CHAPTER 4

Rag Collectors: Mobility and Barter in a Circular Flow of Goods

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"Bring out all your old stuff!" This is how a rag collector greets his prospective customers in *Bilder ur Folkets lif i Östra Finland*, the book by Finnish writer and folklore collector Johannes Häyhä published in 1898.[1] The rag collector featured in Häyhä's depiction has much in common with the itinerant traders who form the focal point of this chapter. They came from a small number of parishes close to the border between the Grand Duchy of Finland and Russia in Vyborg County and maintained a circular flow of goods in which principally earthenware was exchanged for cloth waste, which was then sold in turn as a raw material to the paper industry. Men from the parish of Muolaa in particular were associated with this type of trade in the public consciousness. The trade in earthenware and rags was so closely linked that it seems appropriate to consider it under one heading, something that is also emphasized by Greta Karste-Liikkanen in her 1968 book *Pietari-suuntaus kannakselaisessa elämänkentässä 1800-luvun loppupuolelta vuoteen 1918* about livelihoods on the Karelian Isthmus.[2]

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The overall aim of the chapter is to provide an insight into an itinerant means of livelihood which had a business logic based on the idea that material perceived by one individual as worthless can be turned into something of economic value. We examine this topic from three perspectives. In the first part of the chapter, we analyze why the trade in earthenware and rags became such an important source of livelihood for peasants in a specific area of Vyborg County. In the second section, we consider the practices that formed part of the circular flow of trade and were deployed in the encounter between the traders and their customers in Finnish rural settlements. Finally, in the third part we look at what happened to the rags once they had been collected by the traders and at the economic valuations associated with the rag trade as a form of livelihood.

From a theoretical viewpoint, the perspectives we have adopted have been influenced by two approaches used in research on the history of consumption. First, we are interested in commodification, starting from the definition by sociologist Arjun Appadurai of a commodity as an article of economic value.[3] We focus specifically on the circular flow of goods that led to rags becoming commodified, that is, acquiring a value that provided itinerant rag collectors with a livelihood. Like Frank Trentmann, who emphasizes that the commodification of waste presupposes a level of mobility that went beyond the local area, we also stress the significance of distance and mobility.[4] During the nineteenth century, waste materials such as rags, scrap metal, and waste paper were shipped from Europe as far as the USA to satisfy the demand of American industry for raw materials.[5] In this study, we are able to show how a group of traders who journeyed all over Finland, with a trading network that also straddled the border with Russia, maintained a corresponding flow of goods on a smaller scale. Our second theoretical approach is based on the premise that barter was an important practice in the encounter between traveling vendors and their stationary customers. During the 1800s, barter played an important role in both rural trading and peddling as well as other types of petty trade. Bartering offered peasants a practical means of obtaining desired consumer goods in a society where access to cash was limited.[6]

As with the collection of other types of "waste," rag collection has primarily come to be noticed in earlier research as a form of livelihood associated with poor people on the margins of society in urban settings.[7] In a Nordic context, rag collection is chiefly mentioned in passing as a subsidiary occupation of peddlers or Roma people.[8] Where Finland is concerned, the rag trade is cited as a secondary occupation of Russian-Karelian

peddlers, while Antti Häkkinen states that Jewish hawkers in the towns and Tatar peddlers also bought or bartered for rags and other goods from time to time alongside their main trading activity.[9] The rag collectors from the Karelian Isthmus that we study here differ from these groups with regard to certain key aspects. The first is that they traded in a more organized manner and in goods which, by virtue of their volume, necessitated a developed transport system and mobility over long distances, including across the border between Finland and Russia. Mobility was a prerequisite for business profitability in an agrarian and sparsely populated Finland. The second key factor is that they specialized in a specific type of trade consisting chiefly of earthenware and rags, while the third is that the rag trade was their principal form of livelihood.

References to the circular trade in which we are specifically interested are found primarily in works covering the unique economic conditions in Southeast Finland. The most detailed analysis of this features in the work by Greta Karste-Liikkanen already mentioned, in which she starts out from the circular goods flow when dealing with the rag trade.[10] The rag trade is also covered in local historical works about the parishes of Muolaa and Valkjärvi, where this form of livelihood was most prevalent.[11] The significance of rags as a raw material for the paper industry is alluded to in the history of papermaking and in historical accounts about individual paper mills, but the focus in these cases is usually on the function of the rags in the actual production process, while their journey to the mill is rarely considered.[12] One exception to this is Vilho Annala, who devotes a number of pages in his history of the Tervakoski paper mill near Hämeenlinna to how the raw material was procured.[13] The use of rags in the paper industry in Sweden starting in the seventeenth century has been studied by Helene Sjunneson and Ylva Sjöstrand.[14]

Relatively few sources of information survive relating to petty trade plied on the margins of society, and this is true also of the circular goods trade that we are studying.[15] We draw mainly on newspapers and responses to ethnographic questionnaires to find answers to the questions we pose. We primarily analyze newspaper and periodical articles that we have found by doing searches for Swedish and Finnish words linked to the rag trade in the newspaper database of the National Library of Finland. Digitalization and the ability to search the database have made it possible, based on isolated references in the press, to gather enough basic source material to create an overall picture of the encounters, locations, and practices that

formed part of the circular trade in earthenware and rags and the value judgments reached in relation to the activity.

The material obtained from newspapers is complemented by responses to the questionnaire *Kringvandrande ryska handelsmän* ("Russian itinerant peddlers") in the cultural studies archive Cultura at Åbo Akademi University in Finland. The questionnaire was sent out by the Institute of Cultural History (KIVA) in 1957 and 1968. The trade in rags was not specifically asked about in either version, but ten or so respondents mention rag traders in their answer to the question "Were there different types of Russian peddlers?" in the version sent out in 1968. Since the question was absent from the previous version, its addition indicates that Professor Helmer Tegengren, who compiled the questions, had noticed that the respondents had mentioned rag traders in their answers to the first questionnaire. The references are also of interest insofar as the rag collectors were Finns from Vyborg County, but were associated in these responses with other groups of peddlers originating in Russia.

A Distinctive Spatial Economy

"As is already known, a number of country folk in our eastern parishes, especially in Walkjärwi and Muolaa, made a living from cloth waste for a long time. To purchase or barter for their goods, these folks traveled around the entire southern region of the country, especially in winter."[16]

The trade in rags is described as an important form of livelihood for peasants in some parishes on the Karelian Isthmus close to the border between Finland and Russia. The settlement most closely associated with the trade was Muolaa, which is mentioned in several contexts as a place that became known throughout Finland thanks to the itinerant rag collectors.[17] In one response to a questionnaire, a respondent calls the rag collectors simply "the men from Muolaa" (Finnish: *Muolaan miehet*).[18] The rag trade was also an important way of making a living in Muolaa's neighboring parish Valkjärvi, which was known primarily, however, for its artisans, who made carts for the Finnish and Russian markets.[19] Other places on the Karelian Isthmus, such as Hiitola and Antrea, were also occasionally associated with the trade in cloth waste.[20] In some cases, the regional affiliations of the rag traders are alluded to in more general terms, and they are described as "traders from the Karelian Isthmus," "Vyborg folk" or "Vyborg rag collectors."[21]

The fact that the trade in earthenware and rags became such an important form of livelihood for peasants in Muolaa and neighboring parishes is explained by several concurrent factors derived from the distinctive historical and geopolitical development of the region. One important factor was the founding of the city of St. Petersburg at the far end of the Gulf of Finland in 1703, which had far-reaching consequences for the economic development of Southeast Finland. The city grew rapidly: by 1810 it was home to over 330,000 inhabitants and at the turn of the century in 1900 its population numbered more than 1.2 million.[22] This contrasted with the population of Finland, which was around 800,000 at the beginning of the nineteenth century and rose to 2.7 million a century later. The growing metropolis became important for Finland's economy as a whole and dominated that of Southeast Finland. For the peasant farmers on the Karelian Isthmus, the agricultural trade, which provided the city with timber and food, and freight carriage, which ensured that the goods were transported to it, were important ancillary occupations.[23] Within this unique economy, the itinerant traders in earthenware and rags constituted a specialized group that maintained a flow of goods that extended geographically between St. Petersburg and large areas of Finland (see Fig. 4.1).

Another factor that affected the development of the Karelian Isthmus was that it was incorporated into the Russian Empire as the Vyborg Governorate during the period from 1721 to 1812, following Sweden's defeat in the Great Northern War (1700–1721). As a result of this, a significant share of the land in the region was given to Russian estate owners. The peasants in the region were tied to the land in a way that hampered the development of agriculture and contributed to a shift by the population toward other forms of livelihood, something that was made possible by the proximity of St. Petersburg. After Finland in its entirety became part of the Russian Empire in 1809, the area was incorporated with the Grand Duchy in 1812 as Vyborg County. A customs frontier was established between the Grand Duchy and Russia, meaning that the region's trade with St. Petersburg officially became a form of foreign trade. The incorporation with Finland did not solve the problems of the ceded lands, however. Even if a kind of resolution of the issue was achieved in 1867, when the Finnish state began to buy up the lands that the tenants could redeem against favorable loans, the development of agriculture in Vyborg County lagged behind the rest of the Grand Duchy in practice well into the twentieth century.[24] The view that the ceded lands had made living conditions in the region uncertain and had driven the population to seek

Fig. 4.1 The rag collectors carefully packed the earthenware and other fragile goods in hay. The hay also provided food for the horses in the winter and was useful if the need arose to conceal any illegal goods. (Photo by Matti Poutvaara. The Finnish Heritage Agency)

alternative mobile forms of livelihood was a perception that even the press of the time explicitly made known.[25]

At the national level, the expansion of the rag trade at the end of the nineteenth century is explained by two parallel trends affecting the economy. First, there was growing demand for cloth waste, an important raw material for the burgeoning paper industry and in part also for the textile industry. Up to the 1840s, paper was manufactured exclusively from textile fibers; rag collection was thus a necessity to keep paper production going and the raw material was often in short supply.[26] From the 1840s onwards, mechanization of the paper industry was introduced, and pulp produced from wood began to replace textile and cloth waste fibers to some extent. The methods were used in parallel going into the twentieth century, however, or alternatively a mix of textile fibers and wood pulp was used; for better-quality paper in particular, rags continued to be the most important

raw material. The rapid growth in the consumption of paper and the establishment of an increasing number of paper mills therefore ensured a rising demand for rags, even though they accounted for a dwindling share of the raw material input for the paper industry.[27] The requirement for wool rags in the textile industry remained high throughout the 1800s.[28]

The second factor was that the liberalization of trade laws affected opportunities for making a living from collecting rags. Until the 1860s, rag trade in Finland was regulated by a royal ordinance dating from 1738, which reflected the desire of the authorities to safeguard the access of paper mills to rags. Paper mills were granted the privilege of collecting cloth waste within a limited area, while an obligation was imposed on peasants to supply rags to the paper mills in the form of a "rag tax." It was the duty of every head of a household to keep linen and wool waste along with wastepaper, a task that could be delegated in practice to a maid, for example.[29] When the trade laws began to be liberalized in the mid-1800s, regulation of this kind based on privileges was regarded as obsolete. At the 1867 Diet, the peasantry submitted a petition aimed at liberalizing the rag trade. The ordinance on trade and industry issued by the Diet in 1868 prescribed that the collection and purchase of rags, tree seeds, horsehair, bristles, hair, cattle bones, horn, and other "waste of such kind" was permitted to every inhabitant of the Grand Duchy.[30] In other words, collecting and trading in rags was now "free and handed over to private consideration and venture," as an article in the newspaper *Wiborgs Tidning* expressed.[31] At the same time, the formulation "waste of such kind" emphasized that households produced material that was viewed from their perspective as scrap, but which had economic value.[32]

Aulis J. Alanen maintains that rag collectors from the Karelian Isthmus had journeyed around western and central Finland already before 1868, although without proper permits.[33] However, more men engaged in the trade with the liberalized regulation. The main barter goods of the rag traders, earthenware, was likewise mentioned in the ordinance of 1868, which permitted peddling only to persons with citizens' rights in the Grand Duchy who were allowed to trade in glassware and ceramic objects, faience, and local handicraft products. The fact that the rag collectors were Finnish citizens and traded in permitted merchandise meant that they could make a living in a lawful manner, which made their legal status more secure than was the case with many other itinerant groups engaged in trade. As "foreign nationals," Russian Karelians and Tatars, for example, could not formally obtain the right to engage in peddling in Finland. Even

if both the customers and the authorities commonly turned a blind eye to the situation when it came to peddling, they were at constant risk of getting into trouble with the law enforcers.[34]

Geographical factors also explain why earthenware in particular became the principal barter goods of the rag collectors. Situated in the Muolaa parish was the village of Kyyrölä, which was mostly inhabited by ethnic Russians. These were descendants of Russian serfs who had been moved to the ceded estates from the region of Yaroslavl after the area was incorporated into Russia in 1721, bringing with them the production of earthenware, which continued to be an important sideline for the inhabitants of the village and to a lesser extent for those in neighboring villages also. At the end of the nineteenth century, the village's output of earthenware pots was so great that they could not all be sold locally, and thus itinerant traders were commissioned to distribute the goods to consumers around Finland. The absence of any developed ceramic handicrafts in the rest of the Grand Duchy increased demand for the pots.[35] In 1882, a contributor to the *Åbo Underrättelser* laments the general state of artisan skills in Finland, for example, saying that the country's potters had failed to move forward in the design of their products and especially with their oddly shaped clay cuckoos.[36]

Although the Karelian rag collectors were Finns, the distinctive historical development of the Karelian Isthmus and its proximity to Russia meant that a geographical, cultural, and mental barrier existed between their place of origin and the rest of Finland. This is reflected in the kind of language used in the press, where it can be read how the "Muolaa dweller recognizes that he is a Finn, but not even he himself can guarantee that he follows Finnish custom,"[37] about what "the Finns" thought of the men from Muolaa or how the men saw themselves as going "to Finland" when they set off on their trading trips.[38] It can thus be said that when the Karelian rag collectors journeyed around Finland, they were perceived to some extent as outsiders, albeit probably to a lesser degree than other groups of itinerant traders who originated in Russia. The level of mobility that was a condition of maintaining the flow of goods covered large parts of Finland. In the source material, mobility is often referred to at the county level—for example, that the rag traders moved around in Mikkeli, Kuopio, Vaasa, and Oulu counties.[39] In other cases, a particular direction is emphasized (e.g., "the southern part of the country"), but there is a lot to suggest that the rag traders from the Karelian Isthmus traveled "around the whole of Finland."[40]

Encounters and Practices in the Circular Flow of Goods

Accounts of the rag traders' encounters with customers note that they were often prefaced by a "jingle," with which the traders alerted the customers to their arrival. By the time they arrived at a village or farm, the men had traveled over long distances and were recognizable from a long way off by their large load, which consisted of goods that would be bartered for cloth waste.[41] Filling the cart or sledge with goods to barter was an important part of the advance preparations for trading trips. The traders procured merchandise from a variety of locations, Kyyrölä being the most important of these: a journey there to obtain earthenware pots naturally formed part of the preparations. Apart from crockery, the rag traders also carried sundry items which were sometimes purchased collectively in St. Petersburg. The trader who visited the city could procure cheap items such as plates, spoons, knives, cups, combs, soap, needles, buttons, and rings on behalf of a group of rag collectors.[42] Before they departed, the tradesmen also procured goods for the journey in Vyborg, including the well-known Vyborg pretzels and other biscuits and pastries that they took with them, according to sources. Products mentioned in this context included small, star-shaped honey cakes, and other baked goods with east-Finnish- or Russian-sounding names such as *kauriska*, *orehki* and *preniki* (biscuits made from a syrupy dough).[43]

It is also claimed in the newspapers that the rag collectors distributed contraband, a practice that has often been associated with itinerant trade. Above all, the contraband comprised intoxicating substances such as so-called "Hoffmann's drops," a medicament that was often used for the purpose of inebriation at the end of the 1800s. It is likely that the Karelian rag collectors had easy access to illegal intoxicants since their home parish lay close to the Finnish-Russian border and that traders from Southeast Finland were often suspected of distributing alcohol smuggled into the Grand Duchy from Russia. A report by Finnish pharmacists dating from 1899 in connection with a petition to the estates to stop the abuse of medicinal products containing alcohol confirmed that "itinerant peddlers, rag collectors, etc.," supplied smuggled Russian goods to their customers.[44] In another article in the newspaper *Wiipurin Sanomat*, the writer claims that the rag collectors made big profits from purchasing cheap Hoffmann's drops in St. Petersburg and transporting them across the border without paying any duty.[45]

Packing the goods in the horse-drawn sledge or cart was an important practice prior to departure.[46] Both the pots that the traders took with them and the cloth waste to be bought were bulky items that took up a lot of space, and it was therefore essential to have a large and sturdy cart or sledge. The merchandise also had to be packed in such a way that it did not break when traveling on the bumpy roads; careless handling or poor packing could have devastating consequences for the outcome of the trip. Earthenware pots in particular were fragile in this regard and were carefully packed in hay.[47] The hay provided food for the horses in the winter and was also useful if the need arose to conceal any illegal goods. In 1896, for instance, a report featured in the press about a rag collector who had hidden a hundred bottles of punch and several bottles of Hoffman's drops in his load.[48] Rag traders placed the smaller items, baked goods, and cash in a lockable box that also served as a seat on the cart.[49]

When all the preparations had been completed, it was time to get on the road. The seasons influenced the journey insofar as the traders usually set off at the approach of winter, more precisely at the time when the snow made it possible to travel with a horse and sledge.[50] It was customary for the rag traders to set off from a particular location all together in a long caravan and then separate after a time to head to different regions of Finland.

In their encounter with the customers, the rag collectors sought to acquire cloth waste of a value that exceeded the value of the goods they handed over. They looked mainly to acquire linen and cotton waste, but also wool waste, which the textile industry used to weave new wool fabric.[51] Apart from various types of textile waste, the rag collectors also collected other goods on a smaller scale from time to time, according to sources. These items included dead cats, the fur of which had a resale value, and ant eggs, which were used as food for cagebirds and other animals as well as a raw material for the pharmaceutical industry. In Ristiina parish in Savonia, a rag collector in 1893 tells, for example, of buying ant eggs, which he says he could get a good price for in Vyborg or St. Petersburg.[52]

On arrival at a farm, the itinerant vendors encountered primarily women, who oversaw clothing in the household. Someone in the household would be tasked with collecting cloth waste, and the rag collectors would entice prospective customers by marketing the merchandise they offered in exchange. The enterprise thus revolved around barter, a practice that was characteristic of petty trade.[53] The relative significance of barter

should be considered on a sliding scale, however; while it was an alternative to payment in cash for peddlers and other petty traders, for the rag collectors it was the actual reason for their trading activities.[54] This difference of degree is also expressed in one answer to a questionnaire, in which the respondent states that fabrics were purchased for cash from peddlers, while folk received various goods from the rag collectors in exchange for rags.[55] Another respondent says that cash certainly featured in transactions, but only in cases where the customer did not have enough cloth waste to cover the total cost of the goods they desired.[56] Barter also featured as a practice explicitly in the familiar "jingle" that in many contexts came to represent the encounter between rag collector and customer: "No money required for items large or small/Rags and scraps gladly accepted."[57]

Women were a prime client group for the rag collectors, as they were responsible for both textiles and managing food in the household. Thanks to a change in eating habits, there was a growing demand at the end of the nineteenth century for the pots, or so-called stoneware, that the rag collectors carried in their loads. In farming households, meals had previously been consumed from large communal pots, but at this time people were beginning to use individual items of crockery, glassware, and porcelain.[58] The recognition by the authorities of this change in the everyday consumption patterns of the lower classes of society was noticeable in a 1868 trade and industry ordinance, when crockery was included among the products that peddlers were permitted to trade. With the Kyyrölä ceramics, which had a good reputation with the customers, the Karelian rag collectors had thus opened up a useful niche market. Many of the questionnaire respondents emphasize the good quality of the pots; they are described as having been carefully produced and skillfully shaped. The glazed inside and attractive decoration using flower motifs, for example, are highlighted, as is the fact that the quality of the pots improved over time.[59] The rag collectors can thus be seen as suppliers of a utility article of high quality which the consumers associated with a specific place of production.

Another customer group that the rag collectors encountered were children. The collectors attempted to entice children to seek out cloth waste for them by promising Russian *preniki* cookies and other sweets in exchange for rags.[60] According to the cultural historian Lauri Kuusanmäki, the visit of the rag collectors was one of the few occasions when children living in the countryside got to taste delicacies of this kind; they only received such items otherwise as gifts in connection with journeys made

Fig. 4.2 The rag collectors also brought with them items intended specifically for children. Clay cuckoos made in Kyyrölä were popular toys that were also used as musical instruments. (Unknown photographer. The Finnish Heritage Agency)

by farm folk to the towns and markets.[61] The rag collectors also brought with them items directed specifically at these young consumers. In particular, clay cuckoos made in Kyyrölä were popular toys that were also used as instruments (see Fig. 4.2).[62]

While the encounter with women and children is described in relatively neutral terms, the liquor-trading encounters gave rise to a more negative choice of words.[63] With their illicit trade the rag collectors were accused of spreading depravity among their clientele, which probably consisted chiefly but not exclusively of men. From Suonenjoki, it was reported in 1888, for example, in an ironic tone that a rag trader's liquor had sold well among the working men of the town, while the women claimed they needed medicine for "stomach pains" or a "headache." It was assumed that the rag collector in question had continued to ply his successful trade elsewhere unless the rural police had apprehended him for the illicit activity.[64] At the same time, writers in the press indicate that the trade in alcohol fulfilled a daily need in the encounter between the rag collectors and their customers. The collectors were dependent on finding accommodation during their travels and the offer of liquor is described as an easy way of securing a welcome among their customers.[65]

The bartering that took place in the encounter between the rag collectors and their customers was both practical and worthwhile for both parties. The customer received utility goods delivered directly to the home and in the transaction got rid of material that no longer had any functional role. A single household was rarely able to collect so much cloth waste that it would have had any resale value, but rags could nevertheless become an economic resource, especially in times of need. In their book *Lumppappersbruken i Finland* ("Rag Paper Mills in Finland"), Gabriel Nikander and Ingwald Sourander show that the interest in selling rags increased during hard times, such as in the famine years of the 1860s or the depression of the 1890s, while it declined in times of prosperity.[66] For their part, the rag collectors exploited the niche that was facilitated by their habit of traveling long distances and by the growing demand for both cloth waste and utility goods.

From Waste to Processed Product

Once the rag collectors had bartered the goods they had brought with them, they were left with a sledge or cart filled with rags, a load that could be considered a "harvest," which in the next stage of the cycle would be turned into cash. Cotton and linen waste were sold to paper factories and wool waste to textile mills. A portion crossed the border and was sold to Russian factories; newspaper articles from the 1860s and 1870s tell of wandering rag collectors who conveyed their loads "directly to a paper mill situated close by in Russia."[67] One important market was the rapidly expanding industry in St. Petersburg, which with its rising demand for raw materials also helped to maintain a flow of goods in Finland.[68]

The expanding paper industry in Finland simultaneously gave rise to a sharp increase in demand for rags in the Grand Duchy, too, which created a competitive advantage for the rag collectors. They were free to supply goods to the highest bidder and transported rags directly to the large paper mills in Tampere and Valkeakoski, for example.[69] The increasingly tough struggle for raw materials also prompted factories to start engaging intermediaries to buy up rags locally on their behalf.[70] In Vyborg, the trading company Clouberg & Co. acted as an agent for the paper mills in both Tervakoski and Tampere. To keep up in competition with both domestic and Russian factories and to secure access to raw materials, F. B. Frenckell, for example, the owner of the big paper mill in Tampere, ordered Clouberg

to pay whatever price was demanded to ensure that traders would deliver their cloth waste to his factory.[71]

The economic value of rags is also reflected in dishonest attempts to make money at times. In 1893, thieves got their hands on a quantity of cloth waste of unknown value when they broke into the rag warehouse of the Clouberg trading firm in the Kolikkomäki area of Vyborg.[72] Two years later, an attempt at forgery was reported at the same warehouse. A rag collector was given a receipt showing that he had delivered 12 kg of rags at a value of 1 mk 17 p, which he could redeem at the offices of the trading firm. The man passed the receipt to his brother, however, who in turn gave it to a woman who altered it to show that the delivery had consisted of 352 kg of cloth waste at a value of 34 mk 32 p.[73] This latter case also highlights the importance of the cash economy in the circular flow of goods. While the encounter with their customers was characterized by bartering, the rag collectors were paid in cash for the goods they supplied directly to the mills or to intermediaries. With the cash they could pay any debts they had incurred in advance of their trip and procure new merchandise for the next trading trip.

The rag traders played an important role in providing industries with essential raw materials, which meant that their activity was rated as mainly positive from an economic perspective. A certain value was attached to their role in taking charge of materials regarded by people as waste on behalf of industry. In a processed form, the cloth waste had value for the national economy, and in a figurative sense for the development of society as a whole. This aspect was emphasized in 1883 by a contributor to the periodical *Suomen Teollisuuslehti*, which was a mouthpiece for industry in Finland: "It could be said that our current society is dependent to a certain extent on the rag collectors." The rag collectors ensured that paper production could be kept going, and the paper mills were a guarantee in turn of the publication and dissemination of literature, which spread knowledge that contributed to the creation and maintenance of an educated and civilized society.[74]

The significance of the paper industry to the Finnish economy meant that a shortage of raw materials was a constant source of concern for the authorities and for the industry. Although pressure had been brought to bear in various ways, such as through edicts and a rag tax, it had proved difficult over the years to induce folk to provide rags and other waste material.[75] At the end of the 1800s, the press regularly drew attention to the importance of waste to industry. In *Åbo Underrättelser*, a writer

remarked in 1886, for example, that it was lamented with good reason that Finland was poor, and that the situation would not improve while "so much wastefulness with all manner of small stuff prevails." The author compared Finland with rich countries where even material that could appear worthless to the individual was systematically kept and utilized. In addition to rags, he cited cotton reels, phosphorus sticks, empty tins, broken glass, ash, worn-out leather and rubber footwear, broken sewing needles, and medicine bottles, among other things. In Finland, as elsewhere, people should heed the saying *många bäckar små, gör en stor å* ("from little acorns, mighty oaks grow").[76] The industry's need for rags and the fear that usable material would be lost are also reflected in the notices and articles in the newspapers exhorting the public to keep their discarded textiles instead of throwing them away.[77] The point was made at the same time that access to waste textiles should be safeguarded by adequately remunerating those who handed them over. The value of the goods or the sum of money offered for rags was described as so poor that it did not encourage households to practice thrift.[78]

In parallel with the economic discourse that put a positive value on rag collection, another view is presented that judges this form of livelihood in a more negative light. The opinion representing this perspective presents the itinerant lifestyle of the rag trade as demoralizing and as a factor that hampered the development of agriculture and the handicrafts in Vyborg County. The absence of a significant proportion of the male population from parishes such as Muolaa and Valkjärvi for long periods in the winter had a detrimental effect in many respects. The men were prevented from making the agricultural implements needed for improving the efficiency of the region's neglected agriculture and they did not have time to get involved to the necessary extent in agricultural work, repairs, and planting new crops. Several critics saw an explicit connection between the nomadic life and the neglected state of agriculture in Muolaa and Valkjärvi; the region where rag trading was a particularly important form of livelihood was also the region where the farms were in the worst state.[79]

An even more serious problem was the indolence that critics believed that the rag trade gave rise to. The young men of the district marked time until they were old enough to set out on the road and thus grew up with a mentality that alienated them from artisan crafts and agriculture. Who would want to put in the effort to cultivate the soil when "easy money" was to be made in St. Petersburg, asked one contributor to the *Maakansa* newspaper in 1913.[80] In Muolaa in particular, this type of "speculative

trading" appeared to be especially deeply rooted in the population. The general trend in Karelia, where the lifestyle was beginning to take on more civilized forms thanks to work to educate and inform the public, did not extend to Muolaa.[81] Such views represent typical conceptions of mobile groups in society and itinerant trade, and can in addition be linked to the stereotypical images of the Karelian, for which not least Zacharias Topelius laid the foundations in his description of the Finnish peoples in the school reading book *Boken om vårt land* ("Book of our Land"). In this, the Karelians appear as an ethnic group that is mobile and enterprising by nature and "likes travel and trade, making long journeys in its own country and to Russia for its merchandise."[82] A contributor to the *Laatokka* newspaper noted in 1892 that the alleged aptitude of the Karelians for trade, underpinned by historical development, had been preserved in its purest form in precisely the home districts of the rag collectors.[83]

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have looked at how itinerant rag traders, chiefly from the parishes of Muolaa and Valkjärvi in Southeast Finland, made their living from trading in earthenware and rags at the end of the 1800s and the start of the 1900s. We were interested in the factors that contributed to this form of livelihood becoming common in a specific area of Southeast Finland, in the encounters and practices that characterized the trade and the economic value judgments associated with the trade in rags.

The rag traders were a specialized group of traders on the Karelian Isthmus, the unique geographical and historical features of which resulted in a significant proportion of the region's population making its living from freight carriage and mobile trade of various forms. The conditions for gaining a livelihood from the circular flow of goods improved at the end of the nineteenth century due to the growth in consumption, liberalization of the laws on trade and industry, and the increasing demand of expanding industries for raw materials such as cloth waste. The rag traders exploited their geographical location by buying sundry merchandise in St. Petersburg on favorable terms and procuring ceramic objects in Kyyrölä. Some of the purchasing was carried out collectively, showing that the rag collectors were also organized among themselves. In addition, they had the ability to utilize the mobility over long distances that was necessary for the commodification of cloth waste in the sparsely populated territory of Finland, and they maintained networks through which they could sell the

rags they collected. To keep the circular flow of goods in operation thus called for wide-ranging knowledge as well as an idea of how the activity could be made profitable.

In the encounter with customers, the sources describe how the traders greeted the customers with a familiar “jingle” and tried to induce them to surrender cloth waste, which they took in exchange for the goods they had brought with them. The encounter normally took place between male rag traders and female customers, who were usually at home and were responsible for the pots that the rag collectors wanted to exchange for the fabric waste they coveted. Children also featured in the encounter and were encouraged by the rag collectors to seek out rags with inducements of pastries and sweets. Men were probably the principal group of customers in the trade in the illegal liquor that the rag collectors were said to carry with them, but this encounter is not described in greater detail in the sources we studied. Alcohol was a way of making the money last longer, but at the same time it was an illicit form of trade that could potentially create problems with the authorities.

The most important practice in the flow of goods was barter, which offered the customer a practical means of disposing of material perceived as scrap. Even if the customer had realized that the waste had economic value, a single household would scarcely have been able to amass such a large quantity of rags and transport it over such long distances that the goods could have been turned into a resource. In exchange, the customer received utility goods, primarily ceramic objects from Kyyrölä, which had a good reputation as quality merchandise and for which there was a use in the daily life of the household. Cash only entered the picture when the traders sold the rags, either directly to factories in Russia and Finland or to intermediaries who acted as agents for the paper industry. With the cash they could pay off any debts that had arisen in advance of their trading journey and buy goods ahead of the next trip. Although the circular trade was based on barter, it is worth noting that the names given to the itinerant traders derived from the rags they collected and not from the earthenware that they principally gave in exchange. They thus belong to a subcategory of migrant traders whose primary function was to collect items that they passed on to industry as raw material.

The public had an ambivalent attitude to the activity of the rag traders. From the perspective of the local and national economy, it was an important occupation, as it guaranteed expanding industries access to essential raw materials. Industry representatives underlined this fact in appeals in

the press, in which they urged households to keep materials that had a reuse value in another context. In this regard the activity of the rag collectors was evaluated positively in a manner that was seldom or never applied to other itinerant groups of traders. In parallel, however, the press adopts a patronizing attitude to the rag traders. In this discourse, their mobile form of livelihood is associated in a stereotypical manner with fraudsters and idlers chasing "easy money." An itinerant lifestyle was thought to alienate the rural population from agriculture, which was seen as a more honorable way of earning a living.

By studying the practices and places that had significance for the circular trade in earthenware and rags, we shine a light on a mobile form of livelihood that previous research has largely overlooked. We aim to highlight how material which lacked value from the viewpoint of the individual could be commodified, meaning that it acquired new value in a different context. The growing pace of industrialization in the late 1800s ensured that the demand for both old and new types of raw materials increased. The simultaneous liberalization of the laws on trade and industry gave rise to new possibilities of making a living for people who were prepared to move around and had the ability to build up a functional flow of merchandise. In a circular flow of goods such as this, an earthenware pot could be bartered for a discarded garment, which in turn became a piece of the puzzle in the process that kept industry and economic growth going.

Notes

1. Häyhä 1898, p. 41.
2. Karste-Liikkanen 1968, p. 197.
3. Appadurai 1986, p. 3.
4. Trentmann 2016, p. 628.
5. Zimring 2005, pp. 12–13. Trade was mainly on a national scale up to the Second World War, but particularly valuable merchandise, such as cotton and tropical foodstuffs, was transported over long distances at an early stage to satisfy demand in Europe. Topik and Wells 2012, p. 597.
6. Haapala 2007, pp. 46–49; Alanen 1957, p. 333; Rosander 1980, p. 84.
7. See, e.g., Faure 1996, pp. 60–61; Wynne 2015, pp. 1, 34–49; Strasser 1999, p. 8.
8. See, e.g., Rosander 1980, p. 78; Rekola 2015, p. 59.
9. Nevalainen 2016, p. 22; Naakka-Korhonen 1988, p. 146; Häkkinen 2005, p. 249.

10. Karste-Liikkanen 1968, pp. 197–204.
11. Sarkanen and Repo 2002, pp. 62–64; Seppänen 1953, pp. 361–366, 373–377.
12. See, e.g., Gabriel Nikander and Ingwald Sourander. 1955. *Lumppappersbruken i Finland*; Panu Pulma, 2012. "Lumpputampilta paperikoneelle: Paperin tekijät ja paperinteon koneellistuminen 1800-luvun Suomessa"; Markku Kuisma. 1993. *Metsäteollisuuden maa. Suomi, metsät ja kansainvälinen järjestelmä 1620–1920.*
13. Annala 1950, pp. 177–181.
14. Helene Sjunneson. 2012. *Papper och lump. Studier av kontinuitet och förändring i nordisk pappersindustri från 1600-tal till 1900-tal*; Ylva Sjöstrand, 2020. "Lump. Textil återvinning under det långa 1800-talet."
15. Strasser 1999, p. 8; Mikkola and Stark 2009, pp. 4–6.
16. *Folkwännen* 10/15/1879, p. 3.
17. E.g., *Folkwännen* 7/24/1867, p. 2; *Wiborgs Tidning* 10/9/1879, p. 1; *Maakansa* 5/1/1913, p. 4; Karste-Liikkanen 1968, p. 199; Sarkanen and Repo 2002, p. 62; Naakka-Korhonen 1988, p. 6.
18. KIVA FM 1064:7; *Laatokka* 5/4/1892, p. 3; *Savo-Karjala* 12/14/1892, p. 2; *Wiipurin Sanomat* 10/18/1894, p. 2. Sometimes the reference is negative, like when the newspaper *Päivälehti* (9.8.1894, p. 4) highlights that Muolaa is known for its "brawling rag collectors."
19. *Karjalan Ääni* 1/22/1927, p. 3; Ahlqvist 1859, pp. 23–24; Karste-Liikkanen 1968, p. 200.
20. *Laatokka* 11/16/1886, p. 2; *Wiipurin Sanomat* 10/18/1894, p. 2; *Maakansa* 1/29/1921, p. 1; 3/19/1927, p. 4; KIVA FM 960:3–4; Hämynen et al. 1997, p. 181; Alanen 1957, p. 189.
21. Naakka-Korhonen 1988, p. 146; Kuusanmäki 1936, p. 116; KIVÅ FM 918:3.
22. Engman 2003, p. 101.
23. Engman 2003, pp. 111–130.
24. Regarding the ceded lands, see Jyrki Paaskoski. 1997. *Vanhan Suomen lahjoitusmaat 1710–1826.*
25. See, e.g., *Wiipurin Uutiset* 2/24/1888, p. 2; *Wiipurin Sanomat* 9/30/1892, p. 2.
26. See, e.g., Nikander and Sourander 1955, p. 28; Kuisma 1993, pp. 308–310; Pulma 2012, pp. 100–106. The growing demand is also discussed in the newspapers. See, e.g., the advertisement for Oravais Woolen Mill in *Suomalainen* 3/30/1893, p. 4.
27. Rudin 1995, p. 205; Nikander and Sourander 1955, pp. 10, 190–191.
28. Sjöstrand 2020, pp. 16–17.
29. Alanen 1957, p. 188. See also Sjöstrand 2020, pp. 17–19.

30. Annala 1950, p. 178; Wassholm 2020, p. 122.
31. *Wiborgs Tidning* 5/23/1868, p. 1. See also *Suomalainen Wirallinen Lehti* 5/23/1868, p. 1.
32. Other residues that acquired value during industrialization were, for example, scrap metal, bones, ash and grease. Zimring and Rathje 2012, p. 357.
33. Alanen 1957, p. 189.
34. See e.g., Wassholm and Sundelin 2018a, pp. 139–140.
35. Regarding earthenware production in Kyyrölä. See, e.g., Karste-Liikkanen 1968, pp. 197–200; Virrankoski 1963, pp. 430–431; Kaukiainen 1982, pp. 178–179.
36. *Åbo Underrättelser* 9/24/1882, p. 2.
37. *Laatokka* 5/4/1892, p. 3.
38. *Päivälehti* 5/2/1895, p. 3.
39. Sarkanen and Repo 2002, p. 62.
40. *Folkwännen* 10/15/1879, p. 3; 7/24/1867, p. 2.
41. KIVA M 2068; FM 941:2–3; 960:3–4; 1064:7.
42. Sarkanen and Repo 2002, p. 62; Karste-Liikkanen 1968, pp. 197, 200.
43. *Ilmarinen* 6/11/1881, p. 1; *Keski-Suomen Sanomat* 1/12/1911, p. 2; KIVA FM 941:2–3; 960:3–4.9; 1064:7.
44. *Farmaceutisk Tidskrift* 4/29/1901. The extent of the smuggling is demonstrated by the fact that in 1899, county sheriffs in the Valkjärvi district confiscated over 100 kg of Hoffmann's drops.
45. *Wiipurin Sanomat* 10/23/1894, p. 3.
46. KIVA FM 1064:7.
47. Sarkanen and Repo 2002, p. 62.
48. *Päivälehti* 3/22/1886; *Wiipuri* 3/28/1896.
49. Ahlqvist 1859, pp. 23–24; Sarkanen and Repo 2002, p. 62.
50. KIVA FM 941:2–3.
51. Answers to the questionnaires mention *villa- ja kangaslumppu* ("wool and fabric rags") (KIVA FM 960:3–4), *pellava ja villa* ("linen and wool") (KIVA FM 1064:7) and *pellava- ja hamppurätit* ("linen and hemp rags"). In the last case, it is said that wool was not accepted (KIVA FM 941:2–3). A number of rag collectors also specialized in sacks. Seppänen 1953, pp. 373–377.
52. KIVA FM 960:3–4; *Wiipurin Uutiset* 7/11/1888, p. 2; *Mikkeli* 7/29/1893, p. 3; 8/5/1893, p. 3. For the trade in ant eggs, see Karjalainen 1979, pp. 71–78; Nevalainen 2016, p. 165.
53. We have previously looked at barter in petty trade in Finland during the 1800s in the following studies: Wassholm and Sundelin 2020, p. 121. Wassholm and Sundelin 2018a, p. 138, b, pp. 246–247.

54. KIVA FM 941:2–3.
55. KIVA FM 960:7.
56. KIVA FM 941:2–3.
57. Häyhä 1898, p. 41.
58. Sillanpää 1999, p. 43.
59. KIVA M 2068; FM 941:2–3; 960:3–4, 7; 1064:7.
60. KIVA FM 1064:7.
61. Kuusanmäki 1936, p. 116.
62. KIVA FM 960:3–4; 1064:7. Regarding the clay cuckoos, see Vuorela 1975, p. 669.
63. Regarding liquor trading in questionnaires, see KIVA FM 918:3; 941:2–3.
64. *Tapio* 2/25/1888, p. 2.
65. *Päivälehti* 5/2/1895, p. 3.
66. Nikander and Sourander 1955, p. 28.
67. *Wiborgs Tidning* 10/9/1879, p. 1; *Folkwännen* 7/24/1867, p. 2.
68. Karste-Liikkanen 1968, pp. 197, 200; Hämynen 1993, p. 181; Naakka-Korhonen 1988, p. 6.
69. *Folkwännen* 7/24/1867, p. 2; *Laatokka* 5/4/1892, p. 3.
70. Karste-Liikkanen 1968, pp. 197, 200; *Wiborgs Tidning* 10/9/1879, p. 1.
71. Annala 1950, pp. 177–178.
72. *Wiborgsbladet* 10/26/1893, p. 3.
73. *Fredrikshamns Tidning* 6/29/1895, p. 3. The Clouberg trading company also featured in the press in 1890 when the public health committee in Vyborg ordered it to "remove its rag warehouse" in one of the town's suburbs. The reason was that the rags were "of such a nature that contagious diseases are spread easily by them and epidemics mostly occur in said suburb." *Östra Finland* 10/8/1890. p. 2; *Wiborgsbladet* 10/8/1890, p. 2.
74. *Suomen Teollisuuslehti* 5/23/1883, p. 9. Original Finnish: "Woisi sanoa, että nykyinen yhteiskuntamme johonkin määrin riippuu – lumppukauppiaista."
75. Nikander and Sourander 1955, p. 28.
76. *Åbo Underrättelser* 3/30/1886, p. 1.
77. See, e.g., *Wiborgs Tidning* 10/23/1867, p. 2; *Wasabladet* 11/2/1867, p. 3–4; *Borgåbladet* 3/6/1875, p. 2; *Suomen Teollisuuslehti* 2/28/1883, p. 51; *Hämäläinen* 4/29/1891, p. 2.
78. *Åbo Underrättelser* 3/30/1886, p. 1.
79. *Ilmarinen* 6/11/1881, p. 1; *Maakansa* 5/1/1913, p. 4.
80. *Ilmarinen* 6/11/1881, p. 1; *Maakansa* 5/1/1913, p. 4.
81. *Laatokka* 5/4/1892, p. 3.
82. Topelius 2017, p. 227.
83. *Laatokka* 5/4/1892, p. 3.

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