support for the children, as did couples with more than two or three children.<sup>14</sup> To avoid misunderstandings, I stress that women did, on average, earn less than men, and that both women and men lived at the subsistence level and could slip into poverty or hardship at any time.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to material wages, this working together included mutual assistance in the neighbourhood and in the family,<sup>16</sup> as well as living together, taking in boarders, and night lodgers, etc. People also occasionally shared apartments or rooms without being part of a family.<sup>17</sup> In difficult economic times, family members would – if the household required it – engage in diverse petty and marginal trades, either on a regular basis, exclusively, or as a supplement to classical trades. Both women and men engaged in most of the petty trades, for example peddling fruit, vegetables, flowers, brushwood, notions or matches, entertainment of every kind, playing music, performances with animals, curiosities, or peep shows – a kind of cinema with images and narratives – as well as services, such as carrying purchases from the market, cleaning shoes,

*Entstehung, Struktur und Lebensverhältnisse. Eine historisch-statistische Untersuchung* (Stuttgart, 1965), pp. 51–58. In this study, Kraus showed the diverse possibilities available to women for making a living, such as washing, drying and hanging up clothes, mangling clothes, sewing, making clothing, and scrubbing. She also calculated the wages earned by women, and discovered that a large portion of gainful employment by women did in fact suffice to make a living, although women earned on average less than men. Peter Earle, “The Female Labour Market in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century”, *The Economic History Review*, 17 (1989), pp. 328–353, 339, 346 points out that not all widows had to live from support and that in London, at least in the seventeenth century, not all wages for women’s gainful employment were below subsistence level.

14. For more on this issue, see Hüchtker, *Elende Mütter*, pp. 75–81.

15. On the difference between women’s and men’s wages in the 1840s, see Saß, *Berlin in seiner neuesten Zeit*, pp. 164f.; Ernst Dronke, *Berlin*, Rainer Nitsche (ed.), *Berlin in seiner neuesten Zeit* (Darmstadt [etc.], 1987, orig. 1846), pp. 109–111. I cannot consider the accuracy of these figures here. However, I should point out that they originate from a period of crisis and are connected with the establishment of arguments that gainful employment by women is evidence of the serious difficulties in the city.

16. Martin Dinges, *Stadtarmut in Bordeaux (1515–1675) – Alltag, Politik, Mentalitäten* (Bonn, 1988), pp. 523f.

17. On this, see examples drawn from the so-called *Familienhäusern* or family houses, the first blocks of apartments build in the 1820s exclusively as lower-class housing; Johann Friedrich Geist and Klaus Kürvers, *Das Berliner Mietshaus 1740–1862: Eine dokumentarische Geschichte der “von Wülcknitzschen Familienhäuser” vor dem Hamburger Tor, der Proletarisierung des Berliner Nordens und der Stadt im Übergang von der Residenz zur Metropole* (Munich, 1980), p. 167.

opening doors, writing letters, advising on legal questions, and other vital matters, collecting bones and rags, or emptying bedpans. A number of these jobs, such as opening carriage doors and selling flowers, were primarily done by children, while playing music in the courtyards of Berlin apartment buildings was usually performed by blind men. Some of these activities were less well regarded, such as emptying bedpans. Many of them, however, such as washing, selling at market stands, and wage labor, were widely accepted.

Who were these poor women and men who used every means at their disposal to survive? Contemporary scholars generally assume that poverty in Berlin increased massively during the first half of the nineteenth century. They regard crises, processes of disintegration and, in particular, massive population growth as the causes of this development. The connection between impoverishment and population growth has come to be accepted as an “historical fact”<sup>18</sup> that no longer requires proof of any kind. Scholars do not, for the most part, bother to investigate the crises and their effects more precisely.

However, the period from the end of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century was influenced by a number of rather different developments. Trades concerned with textile production had particular trouble at the end of the eighteenth century, while the Napoleonic Wars and the Wars of Liberation caused a general crisis in trade. Berlin’s population did not increase during the Napoleonic Wars, but actually decreased. Only after 1815 did it again attain the population level of 1802. I cite several figures from contemporary sources and social-historical investigations, which, despite their apparent exactness, are only approximations: in 1771, Berlin’s population was reported to be 133,639; in 1801, it was 173,440; in 1806, 155,700; and in 1815, 172,000.<sup>19</sup> The population increased rapidly after 1815. In 1831, it was reported to be 248,164; and in 1849, 412,154. The cholera epidemics of 1831, 1837, and 1848 intensified the situation, although the death rate was more than

18. Dorothee Rippmann and Katharina Simon-Muscheid, “Weibliche Lebensformen und Arbeitszusammenhänge im Spätmittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit”, in Mireille Othenin-Girard *et al.* (eds), *Frauen und Öffentlichkeit: Beiträge der 6. Schweizerischen Historikertagung* (Zurich, 1991), pp. 63–98, 64.

19. See the figures in Hermann Wollheim’s *Versuch einer medicinischen Topographie und Statistik von Berlin* (Berlin, 1844), pp. 47–49; Bratring, *Statistisch-topographische Beschreibung*, p. 158; Ingrid Thienel, *Städtewachstum im Industrialisierungsprozeß des 19. Jahrhunderts: Das Beispiel Berlins* (Berlin [etc.], 1973), p. 369, evaluates the existing figures but unfortunately begins only in 1822. The figures of the municipal authorities in Berlin: Magistrat der Stadt Berlin (ed.), *Bericht über die Gemeindeverwaltung der Stadt Berlin in den Jahren 1829–1840* (Berlin, 1842), pp. ii–iv are significantly higher, but begin in 1829. One reason for the difference is that it is not always clear whether the military population has been included. Mieck reaches similar conclusions in “Von der Reformzeit”, pp. 413, 478–494, and points to further sources of error, such as repeated changes in census districts and the growing precision of the survey.

compensated for by immigration to this city during this period.<sup>20</sup> A phase of stabilization was followed by famines in the 1840s, which reached their climax in 1847. The Revolution of 1848–1849 brought hope and a new beginning, as well as a decline in trade and uncertainty.

Because scholars have assumed that it is so self-evident that population growth in Berlin was responsible for impoverishment, they tend to present as evidence a variety of figures about support for poor people and inhabitants of workhouses, without connecting these in any detailed way to population growth.<sup>21</sup> This presumed connection between an increase in population and an increase in poverty probably results, in the first place, from the fact that many investigations began in the 1820s, after the Prussian reforms, although they tend to generalize their results for the entire first half of the century. Second, it appears that contemporary Malthusian portrayals of the dire scenarios resulting from population explosion have left their mark on current poverty research.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to this, the diversity of livelihoods engaged in by the urban population living at the subsistence level makes it extremely difficult to define poverty as a quantitative social-historical phenomenon. This problem is often avoided by presenting the urban lower classes as a list of diverse, highly distinct groups: the poor, the elderly, the sick, homeworkers, servants, journeymen, vagrants, master weavers, cobblers, joiners, manufacture and factory workers, beggars, peddlers, widows and orphans, rag collectors, etc.<sup>23</sup> This kind of list indicates that a large portion of the urban population was continuously confronted with the threat of poverty. A society in which up to two-thirds of the population live at the subsistence level, and thus could face destitution and hardship as a result of sickness, loss of livelihood, or other crises – as was the case in the cities of the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, as well as Berlin in the 1840s or Hamburg in the nineteenth century<sup>24</sup> – does not define a

20. Mieck, “Von der Reformzeit”, pp. 478–494.

21. See, in particular, Radtke, *Armut in Berlin*, pp. 67f.; Arno Pokiser, *Zur Funktion der städtischen Armendirektion des Berliner Magistrats in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts: Ein Beitrag zur Berliner Sozialgeschichte* (doctoral dissertation at the Humboldt University in Berlin, 1987), pp. 29–38; Helga Schultz, *Berlin 1650–1800: Sozialgeschichte einer Residenz* (Berlin, 1987).

22. See, for example, Radtke, *Armut in Berlin*; Thienel, *Städtewachstum*, whose results are often presumed to be valid for the entire century. The city’s administrative report for 1851 indicates a disproportional increase in poor people in comparison to the overall population growth in the 1840s, and thus, at least, attempts to draw correlations. Magistrat der Stadt Berlin (ed.), *Bericht über die Gemeindeverwaltung der Stadt Berlin in den Jahren 1841 bis 1850* (Berlin, 1851), p. 211.

23. Jürgen Kocka, *Weder Stand noch Klasse: Unterschichten um 1800* (Bonn, 1990), pp. 104–108, 123–128; Michael Döge, *Armut in Preußen und Bayern (1770–1840)* (Munich, 1991), pp. 16f.; Wolfram Fischer, *Armut in der Geschichte: Erscheinungsformen und Lösungsversuche der “Sozialen Frage” in Europa seit dem Mittelalter* (Göttingen, 1982), pp. 53–55.

24. Fischer, *Armut in der Geschichte*, p. 19; Thomas Fischer, *Städtische Armut und Armenfürsorge im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert: Sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchungen am Beispiel*



particular group as poor.<sup>25</sup> Within Berlin's poor-relief institutions, the number of men and women who received support was relatively balanced: women were not over-proportionally represented, as one might presume, given the popular assumption that women formed the vast majority of respectable poor.<sup>26</sup>

In investigating the extent of poverty, many poverty researchers have focused primarily on the files of the municipal or state institutions that provided care for the poor. They have paid hardly any attention to the diverse nongovernmental charitable institutions, social networks, neighbourhood assistance, and almsgiving on the street, which together provided a large portion of support for the poor. As a result, the figures that these studies report are not very convincing. Bratring, for example, states that in 1803 there were 10,880 poor people in a total population of 178,308, i.e. 6 per cent of Berlin's population.<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Nikolai states that in 1784 there was a total of 6,009 persons<sup>28</sup> in "all of the poor relief homes" – which is 4 per cent of the city's population of 145,021. Both these figures are well below the estimated one-third to two-thirds of the population that was dependent on a variety of strategies and tactics in order to survive. Not only do such approaches tend to underestimate the scope of poverty, but they also distort our overall view of it. Poverty influenced urban culture as a whole. Only in the course of the first half of the nineteenth century did poverty become a criterion of social marginality. For this reason, it makes little sense to try to provide a social-historical definition of poverty. Rather than attempting this, in the remainder of the article I will analyse the practical competencies that poor people had, and the ways in which they acted, and in this way I will try to suggest a new understanding of the meaning of poverty in Berlin's urban culture.

#### THE DEFENCE OF SUBSISTENCE

The petty and marginal trades that poor people engaged in also included a variety of strictly regulated or forbidden activities, such as prostitution and begging. Effectively presenting their age, afflictions, illnesses, or numerous children, people begged on the street or at doorsteps. The reasons that

*der Städte Basel, Freiburg i. Br. und Straßburg* (Göttingen, 1979), pp. 53–55; Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France*, pp. 23f.; Kraus, *Unterschichten Hamburgs*, pp. 75f.

25. See also the problems of definition in Norbert Finzsch, *Obrigkeit und Unterschicht: Zur Geschichte der rheinischen Unterschichten gegen Ende des 18. und zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1990).

26. Hüchtker, *Elende Mütter*, pp. 75–81.

27. Bratring, *Statistisch-topographische Beschreibung*, pp. 158, 163.

28. Friedrich Nikolai, *Beschreibung der Königlichen Residenzstädte Berlin und Potsdam, aller daselbst befindlichen Merkwürdigkeiten und der umliegenden Gegend* (Berlin, 1968, orig. Berlin, 1786), vol. 2.

caused poor people to beg were the same as those that the poor-relief administration used as criteria for providing support. Women, in particular, begged in their capacity as mothers; otherwise men and women shared the same grounds for begging. Many people presented begging letters that contained dramatic descriptions of illnesses and fire or loss of a spouse, job, or living quarters. The transition from peddling and hawking to begging for alms was fluid.

Any attempt by officials to limit these marginal trades was met with active resistance. When problems arose, women and men addressed the authorities directly and insisted on their right to make a living. People wrote letters, for example, in order to petition for the retention of their leases, or for permission to continue to reside in the city.<sup>29</sup> They also wrote petitions for licenses or complained to higher authorities if these were not issued or extended. Often their petitions were successful. Frau Lorentz, for example, wrote directly to the king after she had encountered difficulties with the police because of a newly issued ban on trade in royal parks in 1804:

Most serene Highness most powerful King! Most gracious King, and Master! (A)s my husband now has no trade, but we on the contrary have been permitted for some time to sell bread and rolls, whereby spirits are contained[?DH], during the summer when citizens go on walks with their children. However, I have been strictly prohibited from doing this, although no complaints were lodged against me; rather I have always humbly obeyed the higher ordinances and we have conducted ourselves in an orderly and honest manner; still, against all expectations, it has been forbidden us.<sup>30</sup>

After investigations by the municipal authorities confirmed that Frau Lorentz had engaged in her trade for four years without any complaints, Friedrich Wilhelm III granted her (and other people who had sold goods in the park before 1804) royal permission to continue to do so.

The range and extent of the practical competencies that participants of the culture of beseeching and begging possessed can be seen in conflicts about almsgiving on the street and conflicts about the conditions of prostitution. These two activities were forbidden and yet, at the same time, were tolerated in one way or another. They thus offered possibilities for developing strategies, i.e. poor people who beseeched and demanded actively took part in determining the conditions of their trade. Begging had been legally regulated since 1561. In 1770, every form of begging on the street had been forbidden. Police and officials of the poor-relief administration prosecuted “wanton” or “foreign” beggars, “vagabonds”,

29. Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA), Pr. Br. Rep. 30 Berlin C 7389, Bl. 25 (1819).

30. BLHA, Pr. Br. Rep. 30 Berlin A 372, Bl. 24 (1805).

and “loose wenches”. In the event of recurrence, offenders were sentenced to time in a workhouse.<sup>31</sup>

These repressive measures, however, had little success. Poor people continued to beg, and the urban population often supported beggars when the latter were threatened with arrest. Men and women, wealthy tradesmen and storeowners, and even members of the military and police repeatedly intervened for the release of persons arrested for begging. The justification usually offered for these interventions was that the persons arrested had not been begging, but rather had “voluntarily” been given alms.<sup>32</sup> Even members of the poor-relief administration held such views, as is illustrated by the use of poverty attestats. Poverty attestats were written documents that entitled a person, for example, to free medical services. As officially legitimated proof of poverty, these attestats were particularly well suited for begging. In order to limit what they considered the illegitimate use of such documents, senior authorities ordered that a concrete purpose had to be included in poverty attestats. Intentionally misunderstanding these instructions, deputies then issued an attestat that stated “in order to justify the request for assistance from His Royal Highness Prince Albrecht”.<sup>33</sup>

Public almsgiving enhanced the reputation of the givers, particularly among the aristocracy and the upper middle class. Giving alms was a Christian virtue as well as a Jewish one and an indispensable part of urban charity.<sup>34</sup> People who begged also participated in the defence of almsgiving. Magdalene Graffen, for example, requested in 1808 that lower officials at the poor-relief administration stop harassing her when she sought her “meagre bit of bread” on the Spittel Bridge, as she had done for some time.<sup>35</sup> The “compromise” that Magdalene Graffen offered to officials consisted of recognizing more or less implicitly the ban on “wanton begging”, but in defining her own actions as subsistence [*Brottsuche*]. The rules concerning charity – the criteria of neediness, the distinction between alms and “wanton” begging – were negotiated on the street. This meant that all the participants argued not only about alms themselves, but also about defining the terms and the shape of urban poor-relief policies. Women and men participated in these disputes, both as givers and as demanders or beseechers.

31. Felix Stiller, “Das Berliner Armenwesen vor dem Jahre 1820”, *Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preussischen Geschichte*, 21 (1908), p. 182.

32. For more on this issue, see Hüchtker, *Elende Mütter*, pp. 49–64.

33. Landesarchiv Berlin (Stadtarchiv) [LAB (STA)], Rep. 03/608, Bl. 67 (1826).

34. On the terms “moral economy” and “paternalistic rule”, see E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd”, in *idem*, *Customs in Common* (New York, 1991), pp. 185–258; Manfred Gailus and Heinrich Volkmann (eds), *Der Kampf um das tägliche Brot. Nahrungsmangel, Versorgungspolitik und Protest 1770–1990* (Opladen, 1994); Benninghaus, “Sittliche Ökonomie”.

35. LAB (STA), Rep. 03/608, Bl. 2 (1808).

Like begging, prostitution was forbidden by law and was prosecuted by the police. Prostitution was tolerated only in police-registered brothels. Because of the many unrecorded cases, it is difficult to determine the actual number of prostitutes working in Berlin. According to a contemporary investigation, in 1792 an average of 260 registered prostitutes in Berlin paid into the *Hurenheilkassse* [Prostitutes Insurance Fund],<sup>36</sup> which supplied medical care to prostitutes with venereal disease. In 1796, the figure was 257.<sup>37</sup> Another investigation reported that in 1785 there were 358 prostitutes and some 80 (!) brothels in Berlin.<sup>38</sup> The investigation reported 433 registered prostitutes in 1808, and, in addition to this, classified 400 of the 467 women without a station as so-called *Winkelhuren*, or unregistered prostitutes.<sup>39</sup> This increase probably resulted from the stationing of military troops in Berlin during the Napoleonic Wars. In 1809, the number of registered prostitutes decreased to 311, which was likely the result of renewed police measures against brothels and prostitutes.

In 1792, a new brothel regulation was enacted as part of enlightened legal reforms in Berlin.<sup>40</sup> This new regulation contained detailed police measures about the conditions under which prostitution was to be tolerated, measures that were much stricter than the previous regulation from 1770. Brothels were now required to be as inconspicuous as possible to the urban public. They had to be closed to the street and could not be located on busy streets. Prostitutes were forbidden from offensively pursuing clients, for example, by residing in public dance establishments.

Brothel keepers and prostitutes themselves objected to this obstruction of their profession. For example, after local policemen had driven them out of a dance hall, five prostitutes submitted a written petition directly to police headquarters, requesting general permission to visit public halls and allowance to have a guest in their rooms after ten in the evening. They based their petition – every element of which was in direct violation of the brothel regulation – by appealing to their own subsistence: “Unfortunately we are and will be completely ruined by this excessively strict ban, for it takes away our freedom, by which we earn our daily bread.”<sup>41</sup> In their second letter, they explained in detail their costs and incurred

36. Brothel keepers and prostitutes had to make regular payments to the Prostitute’s Insurance Fund [*Hurenheilkassse*] in order to finance the treatment of venereal disease.

37. Fr. J. Behrend, *Die Prostitution in Berlin und die gegen sie und die Syphilis zu nehmenden Massregeln: Eine Denkschrift, im Auftrage, auf Grund amtlicher Quellen abgefasst und Sr. Excellenz dem Herrn Minister von Ladenberg überreicht* (Erlangen, 1850), p. 43.

38. Ludwig Formey, *Versuch einer medicinischen Topographie von Berlin* (Berlin, 1796), p. 112.

39. Behrend, *Prostitution in Berlin*, p. 51.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 21–36.

41. BLHA, Pr. Br. Rep. 30 Berlin A 269, Bl.44 (1812).

expenses. They listed rent, food, clothing, firewood, the *Hurenheilungskasse*, and billeting tax.<sup>42</sup> However, they also assured the authorities that they accepted the officials' central interest in maintaining law and order: "We can take the liberty of calling upon the testimony of our [brothel] keepers that we have never been the cause of a disturbance or disorder."<sup>43</sup> The women appealed to custom and tradition here, as well as to respectability and good conduct. They referred, in other words, to notions of order that overlapped at least in part with those of the authorities.

These examples illustrate two important points. First, in this beseeching and begging culture, based on oral and written communication, the urban population had at its disposal various possibilities for acting to ensure its own subsistence. Those giving, as well as those receiving, justified not only their respective interests, but also their general right to communicate and to engage in politics in this way. Second, this kind of politics was not, for the most part, gender-specific. Both women and men begged; both wrote petitions to the authorities and used poverty attestations; both women and men gave alms and defended those begging from arrest.<sup>44</sup> Like men, women also possessed strategies of action, that is, their actions were not limited to reacting to the conditions established by the authorities and to defending their subsistence possibilities. Women actively participated in forming the culture of beseeching and begging.

#### THE GRADUAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE CULTURE OF BESEECHING AND BEGGING

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the significance of beseeching, begging, and demanding changed for the city's poor-relief policy. The culture of beseeching and begging on the street disintegrated, as support for the poor was transferred to institutions. This transfer occurred through a gendered restructuring of poor-relief policy. Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century, reforms in poor-relief administration focused in particular on the independent actions of charitable citizens. One approach was to transform almsgiving on the street and at doorsteps into donations to the poor-relief administration. For this purpose, the administration in Berlin publicized annual reports, in which it repeatedly appealed to the charitable sense of citizens and criticized their reticence in making donations. In the course of a reorganization of poor relief in 1774, it also issued a ban on almsgiving, which, however, had little practical effect.<sup>45</sup>

42. The billeting tax [*Verpflegungssteuer*] replaced the obligation of citizens to put up members of the military in their houses. The tax was levied in particular on houses in which prostitutes lived; BLHA, Pr. Br. Rep. 30 Berlin C 720, Bl.6 (1816).

43. BLHA, Pr. Br. Rep. 30 Berlin A 269, Bl.44 (1812).

44. This does not mean that no gender hierarchies existed.

45. Thomas Philipp von der Hagen, Director of the Poor Relief Board and President of the

A second approach, the integration of citizens into its institutions, was more effective, albeit only in connection with changes in the urban understanding of poverty. Beginning in 1787, voluntary citizen deputies were appointed. These deputies were responsible, on the one hand, for investigating the living conditions of persons seeking support and, on the other hand, for collecting donations from wealthier citizens. In 1806, the number of deputies was increased. They were now entrusted with distributing alms, and their voluntary work was transformed into an obligatory duty.<sup>46</sup> The Napoleonic Wars brought this process to a halt. However, the principle of citizen participation was again taken up in the Prussian reforms, in particular in the municipal ordinance (*Städteordnung*) of 1809. Equipped with broad decision-making powers, the men involved in the poor-relief administration now shaped a part of the institutional care for the poor. Instead of acting charitably according to their own judgement, they were part of the administration – even if they also continued at times to pursue their own ideas. The municipal ordinance of 1809 regulated the communalization of the entire poor-relief administration, a process that took place over approximately ten years. It was not until 1820 that the poverty commissions were established. The commissions replaced the citizen deputies of 1806 and assumed their responsibilities.<sup>47</sup>

The integration of citizens in the municipal administration marked the beginning of an institutionalization of poor-relief politics. An increasing number of decisions about providing for the poor were now made in administrative commissions, rather than on the street. For poor people, this meant that they no longer encountered independent almsgivers directly, but instead met members of the poor-relief commission, who were themselves subject to directives. They became, in other words, a clientele. With the introduction of municipal self-administration, this

Supreme Consistory [*Oberconsistorium*], presented numerous plans to reform the poor-relief administration, which were subsequently adopted with minor revisions: (Thomas Philipp) von der Hagen, “Plan wegen Abstellung der Gassenbetteley und Einrichtung des Arbeitshauses”, in (Anonymous), *Plan von der Abstellung der Betteley und Verpflegung der Armen in grossen Städten* (Berlin, 1778), pp. 169–208; *idem*, “Plan zur bessern Einrichtung des grossen Waysenhauses”, in *ibid.*, pp. 215–230; *idem*, “Plan zur bessern Einrichtung der Armen-Casse und der Vertheilung der Allmosen in Berlin”, in *ibid.*, pp. 433–472.

46. The “plan for a new institution for alms-giving and medical care for poor people in the capital city of Berlin insofar as it is the responsibility of the Berlin Poor Relief Board” [Plan zu einer neuen Einrichtung des Almosenwesens und der Krankenpflege für die Armen in der Residenzstadt Berlin so weit es von dem Berlinischen Armen-Directorio ressortirt] came into force on 27 May 1806; see Stiller, “Berliner Armenwesen”, p. 193.

47. After tough negotiations about the financing of the poor-relief system, the royal Poor Relief Board was transformed into a municipal Poor Relief Board in 1819. The members of the Poverty Commission, who were volunteers, assisted the municipal Poor Relief Board in the investigation and surveillance of poor people receiving support. By 1825, all fifty-six commissions had been established.

institutionalization of citizen actions – which had begun in the poor-relief administration in 1787 – expanded beyond the domain of charity. As city councillors or poor-relief deputies, men now made policy in institutions, and women were excluded from this on the basis of their sex. In the transfer of poor-relief politics from the streets to institutions, gender became a decisive criterion for inclusion or exclusion. As Isabel Hull has shown in her book on civil society in Germany, gender became a central structural category for society at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>48</sup>

We can also understand the growing number of associations that were established in this period as an institutionalization of charity. These associations, which sought to provide support for the poor, transformed poor people into the clientele of charity, defined in terms statutes. The associations were themselves organized on the basis of gender and shaped by gendered hierarchies: there was, for example, a women's *Krankenverein*, or sick insurance fund and a men's *Krankenverein*, an association of female ex-convicts and an association of male ex-convicts. Often associations had female activists and male directors. Decisions about charity were shifted from a direct encounter between givers and receivers to institutionalized spaces that were organized according to gender hierarchies. As a result, the scope of action for women, as givers and as receivers of charity, was altered. The former were subordinated in new ways to institutional guidelines made by men; the latter had to deal increasingly with institutions rather than with people.

As the new poor-relief commission was a political office, the exclusion of women from it required no explicit justification.<sup>49</sup> From the beginning, however, this exclusion was not accepted as a matter of course and was called into question by the women's movement throughout the nineteenth century. Already in 1817, the wife of General von Boruslawski, who was the member of a charitable association, suggested that women, like men, should be obligated to participate voluntarily in the self-administration. The Poor Relief Board supported this proposal, and was particularly pleased that a private charitable organization should suggest such cooperation.<sup>50</sup> The Berlin government,<sup>51</sup> however, rejected the proposal, with the justification that it would mean that women “were removed from

48. Isabel V. Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815* (Ithaca, NY, 1996); see also Hausen, “Wirtschaften”, p. 53. The effective force of this gender order is evident, even today, in historical studies that begin with the assumption that it was only in the course of the nineteenth century that women were gradually allowed, or fought for, the right to participate in politics. Little consideration has been given to the fact that the forms, locations, and meaning of politics have also changed over time. See, for example, Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government* (Oxford, 1987).

49. Iris Schröder, *Arbeiten für eine bessere Welt. Frauenbewegung und Sozialreform, 1890–1914* (Frankfurt/M. [etc.], 2001), p. 115.

50. BLHA, Pr. Br. Rep. 30 Berlin B 37, Bl. 27 (1817).

51. Between 1816 and 1821, Berlin was an administrative region or county [*Regierungsbezirk*].

the calling that is theirs by nature and that functions everywhere in society".<sup>52</sup> The general's wife offers an example of how the givers of charity did not simply accept the reduction of their formative possibilities. With her suggestion, she attempted to open a field of activity for women and, at the same time, to defend their strategic competencies, not on the street but rather within the new institutions. The means with which she attempted to do this – a petition addressed to the Poor Relief Board – demonstrates once again the self-understanding with which women interacted with officials and the self-understanding with which all sides participated in the process.

Institutionalization, however, was not solely responsible for the dissolution of the culture of beseeching and begging. A transformation or, more precisely, a shift in emphasis in the evaluation of poverty also played a significant role. This shift was the result of extended debates about Prussian reform policy among Berlin authorities, in particular about the consequences of liberalization and the right to carry on a trade [*Gewerbefreiheit*]. With the introduction of the right to establish and to carry on a trade as well as the abolition of serfdom [*Erbuntertänigkeit*], municipal authorities found it increasingly difficult to control the population influx into Berlin. The city feared that its privilege as a royal residence would be threatened as a result of this. In order to strengthen their position, municipal authorities repeatedly invoked the dangers that would arise from a massive influx of poor and potentially poor people.

In the debate about reform policy, the municipal authorities responsible for poor relief invoked the image of the wandering journeyman to illustrate their equation of the right to carry on a trade, uncontrolled immigration, and impoverishment in the city. This journeyman, according to their narrative, is permitted to establish his own trade in Berlin and starts up a family that he cannot support. He then abandons his wife and children, who become a burden to the poor-relief administration:

They [the immigrants] either become impoverished themselves or leave behind widows and orphans in need of support. The large class of factory workers and weavers will become unemployed or will abandon their wives and children as a result political developments or other events, as their trade grinds to a halt for some time.<sup>53</sup>

This narrative developed into a stereotype that was repeated for decades, a narrative which not only summed up the new burdens of the city, but which also assumed a direct force in reality.<sup>54</sup> A new image of poor people

52. BLHA, Pr. Br. Rep. 30 Berlin B 37, Bl. 32 (1817).

53. LAB (STA), Rep. 03/130, Bl. 60–63 (1809).

54. See, for example, the poor-relief administration's report in 1828, Armen-Direction von Berlin, *Die öffentliche Armenpflege in Berlin. Mit besonderer Beziehung auf die vier Verwaltungsjahre 1822 bis 1825* (Berlin 1828), pp. 227–229; or the article in a newspaper for



entitled to support was disseminated in this way, a passive clientele symbolized by the mother as a victim of reform policy and a victim of her abandoning husband. The image of the “wretched mother”, rather than the “importunate beggar woman”, now determined the discourse about poor women.<sup>55</sup>

Although scholars of poverty have generally assumed that the Enlightenment marked a shift in understandings of poverty from individual lack of morality to social causes, it was only in the first half of the nineteenth century that a pejorative conception of the lower classes’ way of life became constitutive. The organizations concerned with poor relief regarded impoverishment as inseparably connected to the dissolution of morality and urban order. We find this new focus on the issue of immorality in the poor-relief ordinance of 1826, which treated begging for the first time as an entirely negative phenomenon. In 1838, police assumed the responsibility for combating and prosecuting begging.

As a result of the constant invocation of danger it posed to urban order, poverty in general was connected to immorality and criminality and was thus perceived as a threat. It was therefore only logical that the poor-relief administration came to regard immorality as a new domain of policy in the 1820s. In contrast to 1790, when the poor-relief administration did not consider “prostitution and loose behaviour” to be objects “directly concerned with poor relief”,<sup>56</sup> it now apparently assumed that “the responsibilities of the police [...] include the domain of caring for the poor”.<sup>57</sup> The poor-relief administration reported to the police women suspected of being prostitutes, opposed police toleration of prostitution, and sought a general abolition of concubinage, albeit without success. As an alternative, they cut poor-relief support to mothers living in concubinage.<sup>58</sup> In the course of the morality movement, there were citizen protests against brothels and prostitution in Berlin as well as in other European and American cities in the 1830s.<sup>59</sup> For part of the lower classes and the lower middle class, the morality movement – which opposed prostitution as well as alcoholism – became a central means for gaining

police affairs from the 1830s: S.G., “Zur practischen Armenpolizei”, *Beiträge zur Erleichterung des Gelingens der praktischen Polizei*, 13 (1835), p. 287; 14 (1836), p. 34.

55. On this issue, see also Dietlind Hüchtler, “Gender as a Medium of Change in Berlin’s Politics of Poverty, 1770–1850”, in Gleixner and Gray, *Transitions*; Bonnie Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, MA [etc.], 1998), pp. 172–179.

56. LAB (STA), Rep. 03/357, Bl. 153–155 (1790).

57. LAB (STA), Rep. 03/78, Bl. 46 (1842).

58. For example LAB (STA), Rep. 03/78, Bl. 7 (1836), Rep. 03/78, Bl. 8 (1836), Rep. 03/78, Bl. 41 (1842), Rep. 03/78, Bl. 48 (1842).

59. See, for example, Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition* (New York, 1987), pp. 11–20; Edward J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain Since 1700* (Dublin [etc.], 1977), pp. 25–33.

political reputation through the adoption of a gender-segregated middle-class morality.<sup>60</sup> Against the backdrop of this morality campaign, brothels were repeatedly closed down and no new concessions were issued in Berlin after 1837. With one or two exceptions, brothels were tolerated only in one small alley.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to this, the debate about unregistered prostitution or *Winkelhurerei* intensified. Berend claimed, for example, that in 1839 approximately 1,200 women had been placed in the workhouses because of wanton vagrancy, homelessness, begging, unregistered prostitution, syphilis, scabies, etc. Among these, there were reported to be about 400 to 500 unregistered prostitutes and approximately 200 women suspected of prostitution. In 1851, he reported 5,000 unregistered prostitutes and 10,000–12,000 suspected prostitutes.<sup>62</sup> In contrast to this, the report of the poor-relief administration for 1839 recorded only 3 women who had been picked up for unregistered prostitution, and a total of 614 women in categories of vagrancy, living conditions under investigation, begging, mischief, unregistered prostitution, and homelessness.<sup>63</sup> The administrative report for 1850 recorded 242 women arrested for unregistered prostitution.<sup>64</sup> Even taking into account the fact that Berend was a supporter of legally tolerated prostitution, registered and regulated by the police, while the municipal administration was under pressure to demonstrate the success of its antiprostitution policy, the discrepancy of the figures is astonishing. It illustrates that we should not simply oppose the reality of numbers to the reality of discourses. For prostitutes, however, there were hardly any possibilities remaining for them to resist these morality campaigns. We find hardly any calls for better working conditions or opposition to unreasonable demands in the files of the poor-relief administration. Prostitutes had lost their strategic formative possibilities.

### CONSEQUENCES

These developments – the institutionalization of poor relief, the transformation of poor people into a poor-relief clientele, and a morality policy directed against the lower classes' way of life – led to an growing social distance between the middle class and the poor. Through its voluntary deputies, the poor-relief administration moved into the living quarters of poor people. Once the subject of a culture of beseeching and begging, the “wretched mother” became a symbol of the new relation

60. On this, see Clark, *Struggle for Breeches*, pp. 92–118.

61. Behrend, *Prostitution in Berlin*, pp. 152f.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

63. Magistrat der Stadt Berlin, *Bericht 1829–1840*, p. 219.

64. Magistrat der Stadt Berlin, *Bericht 1841 bis 1850*, p. 277.

between poor people and government administration; and the prostitute became a symbol of immorality, which in turn made possible the interventions of police and, in the course of the nineteenth century, of social reformers into the lives of poor women. The justification of petty trades was no longer negotiated on the street or in written petitions. Rather, poor-relief administration and charitable associations made institutional decisions about poor people understood as clients.

What did these developments mean for the positions occupied by poor women? People continued to beg, but begging no longer offered the possibility of asserting a sovereign position in municipal poor-relief politics. Beseeking and begging no longer implied, for poor people, the unwritten right to secure their subsistence as they saw fit. In 1804, Frau Lorentz was still able to intervene successfully. In contrast to this, in 1824 a woman requested money so that she could marry the man with whom she lived, and with whom she had several children. Her request, which was submitted in the midst of a campaign against concubinage, was denied. Instead it was ordered that the couple be separated, although the woman pointed out that they had already lived together as a married couple for years.<sup>65</sup> Beginning in the 1830s, the overall number of requests from poor people in the files of poor-relief administration declined. There are also no petitions from prostitutes about their working conditions during this period. Even if this is not evidence that such petitions were no longer written, it does demonstrate that they had no value as evidence, and thus were of no relevance in making poor-relief policy.

Institutions based on gender distinctions constructed new spaces of charitable actions – for the givers as well as for the receivers of charity. The street – the space in which justification and neediness had been negotiated, and which was equally accessible to all participants – gave way to assemblies of city councillors and poverty commissions, accessible only to men, and to charitable associations with strict gender hierarchies. Gender stereotypes functioned as a medium that made possible central aspects of the transformations in poor-relief policy, in particular creating a social distance from the poor and attaching to poverty the connotation of “immorality”. The stylization of women as passive victims, and their exclusion from municipal institutions, worked together to form a new order of charity. In this sense, the strategies of poor women were reduced to tactics, that is, to more or less successful reactions to official measures.

65. LAB (STA), Rep. 03/637, Bl. 34–40 (1832). It is not clear from the files whether the couple actually followed this order to separate.