

City nomads

Moving house as a coping strategy, Amsterdam 1890-1940

“Looks more like an urchin than a man,” wrote a welfare officer in 1895 in a report on Cornelis B., a thirty two-year old recipient of poor relief. The relief file on the family B., spanning nearly forty years, provides an almost Dickensian portrayal of life on the Amsterdam fringe. Being small and not particularly strong, B.’s work as a casual porter did not yield sufficient income. He earned between two and three guilders per week, but in slack times much less. His wife Carolina, who was handicapped by deafness, earned an additional guilder per week by “charring for Jews.” The family lived with three sons in “a very shabby attic” in the centre of the city. For this dwelling, they paid a weekly rent of one guilder. The 1895 report ended wryly by remarking “there is nothing left to pawn.” In 1897, a report spoke once again of bitter poverty: “the children are weeping of hunger and cold.” Cornelis and Carolina had married in 1892, thereby legitimizing two boys born in 1890 and 1891. The problem of making ends meet would haunt them during their entire married life. Not paying the rent offered a way out, but in 1894 the couple was threatened with eviction for being eighteen weeks in arrears. Cornelis’ alcoholism and frequent penal offences exacerbated their troubles. In 1893, he was convicted for stealing potatoes and served two months in prison. During that period his wife, expecting her third child, was refused charity by the Church because she was “too young.” Apparently, the neighbors lent a hand by supplying the family with food. Ever since 1893, the B. couple was supported regularly by the Amsterdam poor relief with 1.25 guilders per week, as well as with peat for heating and with bread. Also, they took in boarders to supplement their income. Finally, when their five children grew up, their wages helped to sustain them, although the children were also regularly detained in prisons or asylums. The family ties were remarkably strong; in 1930, a report mentioned that the elderly couple refused to go to an old people’s home because they wanted to reside

with their children “who don’t desert the old folks” (Municipal Archives Amsterdam, Archive 5256, file SZ 7695).

A conspicuous facet of the life story of Cornelis B. and his wife Carolina was their frequent change of address. In the population registers of Amsterdam we can trace their itinerary in the heart of the city. Between 1892 and 1930, the couple moved no less than twenty-two times, in roughly the same neighborhood. More often than not, moving house would bring them to an adjacent street or even to an address in the same street. In fact, they lived on eleven different addresses in the Ridderstraat alone. This behavior did not elicit any comment in the poor relief records. Apparently, the Amsterdam officials were familiar with this kind of behavior. According to the *Gemeentelijke Woningdienst* (“Municipal Housing Service”) between 1910 and 1914 Amsterdam families stayed in their house for an average period of 20.3 months. The *Woningdienst* had taken a sample of two thousand families from the municipal register and calculated how long they stayed in their houses (Nota van den Directeur van den Gemeentelijke Woningdienst, 1925). Although the municipal inquiry made no distinction between social strata, the remark was being made that the well-to-do moved much less than the inhabitants of houses with low rents: “In the real working-class neighborhoods, and even more so in the neighborhoods where the lowest paid workers live (...) constantly moving around is a common practice” (Gemeentelijke Woningdienst 1927). A few years later, a Dutch geographer was struck by the high mobility within a poor quarter of the city of Utrecht. He noted that several “big-city nomads” had moved twelve times within two years (De Vooijs 1932: 167). Moving was generally confined to the immediate surrounding area. In an enquiry by the Amsterdam *Woningdienst* in 1936, 1,814 moving families were traced. A total of 1,068 families (59 percent) had stayed in their original district. In the typical slum districts this percentage was higher than average. For instance, in the “Jordaan” district where about 70,000 people lived on less than a square kilometer, 71.2% of the movers remained in the district. Apart from being attached strongly to their neighborhood, people were limited in their choice by their financial position, according to the *Woningdienst* (Gemeentelijke Woningdienst 1936).

Dutch social history provides some indications that moving house was a form of budgeting in working-class households. An inhabitant of Rotterdam related the frequent moving of his parents (eight times during the 1930s) to the surplus on the housing market: “Some house owners tried to make the dwelling attractive by granting you a week of free rent...others lured you with free paint and wallpaper. Moving about became a popular sport...”(Romer 1997: 29). According to others, the period of free rent could amount to several months: “It was the trick to move after that period to the next ‘free house’” (Rood Rotterdam: 30). Interviews about life

during the Great Depression give the same picture for Amsterdam: "People who had a house could not afford the rent, but there were plenty of houses. They moved from one neighborhood to another. Because they could not pay the rent. And then the landlord... offered them free wallpaper, just to get them into the house" (Leydesdorff 1987: 86). The budgetary problems of the working class became acute during the early stage of the family life cycle when the number of children was still increasing. This problem could not be better expressed than by an Amsterdam woman who was cited in a 1903 report on housing conditions: "I have to look for a smaller house, because my family is getting too big. In former days, when I was alone with my husband or when we only had one or two little ones, I could pay that high rent, but now that we have so many, it becomes difficult" (Ter Meulen 1903: 38). Economizing was one thing, not being able to pay the rent another. Often, tenants negotiated with the landlords and managed to defer the payment of rent to a better season. If this was not possible, eviction was inevitable. However, a notorious group of tenants managed to pay no rent at all. Collecting the rent was not always easy for the landlord and a lawsuit which could lead to an eviction was rather expensive. And if such a procedure threatened to take place, the tenant would take his shabby possessions and move out quietly before the bailiffs were sent in. The Amsterdam Association of Landlords kept a blacklist of defaulters, many of whom had the abbreviation "NZ" behind their names, short for "Noorderzon" or doing a moonlight flit. For some of the poorest proletarians moving quickly from house to house while not paying the rent was a tactic applied by (Teijnant 1993:126-127)

Residential mobility as an adaptive strategy

In this article, we analyze data on individual families to ascertain the existence of 'strategic' residential mobility of the urban proletariat. Is this a meaningful approach to residential mobility and can we find support for our point of departure in the literature?

In 1982, Michael Anderson doubted the usefulness of quantitative microlevel studies of residential mobility. In his view, most moves were "largely random and accidental or based on what appear to the outside observer to be very trivial circumstances" (Anderson 1982: 295). In his view, information on individuals is unlikely to reveal the factors underlying shifts in residential patterns. These factors include "... the nature and workings of the city's housing markets, the availability in the city of housing of different sizes and styles, the distribution of employment opportunities and their relationships to availability of transportation, the networks of

personal contacts..." (Ibid). In our opinion, new techniques and datasets allow for a meaningful study of the subject. Firstly, multivariate techniques make it possible to relate the migratory decisions of individuals simultaneously to their stage in the life cycle, their socio-economic position, household composition and their neighborhood. In principle, though difficult, it is possible to include in the models many of the "macro-level" factors Anderson referred to. Secondly, datasets that actually follow individuals in their subsequent moves enable the researcher to add a new dimension to the study of mobility: that of the lifetime trajectory. Previous migration is a very important factor in predicting a new move. In fact, a small number of repeaters seem to account for a large share of all moves (Speare, Goldstein and Frey 1975: 130; see also Goldstein 1964). However, the "repeaters" themselves have hardly been studied, obviously because of their elusiveness.

Support for our views can be found both in historical studies of migration and in descriptions of proletarian survival strategies in slums. In their influential study on British geographical mobility, Colin Pooley and Jean Turnbull assert the primacy of individual life course factors in migration behavior. They show how, by moving, individuals were constantly responding to changing household composition, income or employment. Their analysis of residential mobility, however, tends to emphasize 'upward' adjustment, in the sense that people moved to a more spacious and preferably owned house when the opportunity arose (Pooley and Turnbull 1997; Pooley and Turnbull 1998: 230-231, 256). The absence of a conspicuous proletarian mobility pattern may partly be attributed to the underrepresentation of unskilled workers and the poor in their survey (Pooley and Turnbull 1998: 46, 236, Pooley 2002). Recent studies of German migration have also paid attention to frequent local moves within cities. Contemporaries saw repeated mobility within cities as indicative of weak integration of in-migrants, if not a downright sign of their social failure (Crew 1979: 72; Jackson 1982: 254). Comparing the characteristics of movers and non-movers among in-migrants in Duisburg, James Jackson concluded, however, that local mobility could not be equated with marginality (Jackson 1997:264). Likewise, Steven Hochstadt linked local mobility to in-migrants. In his view, migrant laboring families were struggling to survive in the metropolis by "...constant local movement to find an appropriately priced dwelling" (Hochstadt 1999:169).

Residential mobility of native urban populations in the nineteenth century has been the subject of recent studies by Jason Gilliland on Toronto (Gilliland, 1998) and Renzo Derosas on Venice (Derosas, 1999). Gilliland concluded that the "rental market offers a degree of freedom to a household under a severe budget constraint." In his view, "most moves... were decisive strategies of coping" (Gilliland 1998: 39). For his

analysis, Derosas has built an intricate model that looks simultaneously at the effects of social position, economic conjuncture, household composition and even non-resident kin. He discovered a positive strong correlation between food prices and the risks of moving. According to Derosas, economic crises “...forced families into frequent changes of residence” (Derosas 1999:51). Remarkably, Venetian day labourers were not particularly mobile.

Studies of daily life in urban slums yield many relevant insights. The market for casual labour was crucial for the location and persistence of slums. Casual labourers, often working in the harbors or in construction, had to live close to their work to make use of job offers. Also, they relied on local, personal contacts to find housing and to extend their credit with shopkeeper or landlords in times of unemployment. Their attachment to their neighborhoods was increased further by the work of their wives and children. Obviously, their irregular incomes had to be supplemented with the wages of household members. In short, moving to houses in other districts, even when these houses were cheaper, was not an option until public transport became widely available (Pooley and Turnbull, 1999). The restructuring (decasualization) of the urban labour markets proved more important for the disappearance of the slums than alternative housing (Wohl 1977: 300-315; Gaskell 1990: 11; Dennis and Daniels 1981). Not surprisingly, most studies of slum communities stress the relative immobility of their inhabitants, who often lived in the same neighborhood for generations (Sutcliffe 1982: 118; Young and Wilmott 1957). In some studies, however, frequent relocations *within* the same area are recognized as intrinsic to slum life. Casual workers had to adjust the costs of accommodation to their irregular incomes as well as maintain their local networks (Green and Parton 1990: 76-82, Green 1995: 93-94).

Frequent changing of address is in line with what we know on workers' coping strategies. Various studies have shown how urban working class families responded, with astonishing flexibility, to rapid changes in the labour market and in living standards. Some families decided to emigrate in order to improve their position elsewhere. Family members changed their occupations or diversified their economic activities, for instance, by combining wage work with trade. Families countered periodic unemployment by economizing on expenditures. When worst came to worst, they applied for charity, pawned their belongings, pilfered or even dissolved the household unit. Often, families found assistance in networks outside the households. Among these, networks of kin and neighbors were of great importance (Van der Linden 1994; Schlumbohm and Fontaine 2001; Van der Linden 2002).

In the next section we present our dataset, which allows us to compare a group of decidedly poor

Amsterdam families to a reference group. In the fourth section we reconstruct the developments in the Amsterdam rental market, a topic neglected in most other studies on historical residential mobility. In the fifth section we analyze patterns in moving by social groups. We then move on to a multivariate analysis of the propensity to move in relation to factors such as civil status, the number of children in the household, subtenancy and immigrant status. We pay special attention to factors that can explain repeated migration. What impact did “city nomads” have on aggregate mobility rates and who were they?

The dataset

In this study we analyze the residential mobility of about a thousand Amsterdam families headed by a once- or currently married man in the period 1890-1940. We compare a selected group of poor families to a reference group of randomly picked families. The sample was constructed from three extant data sets. They include:

1) A dockworkers sample used by Ad Knotter for his study on the life cycle of laboring families in the first half of the 20th century (Knotter 1999). The original dataset consists of three groups of workers (each n=125) born between 1850 and 1899 and chosen from: a) dock workers with a permanent labour contract, b) dock workers who worked on a casual basis and c) casual workers who were out of work in 1916 because of the war and for that reason financially supported (by a special regulation). The first two groups were selected from the records of a pension fund dating from 1920. Of course the last group also worked in the harbour now and then and the casual dock workers from the second group were not restricted to working in the harbour alone.

2) A poor relief sample created by Henk Wals for his study on the survival strategies of families of which the head of the household worked in the building industry (Wals 2001). The sample, totaling 345 persons, was selected from the Amsterdam poor relief records.

3) A reference group consisting of the Amsterdam part of the Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN) from the period of birth 1903-1922. The HSN aims at compiling life history data for a representative portion of the 19th and 20th century population of the Netherlands (Mandemakers 2000). The sample size of the HSN for the period 1903-1922 is 0.25% of all native-born persons, amounting to a size of n=692 for Amsterdam. For this study, we focus on the fathers of the sampled persons.

To obtain comparable shares in subsequent cohorts, the three databases have been matched on date of birth. Table 1 present the cohort size of each sample. The Dutch population registers allow for a detailed day-by-day following of individuals (for an introduction to the old Dutch population registers, see Gordon 1989). The life courses of the men in our samples (in terms of occupation, household composition, address, widowhood and remarriage) are traced until death, migration from Amsterdam or the ending of the population register in 1940.

[Table 1 about here]

The Amsterdam housing market 1890-1939

After a period of stagnating and even declining economy in the middle of the nineteenth century, from 1870

onwards the city of Amsterdam enjoyed substantial economic growth. This attracted migrants from all parts of the Netherlands and resulted, from the early 1870s onwards, in fast-growing numbers of people who needed to be housed. In the nineteenth century, building projects were left almost exclusively to the private sector. The connection with the money market which thus existed made the building industry cyclical and as the margins were low, most of the building firms were constantly on the verge of bankruptcy. This did not add much to the quality of the new houses, while in economically bad times the number of building projects sank to an unacceptable low level.

Under these circumstances, at the beginning of the twentieth century the local authorities and particularly housing corporations took over the initiative. Building became more subject to legislation. The Housing Act of 1901 restricted private building and enabled national and local authorities to fund projects carried out by housing corporations. From the second decade on most of the building projects were undertaken either by housing corporations or the city council. In the years following World War I, the housing shortage was tackled by carrying out hundreds of mainly government-funded (84.5 percent from 1915-1925; Ottens 1975) building projects. The new districts were well-planned and arose outside the old city gates, which had marked the town borders for centuries. The new houses were relatively luxurious compared to the old basement apartments and working class houses in the centre of the city, which often consisted of just one room, with no running water or toilet. In the new districts a living room, a kitchen and at least one bedroom was the standard. Meanwhile, in the old slums numerous dwellings were being condemned and torn down (3,739 between 1904 and 1915; Ottens 1975).

To what extent did all this building activity change the housing market and living conditions in Amsterdam? Several observations are worthy of note. First, in contrast with other countries, a shift from renting to owning did not occur. In fact, there were very few owners in Amsterdam. For instance in 1920, only 3.3% of the private dwellings were occupied by owners (Uitkomsten der woningtelling, 1919). This implies that when we discuss the housing market, we actually mean the rental market. Second, the building of new houses could not keep up with the constantly increasing need for new dwellings. This problem was made more acute by the demolition of slums. In reconstructing the need for housing one has to take account of both demographic changes and the net result of building and demolishing. Our calculation of the need for housing in Amsterdam is presented in Figure 1.¹ Clearly, a period of relative abundance (visible in a negative shortage) of houses came to an end in the period 1905-1910. For the next ten years, there was a growing shortage of houses. Already in

1912, it was remarked that rents were going up and that the lack of houses, ironically, led to a conspicuous decline in official complaints about housing conditions. Apparently, people feared that complaining would lead to their eviction. Also, the number of removals of (large) families was declining strongly (Leliman 1912:15). The effects of the housing shortage were also visible in a more cramped housing. The number of persons per dwelling increased gradually until 1920.

[figure 1 about here]

The Amsterdam poor did not move promptly towards the new quarters. Many labourers, like dockers, hesitated to move away from their work. Furthermore, the greatest shortages were in houses with low rents (Leliman 1912:14). This was not solved by the housing projects, since rents were higher in the new areas. A 1925 report showed that a quarter of Amsterdam households already spent more than twenty percent of their income on rent (Gemeentelijke Woningdienst 1925). Moreover, the regulations of housing corporations were more severe than rules applied by most slum landlords in the city centre. Arrears of rent would not be accepted for more than a few weeks. Such a restriction could cause serious problems for a working class family, especially those who depended on casual labour. As an Amsterdam bricklayer put it to a 1891 committee of inquiry: “There are a lot of Amsterdam workers who are without a job every now and then. They prefer a landlord who does not make it too hard for them” (Enquete Staatscommissie 1890). Under these circumstances not every working class family happily moved from the centre to one of the new districts. Eildert Postma, a navy who was interviewed by the same committee, lived with his wife and four children in a small room in the city centre, and paid 1.25 guilders per week for it. Asked why he did not move to one of the new districts, he told the committee he was satisfied with his present housing. “I live a few steps from my work and in the new districts you have to pay at least 1.75 guilders.” (Enquete Staatcommissie 1890, 408).

Mobility patterns of the Amsterdam poor

Did the Amsterdam poor have distinct patterns of residential mobility? If they moved house often to save on the

budget or even to evade paying the rent, this must have resulted in higher mobility rates than other social groups. Also, most of their moves were probably not inspired by job change or the wish to improve housing conditions, thus they are very likely to have been over very short distances. We expect that this behavior was particularly prominent among the casual workers in the transport and building sectors. During the slack winter months their income was insufficient to sustain their families. Many Amsterdam families survived this period by buying on credit and pawning their belongings. Some workers could compensate rent arrears by doing odd jobs for the landlord (De Groot 1988:183). In figure 2, we compare the residential mobility rates of casual and unskilled workers to other occupational groups.ⁱⁱ The most striking development was the steep decline of overall mobility after 1910/14. It seems likely that the development in the availability of houses (see Figure 1) explains much of the trend in mobility. Before 1910, the abundance of houses (visible in negative relative shortages) was reflected in high mobility. From 1910/14 to 1925/29 the severe shortage of houses coincided with low mobility rates. In the period 1925/29 to 1935/39, there was still a shortage of houses, albeit at a modest level, whereas mobility increased slightly.

[Figure 2 about here]

Thus, a period of relative abundance of cheap houses coincided with relatively high rates of mobility among the Amsterdam proletariat. In the late nineteenth century, the casual and unskilled labourers moved very often. Their yearly average in 1895/1899 was 0.74 moves, which means that they stayed about sixteen months at each address. It is interesting to note that the “white collar workers” (clerks, teachers, but also policemen and supervisors) had the lowest removal rates, even less than the self-employed. Social differentiation in mobility disappeared almost completely in the period between 1910/14 and 1920/24, however. After 1920/24, residential mobility became more frequent, but never regained its pre-1910/14 level. Similarly, social differentiation became more visible, but remained quite modest compared with the period 1890/94-1905/09.

An occupational title may hide all kinds of differences between persons in question. Some male workers may have been relatively well-off, for instance, when their wife managed a small shop or when their children contributed to the household. Ideally, we would like to know the total income and fixed expenditures of every household at every period. Unfortunately, these data are not available. However, we do know that a

sizeable part of the workers in the dockworkers sample applied for poor relief at least once in their lives (62%, (Knotter 1999: 208). Per definition, all workers in the poor relief sample applied. Although not all applications were granted (20% of the dockers' requests were rejected), the application as such serves as an indication of economic distress. It is possible to compare the mobility rates of those workers who had applied for poor relief to a 'random sample' of skilled and unskilled workers taken from the reference group. Until 1910, the mobility rates of the first group were about 20-40% higher than the rates of the second group.

Many studies of residential mobility emphasize the importance of family cycle effects. In general, families in the childbearing stage who require more space, move more often than couples with older children (Speare, Goldstein and Frey 1975: 128-134; Jackson 1997: 267). Do we find the same differences between social groups when we control for the family cycle? Figure 3 shows how, for each occupational group, mobility rates developed by period after the wedding. Removals were most frequent in the first five years. Many newlyweds moved to a residence of their own shortly after the wedding, but apparently they remained mobile in the following years as well. Between 10 and 30 years after the marriage, mobility rates were fairly stable. Afterwards, a slight increase was visible in some groups. This may indicate that some elderly heads, often widowers, became boarders in other households. The social differentiation is broadly similar to the one we found in Figure 2. Interestingly, the white collar workers increased their moves after 10-14 years after the marriage. Is this a reflection of the "modern" pattern in which people with higher incomes are most able to fulfill aspirations for better housing across the life course (Harts and Hingsman, 1986; Bonvalet and Lelievre 1990)?

[Figure 3 about here]

Did the "proletarian" movers differ in their destinations as well? Was the period with frequent mobility of the poor (1890-1909) also characterized by relatively more mobility over short distances? The destinations are divided in three types: a move to an address in the same street, a move to another street in the same quarter and a move to another quarter. In Figure 4, we compare these types by occupational group and by period (1890-1909 and 1910-1939). In both periods, the casual and unskilled labourers were most likely to remain in the same

quarter and also to move within the same street. On the other hand, the white collar workers had the lowest tendency to move within the same street. In the period after 1909, moving to another quarter increased strongly, except among the self-employed. Moving within the same street declined, another indication that in this period with a shortage of cheap houses, moving house lost its attractiveness as a survival strategy.

[Figure 4 about here]

A multivariate analysis of residential mobility

Many factors influence the propensity to change address or, conversely, to remain in the same house. We can disentangle this complex knot only by using a multivariate approach. Following the example of Derosas (1999), we have developed a logistic regression model that calculates relative risks of changing address in Amsterdam within a year after the start of observation.ⁱⁱⁱ Contrary to Derosas, who starts observation of households at January 1st of each year (during 1850-1869), we have chosen to begin observation at six different periods, with five-yearly interval and beginning at marriage. In all, we included 4416 observations in our model. The regression model shows the effects of independent variables on the risk of residential mobility. The natural logarithm of the Beta coefficients gives the odds ratios, in our case the relative risks of moving in comparison with the score of a reference category, which is set at 1 (for a detailed introduction, see Menard 1995). For instance, in Table 2 the relative risks of moving of widowed heads is 2.44, or almost two and a half times higher than the reference category of heads still married to their first wife. On the other hand, the relative risk of a household living in the western part of Amsterdam was .79, or 21% lower than the reference category of households living in the Centre.

In the model we look at the occupational position of the head of the household. Because occupational titles were not updated, they were generally fixed at marriage. An indicator of a miserable socio-economic situation is the application for poor relief that we ascertained for part of our population. Also, the effects of family cycle on mobility, of marital status and of the number of children and other relatives in the household are

taken into account. Little is known about the relationship between religion and residential mobility. Derosas discovered a remarkable tendency of Venetian Jews for low residential mobility compared to their Catholic neighbors. Although the old Ghetto was opened up after 1797, the Jews were apparently reluctant to “abandon the houses of the ancestors” (Derosas 1999: 51). Amsterdam counted many religious denominations, apart from the Jewish. The Protestant denominations included three groups: the Dutch Reformed or majority church, the Orthodox Calvinists and evangelicals and a remaining group, consisting mainly of Lutherans and Mennonites. We hypothesize that for orthodox and evangelical workers adherence to Church discipline may have been part of a repertoire of “loyalty.” For these workers, preserving respectability and maintaining good relations with authorities and employers were crucial (Heerma van Voss 2002). Obviously, this repertoire did not include moving about from one slum to another.

We add city quarter of residence to our model by lumping districts in broad categories. In Amsterdam, slums were concentrated in the Centre quarter. Before the demolitions in the 1920s, these slums offered plenty of opportunity to move to miserable, but cheap, lodgings. By contrast, living in the newly developed districts that can be found in the eastern and western quarters, meant higher rents and stricter supervision. Thus, we hypothesize that the chances of mobility were higher in the Centre.

Moving to cheaper lodgings to balance the budget probably required sources of information that were not readily available to migrants. To test this assumption, we look at the effects of migration status in our regressions. We also assume that heads of households who were subtenants in other households were inclined to move to an apartment of their own, if only because of the cramped conditions. Ownership is an important variable in many studies on residential mobility. Tenants tend to move more often than owners, who have strong ties to their areas of residence, both economic and social. However, ownership played a minor role in early-twentieth century Amsterdam. As we have seen, only 3% of all household heads were owners and among the poor this percentage was probably negligible.

Table 2 presents the relative risks of residential mobility within a year. Because the periods 1890/94-1905/09 and 1910/14-1935/39 were quite different in terms of housing demands (see Figure 1), we include separate models for these periods. Making a move was fairly common, in particular in the period 1890-1909. In that period 503 or 40% of the 1254 observed families moved within a year after observation had started. In the period 1910-1939 this percentage was more than halved (19%). Looking at the left-hand column of Table 2, we see that the historical period exerted the strongest effects. Compared to the period 1910-1919, the

chances of making a move were much higher in all other periods, in particular 1890-1899 (almost three and a half times higher) and 1900-1909 (nearly three times higher).

[Table 2 about here]

Surprisingly, occupational position and poverty lose much of their explanatory value when all other factors are held constant. In the period 1890-1909 neither casual workers nor poor relief applicants had higher chances of moving than other groups. Only in 1910-1939 was poverty significantly associated with an elevated risk of moving within a year. Interestingly, Amsterdam Jews were less inclined (more than 40%) to residential mobility than the Dutch Reformed and other religious groups. Probably, this was related to their tendency to live in with relatives, in particular in the first period after the marriage.^{iv} Also, the Jewish community in Amsterdam was characterized by a dense network of relief organizations which - in order to thwart Christian evangelizing and preserve Jewish tradition - extended their charity to rent subsidies (Leydesdorff 1987: 184, 235).

A number of our hypotheses were confirmed. As we expected, mobility was more restricted in the new areas, in particular the western quarter, compared to the centre. Also, people who were subtenants tended to move away quickly (their risks were twice as high as couples not living in). Older household heads had much risks of moving than younger heads. The relative risks were .97, meaning that every year a head got older, his risk of moving declined by 3%. Also, couples without children moved more freely compared to large families. Finally, widowers changed their address quickly, in particular in the period 1910-1939 (in the first period the absolute number of widowers was small). Families with co-resident members tended to be more restricted in their mobility than nuclear families. In contrast to our assumptions, immigrants had higher risks of moving than Amsterdam natives. Similarly, members of orthodox and evangelical churches had higher risks than the reference group of the Dutch Reformed. However, neither of these latter was statistically significant.

Who were the repeaters?

In his migration model, Derosas included a variable indicating a recent *previous* move, which turned out to have a strong predictive effect on chances of making a subsequent move. He suggested that this pointed towards "concentration of mobility in certain households." Also, "it might point to the existence of a household mobility-cycle, leading to repeated and frequent changes of residence until a satisfactory settlement could be found" (Derosas 1999: 51). We feel that this approach does not clarify sufficiently the backgrounds of "repeating". In this section, we pay separate attention to frequent movers.

Repeating made up a significant part of total intra-urban mobility. We counted a total of 6493 moves made by 1030 households (in the three samples combined). A frequency distribution shows that the top 15% of most frequent movers were responsible for 40% of all moves. Thus, general trends are disproportionately influenced by the small group of "city nomads." To discover the factors that determined "repeatership," we reworked our dataset to perform a longitudinal analysis. We selected only those men who were not removed by death or migration from the observation of, for example, the period of five to ten years after the marriage. Also, observations of 25-30 years after the marriage were not included. In the period 1890-1909, the average number of moves per five-year interval made by this selection was 2.23, whereas the average in the period 1910-1939 was only 0.87. We have performed a linear regression on the number of moves made in the five-year periods (Table 3).

[Table 3 about here]

The most interesting outcome of the regression in Table 3 is the fact that many variables that explained the *risk* of moving as such (Table 2) do not explain *repeating*. Obviously, there is a statistical association; people who move often, must move quickly as well. The correlation between the chance of moving with a year and the number of moves within the next five years is about .5.^v However, table 3 shows clearly that frequent moves are explained by a quite different set of variables. First of all, repeating was strongly associated with casual labour and poverty, particular in the period 1890-1909. In that period as well, young heads made the most frequent moves. Overall, repeating tended to occur often in the first period of marriage. Contrary to what we found on the risk of moving, orthodox believers and immigrants had lower chances of becoming repeaters (once

again, this result was not statistically significant). As we saw earlier, widowers tended to move fast. However, they did not become repeaters. Part of this difference may be explained by the fact that the final observation period (25 years after marriages) was omitted in table 3. Subtenant families had *lower* chances of repeating in the period 1890-1909. Finally, the effect of family size was ambiguous. Families without children were often repeated movers in the second period. Having co-resident family members tended to decrease the chance of repeatership in the first period and to increase it in the second.

Repeatership was prominent among the inhabitants of the Centre. Apparently, the housing regulations in the new districts in the Eastern quarter kept the newcomers from making frequent moves. Once again, Jews stand out with a low tendency of repeating. Surprisingly, people who reported to have no religion were associated with frequent moves in the period 1910-1939.

In short, a small group of Amsterdam families adopted frequent moving as a survival strategy. By doing so, they had an important numerical impact on aggregate migration statistics. This behavior was associated with young newlyweds in general, and with the casual workers and the poor in particular.

Conclusion

This article has discussed residential mobility in Amsterdam with special attention to the poorest part of the population. We suggested that overall rates of residential mobility were the mirror image of the situation in the rental market. In periods when houses were in short supply, mobility rates fell drastically and vice versa. After 1910, the abundance of cheap houses made place for a shortage, which was exacerbated by enthusiastic slum demolishing after the First World War. Also, we found that when cheap houses were available, the poor tended to move more often than other groups. We explained this phenomenon in terms of the coping strategies available to poor families. Constantly moving your belongings to cheaper slum dwellings nearby fell in the same category as pawning, buying on credit and applying for poor relief. This tactic was particularly attractive to recently married couples. This may be an affirmation of Derosas' "household mobility-cycle," but we tend to think that it was not the desire for satisfactory housing but the need to make constant budgetary adjustment that propelled them. In fact, childless couples moved more often than couples with children who, in principle, should have been more keen on adjusting their housing situation.

Poverty and insecurity characterized the lives of casual and unskilled labourers in particular. They moved considerably more frequently than skilled workers, white collar workers and the self-employed. Also, they tended to move more often within the same city quarter and in numerous cases even within the same street. Their intra-urban moves were clearly not brought about by an improvement of the living standard or a change of job, but, we suggest, simply by the desire to match the level of the rent with the earnings of the moment while preserving the local network so crucial to survival. Interestingly, the Jewish poor seem to have been shielded by their kin relations and relief organizations. At least, they moved much less frequently than the other denominations.

We began this article with the life story of Cornelis B. and his wife Carolina. At first glance, moving twenty-two times between 1892 and 1930 seemed an extraordinary thing to do. However, an average number of 0.58 moves per year was certainly not unusual, at least not in the period prior to 1910 (see Figure 2). We can now understand why the relief workers paid no attention to their "nomadic" behavior. Frequent changing of address belonged to the wide range of strategies the poorer section of the Amsterdam working class employed to cope with everyday problems such as unemployment and budget strains. This proletarian pattern was visible at least until the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, when all the trends converged during World War I and the following three or four years. From 1910 onwards moving as a coping tactic was less feasible because of the increasing shortage of cheap houses on the one hand, while on the other it became less necessary thanks to a – temporarily – improvement in poor relief. From 1914 onwards the unemployed who were not insured through a union or otherwise, could rely on the municipal council for a modest benefit. To ensure that the allowance was not spent on unnecessary luxurious commodities or the consumption of alcohol, the allowance was frequently payed out in rent subsidy coupons. This probably had a lowering effect on the mobility rates. The unemployment compensation system lasted until 1922, when the government decided that the costs had risen too high. After 1925, there was a slight recovery of both residential mobility rates and the social differentiation in mobility.

Contrary to Michael Anderson, we believe that the short distance movements of the poor were not "random" or inspired by "trivial" circumstances. Nor do we believe that the decisive criterium for mobility should be the change of social network (Anderson 1982: 295). In our view, the moves of the urban poor were highly patterned once the budget constraints of the families involved are taken into account as well as their need *not* to change their social network. The constraints on their mobility posed by both the housing and labour

market were severe. It is precisely the amount of ‘strategic’ leeway within these constraints that we have explored in this article.

Moving house has often been overlooked as a subject for urban history, labor history and migration history. However, we feel that our results can be of relevance to these disciplines. The study of urban networks may be stimulated by the Amsterdam example. Repeated mobility seems to have required a local network that was apparently beyond the reach of immigrants. Also, our analysis has shown that moving house can be added to labor historians’ already impressive lists of families’ adaptive strategies. Studies of migration might take more notice of the phenomenon of repeated migration. Our separate analyses of timing and frequency of moves has shown that repeatership had different determinants than moving house in general. Finally, (changes in) the supply and demand in the housing market require more attention than they generally receive in analyses of historical mobility.

NOTES

Archival sources

Municipal Archives Amsterdam.

Archive 5256, file SZ 7695.

AA 177. Gemeentelijke woningdienst Amsterdam. Waarheen zijn de bewoners der op 1 juli 1936 onbewoond gevonden woningen met lage huren verhuisd?

AA 459. Alfabetische lijst van straten, grachten, kaden, pleinen, enz. der gemeente Amsterdam met aanwijzing van de buurten en postdistricten, waarin zij zijn gelegen (1951).

H 76. Nota van den Directeur van den Gemeentelijken Woningdienst, naar aanleiding van de beschouwingen van den Hoofdinspecteur voor de Volksgezondheid (Volkshuisvesting), inzake het verslag der Gezinstelling te Amsterdam.

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Gemeentelijke woningdienst. De verhouding tusschen het inkomen van de bewoners en de door hen betaalde huur voor de met voorschotten ingevolge de woningwet door de vereenigingen en door de gemeente gebouwde woningen (Amsterdam 1925)

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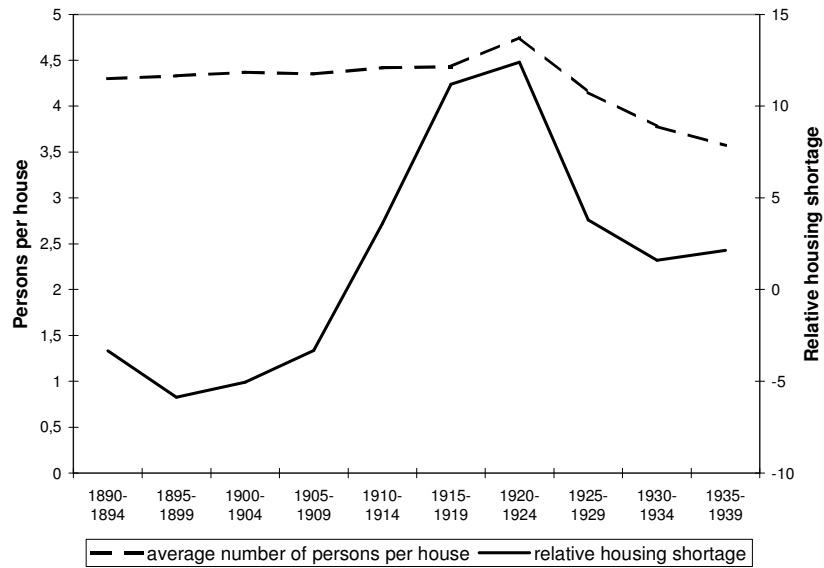
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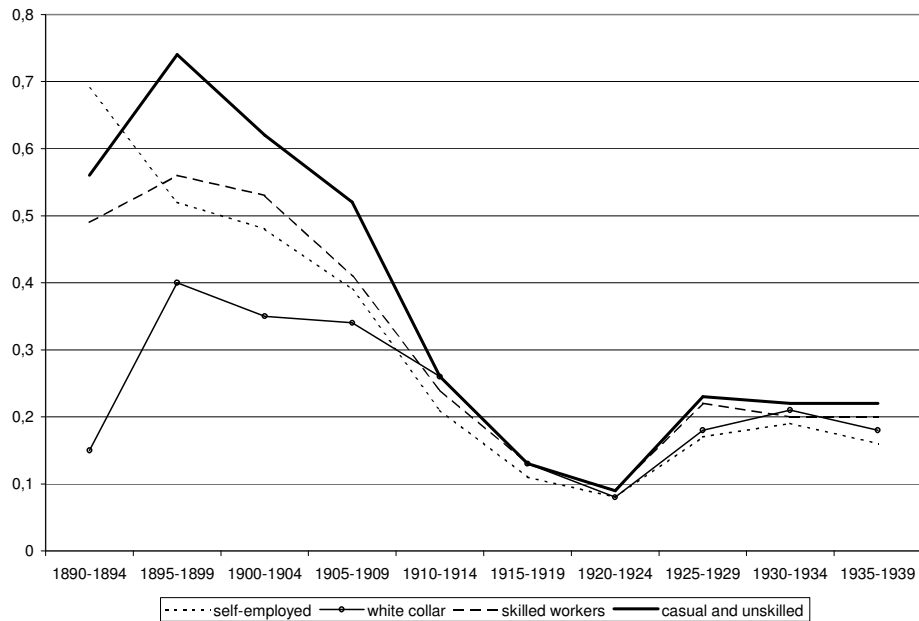
FIGURES to CITY NOMADS

Figure 1. Relative housing shortage and average number of persons per house, Amsterdam 1890-1940



Source: Calculation based on publications of the municipal housing department (van Zee et al. eds 1984; Rikkert 1919 and statistical reports (*Verslagen betreffende de toestand der provincie Noord-Holland, Statistische Jaarboekjes; Statistische*

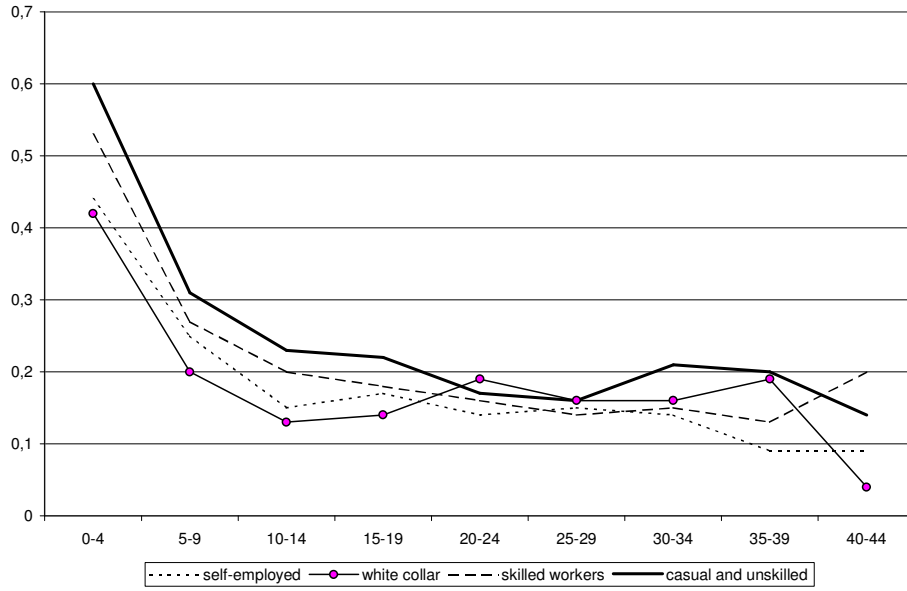
Figure 2. Average yearly number of moves, per occupational group



maandberichten Gemeente Amsterdam, 1899-1940). For the method, see endnote 1.

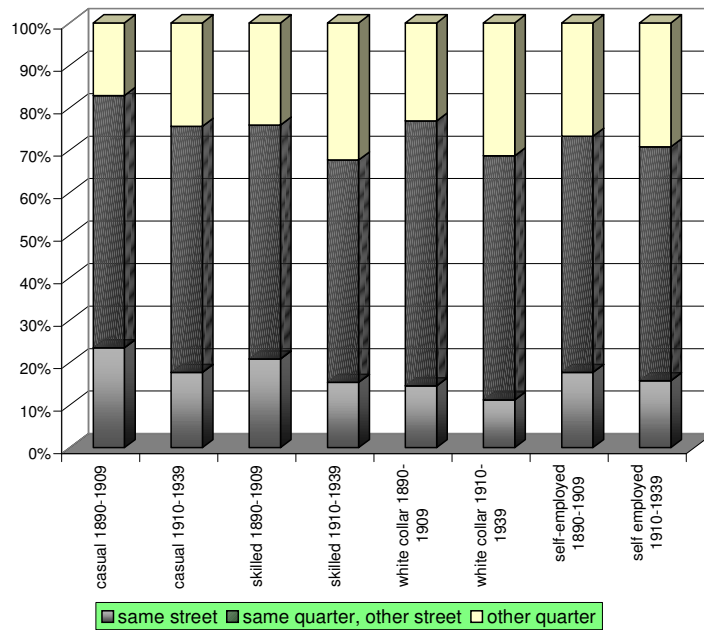
Source: combined dockworkers, poor relief and HSN (reference group) samples.

Figure 3. Average yearly number of moves, per occupational group, by number of years after the marriage



Source: combined dockworkers, poor relief and HSN (reference group) samples.

Figure 4. Type of move, by period and occupational group, in percentages of all intraurban moves



Source: combined dockworkers, poor relief and HSN (reference group) samples.

TABLES to City Nomads

Table 2 Logistic regression of moving within a year (relative risks).

	Entire period	1890-1909	1910-1939
Occupation head of household			
Self-employed (reference group)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Elite	.79	.94	.71
Skilled workers	.98	.90	.99
Casual and unskilled labourers	.99	1.10	.93
Indication of poverty			
Poor relief application unknown (reference group)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Applied for poor relief	1.39 ^{***}	1.28	1.49 ^{***}
Religion			
Dutch Reformed (reference group)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Roman Catholic	1.08	1.28 [*]	1.02
Jewish	.59 ^{***}	.54 ^{**}	.63 ^{**}
Orthodox protestant	1.05	1.04	1.09
No religion	1.14	.55	1.32
Other and unknown	1.07	.78	1.30
City quarter			
Centre (reference group)	1.00	1.00	1.00
West	.79 ^{**}	.98	.73 ^{**}
East	.84	.83	.85
South	.81	.91	.79
North	.49 ^{**}	.25	.54 ^{**}
Address unknown	.69 ^{***}	.61 ^{**}	.77
Migrant status			
Native head (reference group)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Immigrant head	1.05	1.01	1.05
Subtenancy			

Not living in (reference group)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Living in	2.11 ^{****}	1.84 [*]	2.31 ^{****}
Stage of family cycle			
At marriage (reference group)	1.00	1.00	1.00
5 years after marriage	.79 [*]	.77	.82
10 years after marriage	.80	.63	1.01
15 years after marriage	1.11	1.11	1.28
20 years after marriage	1.28	.69	1.60
25 years after marriage	1.35	2.27	1.57
Age of head	.97 ^{****}	.95 ^{***}	.98 ^{**}
Number of children			
More than two children (reference group)	1.00	1.00	1.00
No children	1.58 ^{***}	1.12	1.98 ^{****}
One or two children	1.04	.86	1.19
Number of co-residents (except nuclear family)	.94 ^{***}	.98	.93 ^{***}
Marital status			
Married (to first wife) (ref group)	1.00	1.00	1.00
Widowed	2.44 ^{****}	1.11	2.64 ^{****}
Remarried	1.25	1.78	1.18
Period of observation			
1910-1919 (ref.)	1.00		
Period 1890-1899	3.48 ^{****}		
Period 1900-1909	2.79 ^{****}		
Period 1920-1929	1.42 ^{***}		
Period 1930-1939	1.39 ^{***}		
Nagelkerke's r ²	.122	.090	.055
Chi-square	380.88	86.69	110.49
Model significance	0.000	0.000	0.000
N observations	4416	1254	3153

N moves within a year	1107	503	592
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* significant at $p < 0.1$, ** significant at $p < 0.05$, *** significant at $p < 0.01$, **** significant at $p < 0.001$. This model only includes persons who were observed for the full five-year period. Persons from the elite and white collar workers were combined in the group 'elite'. Also, shopkeepers, traders and farmers were combined in the group 'self-employed'. Persons without occupation were removed. Source: combined dockworkers, poor relief and HSN (reference) samples.

Table 3 Linear regression on number of moves per five-year period (standardized Beta coefficients)

	Entire period	1890-1909	1910-1939
Occupation head of household			
Self-employed (reference group)			
Elite	.008	.014	.003
Skilled workers	.023	.020	.022
Casual and unskilled labourers	.057**	.120***	.011
Indication of poverty			
Poor relief application unknown (reference group)			
Applied for poor relief	.087****	.095***	.115****
Religion			
Dutch Reformed (reference group)			
Roman Catholic	-.009	-.025	.012
Jewish	-.047***	-.099***	-.022
Orthodox protestant	-.024	-.036	-.002
No religion	.001	-.072**	.066***
Other and unknown	-.024	-.070**	.005
City quarter			
Centre (reference group)			
West	-.026	-.046	-.017
East	-.050***	-.089***	-.039*
South	-.029*	-.030	-.037*
North	-.027*	-.039	-.004
Address unknown	.002	.007	-.014
Migrant status			
Native head (reference group)			
Immigrant head	-.001	-.007	-.012
Subtenancy			
Not living in (reference group)			
Living in	.004	-.052*	.061***

Stage of family cycle			
0-4 years after marriage (reference group)			
5-9 years	-.189 ^{****}	-.129 ^{***}	-.228 ^{****}
10-14 years	-.195 ^{****}	-.106 ^{**}	-.251 ^{****}
15-19 years	-.151 ^{****}	-.002	-.233 ^{****}
20-24 years	-.129 ^{***}	-.053	-.200 ^{****}
Age of head	-.124 ^{****}	-.245 ^{****}	-.033
Number of children			
More than two children (reference group)			
No children	.094 ^{***}	.094	.152 ^{****}
One or two children	.005	.049	.003
Number of co-residents (except nuclear family)	-.055 ^{**}	-.036	.061 ^{***}
Marital status			
Married (to first wife) (ref group)			
Widowed	.018	.019	.017
Remarried	.015	.027	.000
Period of observation			
1910-1919 (ref.)			
Period 1890-1899	.293 ^{****}		
Period 1900-1909	.231 ^{****}		
Period 1920-1929	.089 ^{****}		
Period 1930-1939	.106 ^{****}		
adjusted r^2	.246	.156	.084
Model significance	0.000	0.000	0.000
N observations	3495	1153	2342
Average number of moves	1.32	2.23	0.87

* significant at $p < 0.1$, ** significant at $p < 0.05$, *** significant at $p < 0.01$, **** significant at $p < 0.001$. This model only includes persons who were observed for the full five-year period. Persons from the elite and white collar workers were combined in the group 'elite'. Also, shopkeepers, traders and farmers were combined in the group 'self-employed'. Persons without occupation were removed. Source: combined dockworkers, poor relief and HSN (reference) samples.

Table 1. Composition of the samples of married males born in the period 1860-1900 and living in Amsterdam some time during the period 1890-1940.

Period of birth	Dockworkers		Poor relief		HSN	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1860-1869	49	19.8	45	18.2	77	12.7
1870-1879	66	26.6	78	31.6	213	35.3
1880-1889	74	29.8	79	32.0	228	37.7
1890-1899	59	23.8	45	18.2	86	14.2
Total	248	100	247	100	604	100

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ⁱ A.J. Rikkert formulated the Amsterdam municipality's procedure for calculating the yearly need for new dwellings in 1919 on the basis of methods developed by the municipality of Halle (Germany) (Ottens, 1975, 46-48; Rikkert, 1919). The first step was to ascertain the number of couples that require a separate dwelling (a). The second step was to calculate the net migration of families (b). The third was to ascertain the number of houses that had been demolished or declared unfit for habitation (c). The sum (a+b+c) resulted in the number of houses that should ideally be built to meet this need. The difference between the "need" for houses and the number actually built was added to the next year's total. Thus, the yearly housing "need" was a cumulative figure. The yearly cumulative need for extra dwellings has been published for 1912-1940 (van Zee et al. eds 1984), whereas Rikkert (1919) presented calculations for 1906-1918. We have back-projected the figures for the period 1890-1905, using published data on marriages, deaths and migration (*Verslagen betreffende de toestand der provincie Noord-Holland, Statistische Jaarboekjes*). The annual (net) increase in dwellings in this period has been calculated from the Amsterdam Statistical Yearbooks. The relative housing shortage is calculated as the unsatisfied housing need per 100 married men in the Amsterdam population (number derived from the Censuses). Finally, the number of inhabitants per house has been calculated on the basis of figures presented in the *Statistische maandberichten Gemeente Amsterdam, 1899-1940*.

ⁱⁱ The classification by socio-economic group is based on the household head's position in contemporary labour relations, distinguishing by ownership of the means of production, level of skill and regularity of employment (Giele and Van Oenen 1976). The following five main categories were used: *Elite* (employers in industry, professionals, high civil servants; higher military); *Self-employed* (shopkeepers, small entrepreneurs and merchants; self-employed artisans); *White collar middle class* (lower level professionals and lower civil servants, foremen and supervisors of various kinds); *Skilled manual workers* (craftsmen and skilled labourers in small business and industry, service employees); *Casual and unskilled labourers* (casual labourers; unskilled labourers in crafts and industries; agricultural labourers, peddlers).

ⁱⁱⁱ An appropriate alternative method is proportional hazard analysis (Cox regression) of the event of moving.

This method captures both incidence and speed of moving. Our logistic regression of the chance of moving *within a year* does about the same. A test showed that the outcomes of Cox regression analysis were largely similar to Table 2. However, we feel that logistic regression is somewhat easier to interpret whereas direct comparison with Derosas is an extra advantage.

^{iv} Living-in with family is generally not recorded as subtenancy.

^v Pearson correlation between the number of moves with five years after marriage and the chance of making a move within the first year after marriage is .539 (N=678). Similarly, the correlation is .489 after five years (N=794), .475 after 10 years (N=759), .464 after 15 years (N=692), and .503 (N=572) after 20 years.