9. A historical perspective on family change in Europe

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1. INTRODUCTION

Family sociology, as well as other social sciences, often conceptualises historical and recent family change in a ‘before and after mode’. Current trends are set apart from and contrasted with an ideal-typical past. We find this approach already in the very beginnings of family sociology in the mid-nineteenth century – for instance, in the work of Le Play (1879). In that period, industrialisation and urbanisation were seen as representing the great watershed that separated the past from the present. A hundred years later, modernisation theory and structural-functionalism followed this model, distinguished the ‘modern family’ from previous family forms, and predicted a global convergence towards the nuclear male breadwinner–female housekeeper family, as a result of industrialisation (the classical example is Goode 1963; for discussion see Cherlin 2012, pp. 580–2). More recently, the presumed stability and homogeneity of the ‘modern family’ has served as a starting point for the description of trends towards post-modern diversity in the context of pluralisation, de-institutionalisation, and individualisation (Gerhard 2010). These macro-sociological approaches are powerful concepts for portraying the larger changes in family behaviour. However, they come at a cost. First, they simplify matters by framing the past as a homogenous entity. Second, they emphasise too strongly the break with the past and the ‘novelty’ of the present. A historical perspective provides a more nuanced perspective on family change. It also exposes the limitations of the above-mentioned sociological approaches, which paint with a ‘broad brush’. A historical perspective can take into account various combinations of continuity and change. It can also demonstrate that many developments are non-linear, and that opposing trends may be occurring at the same time.

Systematic research on the history of the family started in the 1960s in the context of ‘new social history’. From its beginnings until today ‘family history’ has been a broad field of inquiry including different research interests, notions of ‘family’, and methods. It was influenced by, as well as critically questioning, approaches from sociology, anthropology, demography, and psychology (Hareven 1991). Family history became a historical sub-discipline of its own with specific scientific networks, conferences, and journals, such as *Journal of Family History* (since 1976) and *The History of the Family* (since 1996). However, the family also remained an object of interest in a wide range of historical studies. Emphasis on the family became part of histories of childhood (Ariés 1962; Cunningham 1995; De Mause 1974), youth (Gillis 1974; Mitterauer 1992), old age (Laslett 1989; Hareven 1996), gender (Davidoff and Hall 2019; Tilly and Scott 1978; Wiesner-Hanks 2006; Wunder 1998), class (Hareven 1982; Maynes 2002; Rudolph 1995; Secombe 1993), and privacy (Ariés and Duby 1987).

Early ‘grand narratives’ followed modernisation theory in two different variants: a social-structural variant argued a close connection between industrial capitalism and the

nuclear family (Goode 1963); while mentality history approaches postulated that sentiment and affection in family relations only occurred with modernity (Shorter 1975). At the same time, in contrast, close-grained analysis at the micro level revealed the existence of nuclear families in pre-industrial societies (Hareven 1991, pp. 100–1) and an intensive emotional family life, for instance, among medieval peasants (Le Roy Ladurie 1981). Within this variety, however, time-specific methodological hegemonies emerged. In the 1960s–1980s, European family history was dominated by quantitative statistical methods, closely connected with historical demography. The family was conceptualised as a household community, the main research interest was in the ‘size and structure’ of families and households across time and space (Laslett and Wall 1972; Wall et al. 1983). Since the 1980s, cultural historical approaches and historical anthropology gained increasing influence, conceptualising the family as a system of kin-based relationships, both within and beyond households. The emphasis shifted towards the complexity of social and emotional interactions between family members, on the dynamics of life course transitions, and on the impact of family norms and discourses (Davidoff and Hall 2019, pp. lii–liii; Hareven 1991, pp. 96–7). These approaches usually rely on qualitative archival sources such as court records, (auto)biographical documents, or – in respect to the twentieth century – on oral history.

From the 1980s onwards, many attempts were published to bind these various strands together in the form of ‘national’ family histories on specific time periods, often with a focus on class-specific developments (e.g., Houlbrook 1984; Rosenbaum 1982; Sieder 1987); and in the form of comprehensive studies on the history of the European family since classical antiquity, or at least since the early modern period (Burguiere et al. 1996; Kertzer and Barbagli 2001, 2002, 2003; Mitterauer and Sieder 1982).

In summary, more than half a century of intensive historical research on the European family has produced a rich spectrum of both empirical evidence and methodological and theoretical reasoning (Fauve-Chamoux and Ochiai 2009; Hareven 1991; Kertzer 1991; Kertzer and Barbagli 2002; Ruggles 2009; Wall 2001). In this chapter, I focus on only a few selected aspects of this research to illustrate the contribution of the historical perspective to family sociology. My aim is to exemplify the usefulness of long-term historical perspectives based on three themes: first, I discuss how the trends towards the homogeneity and the diversity of family forms are interconnected; second, I examine the roots of both the emancipation of women and the limits of gender equality in the history of the European family; and, finally, I explore the historical variations in generational relations. However, the timeframe of this chapter does not stretch up to the present, but from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries only. I do not include the massive changes of family life which began in the last third of the twentieth century, which are widely discussed in other chapters of this volume.

2. THE DIVERSITY OF FAMILY FORMS IN PRE- AND EARLY INDUSTRIAL EUROPE

2.1 Family Forms in Pre-Industrial Europe

Growing diversity is regarded as one of the basic features of contemporary family behaviour (see Liu and Esteve in this volume). It is, however, important to understand that diversity in family behaviour is not a unique feature of the present. Indeed, a long-term historical

perspective reveals that pre-industrial Europe exhibited a rich diversity of family forms, and that trends towards the standardisation and the diversification of family behaviour have long intermingled.

Family history and historical demography have provided substantial evidence of the diversity of family forms in historic Europe. Researchers have taken advantage of the huge amounts of existing data (e.g., from parish priests, community officials, early censuses) to study family diversity as far back as the sixteenth century. As these data were often recorded following a similar logic, they were well suited for drawing comparisons across time and space. Indeed, the organisational principle of such listings relied on a specific definition of the 'family': i.e., that a family consisted of a group of individuals who were residing under one roof and under the authority of one head, and who were connected by kinship and by labour relations, or by labour relations only. The use of this definition led to a reconceptualisation of the family, and a shift in emphasis to focus on the 'household', the 'co-resident domestic group', or the 'family and household as work group and kin group' (Laslett 1983).

Before the Industrial Revolution, European societies were mainly agrarian. Most people were occupied (wholly or partially) with agricultural production. Agricultural production was mainly organised by households and families, who worked in varying degrees for their own subsistence, for feudal rents and taxes, and for markets. Thus, the various modes of agricultural production and the structures of peasant families were key drivers of diversity (Rudolph 1995). Peasant family forms differed depending not only on local economic and ecological conditions and property and ownership relations, but on kinship systems and inheritance rules, which were sometimes – although not always – transmitted within ethnic communities (Farago 1986). Historical family research has created various family typologies, but three household types have been seen as particularly important: the 'simple' or 'nuclear family', which consisted of parents and their children only; the 'extended family', which included one or more additional relatives; and the 'multiple' or 'joint family', which comprised more than one married couple (Wall 2001). These typologies only refer to co-resident domestic groups and differ, therefore, from sociological and anthropological typologies, where 'extended family' usually means a wider kinship network. While these ideal types have proven useful for making quantitative comparisons, they 'may also be misleading, for the reality of family life in the past was much more messy and less rule-driven than such typologies suggest' (Kertzer and Barbagli 2002, p. xxxi).

A large share of households included non-relatives who belonged to the household's labour force. Paying attention to such persons and integrating them into the research design distinguishes the family history of the 1960s–1990s from most former and current family sociology and anthropology. The 'substantial proportion' of non-kin household members was, in the words of Peter Laslett, something like 'a sociological discovery' (Laslett 1972, p. 151). In peasants' households, these non-relatives either lived for longer periods, as, for example, male and female farmhands; or temporarily, as, for example, inmates or lodgers who supplemented the household's workforce in peak times. Similarly, the households of urban master artisans included apprentices and/or journeymen, and middle- and upper-class households also employed live-in domestic servants. Both kin and non-kin household members were interconnected through work in the family economy and through subordination to the head of household, but they differed with respect to their property rights, status, and the length of their affiliation with the household. Non-kin household members represented a very specific and widespread group of wage labourers who were usually single men and women in their youth

and early adulthood, and who are referred to in historiography as ‘life-cycle servants’ (Laslett 1983, pp. 526, 534).

These different types of families and households were very unevenly distributed throughout pre-industrial Europe. For instance, large joint families existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – and presumably even earlier – in southern Russia, where peasant serfs lived in village communities in which the land was frequently redistributed according to family size. This system supported the co-residence of parents with several married sons (Czap 1983). Family forms in the Baltic provinces were enforced by estate owners, who intervened directly in the composition of peasant households by, for instance, putting together households consisting of peasant couples with married offspring and married servants (Plakans and Wetherell 1992). In the Balkans, complex families were part of a patriarchal kinship system (Mitterauer 1996). In south-western France and in some other European regions there were stem families, consisting of a married couple and one married son – the ideal family form per se in Le Play’s opinion (Fauve-Chamoux and Ochiai 2009). In parts of Italy, multiple families were connected to the *mezzadria* system, whereby land owners leased large farmsteads for a one-year period to large sharecropper families (Kertzer 2002, p. 44). However, there were hardly any multiple families in England, and there were very few multiple families in most parts of France, Spain, Italy, and central and east-central Europe (Wall 2001, pp. 221–4). Extended families with a live-in unmarried or widowed relative (e.g., a parent, a sibling, or a cousin) were more evenly distributed and existed throughout Europe, but their share among all families was below 20 per cent in most regions (Wall 2001, pp. 221–4). However, peasant and craftsmen families that were extended by non-kin life-cycle servants existed in large parts of western, northern, and central Europe. In some periods and areas – such as in the Austrian Alps in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries or in Vienna in the nineteenth century – these households became remarkably large and complex (Ehmer 1980; Mitterauer 1986).

Nuclear families existed throughout pre-industrial Europe. In some regions, nuclear families were even dominant, particularly in the north-west of the continent, including in parts of Scandinavia, the British Isles, the Netherlands, the north of France, German-speaking regions, and among east-central European Slavic-speaking populations. These small families were typical for rural social groups who owned small plots of land only, such as smallholders, cottagers, rural artisans, or proto-industrial producers in the putting-out system (*Verlagssystem*), or for landless labourers. Among the lasting achievements of family history in the 1960s and 1970s are that the myth of a universal pre-industrial large and multigenerational family was deconstructed, and that the long historical continuity of nuclear family households was revealed.

2.2 A Spatial Dichotomy between the East and the West?

There is an ongoing discussion among scholars about whether the dominance of nuclear families in pre-industrial north-western Europe was unique in the world. This highly influential hypothesis was developed by British sociologist John Hajnal (1965, 1982) in his theory of a ‘European marriage pattern’ and ‘household formation system’, which was characterised, in his view, by a close connection between marriage and the ability to found a new independent household; and, as a consequence, by high rates of lifelong celibacy, older ages at marriage, the neo-local residence of the married couple, and the predominance of nuclear families. It was also argued that in the ‘east European’ or ‘non-European’ pattern, by contrast, marriage was

universal and took place at younger ages, and the married couple was not expected to create a household of their own; instead, they remained in the husband's family, thus forming a joint family (Laslett 1983, p. 526). Hajnal's observation that both the average age at first marriage and the share of lifelong unmarried persons was very high in parts of pre-industrial Europe has been confirmed by a large number of studies, not least by the largest and most comprehensive quantitative project on European demographic history, the 'Princeton Project on the decline of fertility in Europe' (Coale and Watkins 1986).

Nevertheless, many criticisms of Hajnal's theory arose. Some historians were concerned that the idea of an overarching spatial dichotomy of family forms (north-western Europe versus eastern Europe, or, more generally, the 'west' versus the rest) would replace the earlier temporal dichotomy of pre-modern versus modern, which had already been successfully questioned (Ruggles 2009; Szoltysek 2012, 2015).

A growing number of small area studies based not only on statistical evidence, but on qualitative archival records, illustrated that there were substantial variations within both eastern and western Europe (Szoltysek 2015). Anthropologists and sociologists have called attention to the even greater diversity beyond Europe (Goody 1996; most comprehensive to date Therborn 2004). Particularly important was the move 'from a limited view of the family as a static unit at one point in time to an examination of the family as a process over the entire lives of its members' (Hareven 1991, p. 96), and, consequently, a strong interest in the interaction between individual life courses and family cycles. Such fine-grained investigations showed that in regions dominated by nuclear families, individuals might live in extended and sometimes even in joint families, depending on their life course phases (Sabeen 1990, pp. 261–71, 316–20; Kertzer 2002, p. 68). They also cast new light on the distribution of marriage patterns in pre-modern Europe. On the one hand, there were some areas that were characterised by extremely late and limited marriage that were typically found in the west; e.g., on the Atlantic seaboard and in the central European Alps. On the other hand, the lowest ages at marriage were observed in certain areas of the east. However, the marriage behaviour in other regions varied between these extremes across the whole continent (Ehmer 2002, pp. 306–9). The pre- and early industrial European family was characterised by multiple spatial diversity and not by a clear-cut dichotomy between east and west.

2.3 Industrialisation and Family Change

In almost all nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories about the long-term history of the European family, industrialisation and the spread of capitalism appeared as basic forces which paved the way for the predominance of small nuclear households in all social classes, and in all regions that became industrialised. In fact, key factors of social and economic development point in that direction. The agricultural sector, which was the main driver of diversity in pre-industrial Europe, became less important over time, and ultimately stopped shaping social structures. The decline of household-based modes of production and the gradual transition to wage labour as the basic or even sole source of income fundamentally changed the character of the family as an economic unit. However, the assumption that these developments led to an overall decline in the diversity of the European family may be doubted. Rather, the processes of class formation, which were unleashed by the Industrial Revolution, induced the reshaping of class-specific variations.

2.3.1 Middle-class families

Middle- and upper-class attitudes and practices show considerable changes both in respect to the household family and the wider kinship networks. These changes were on their way already in the early modern period and accelerated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Particularly important – and clearly contradicting prevailing theories – was the strengthening of kin relations (Sabeian and Teuscher 2007). Families who owned property developed strategies to secure their possessions over generations. The family was increasingly regarded as a perennial institution linked to a specific territory, plot of land, or business. While such concepts of the family were particularly salient among the nobility, they also gained acceptance among affluent peasants and mercantile middle classes (Sabeian 1998, pp. 379–96). During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the construction of kinship networks became an important means of class formation for the bourgeoisie, as expressed in the marked increase in endogamous marriages, particularly between cousins. ‘Class differentiation went hand in hand with kin integration’ (Sabeian and Teuscher 2007, p. 22). However, the strengthening of kin bonds was accompanied by the retreat of the individual family household and the emergence of a new domestic ideology that attached a positive meaning to the separation of family from work (Davidoff and Hall 2019). The rise of the bourgeois family was regarded as a cultural and civilising achievement, and was accompanied by the construction of a dichotomy between the private (the family, the home) and the public (the world of work, political affairs). ‘The domestic sphere was initially at least the bourgeois realm *par excellence*’ (Maynes 2002, p. 201).

2.3.2 Working-class families

Working-class families developed differently – despite some parallels. During the early modern period, families of the labouring poor were significantly smaller than those further up the social ladder. British seventeenth-century statistician Gregory King estimated in 1688 that there were only 3¼ persons in the average family in the wage-earning classes, which at that time already accounted for 62 per cent of the English population (Laslett 1984, pp. 31–2). In the industrialised regions of the nineteenth century, working-class families became larger, as people married earlier and had more children. In addition, more children survived due to the decline in infant mortality, and more children remained in the parental home during their youth. These young people were able to contribute to the family income by finding work in the newly emerging industries, and thus no longer relied on taking live-in jobs in peasant or middle-class households. It was also common for working-class families to temporarily take in relatives. British industrial communities in the 1850s had more than double the share of extended families than the average British pre-industrial community (Humphries 2010, p. 76). Moreover, it was common to take in non-kin housemates such as boarders and lodgers in order to generate additional income. Women were frequently working at home in new forms of domestic industry, particularly in shoe and garment production, often with the help of their children – meaning a reintegration of production and paid work into the household (Secombe 1993, pp. 32–40). The result of these trends was that large working-class households were living in small, overcrowded flats. In contrast to the private sphere of the bourgeoisie, these arrangements have been called a ‘half-open’ family structure (Sieder 1987, p. 184).

A completely different situation prevailed far into the second half of the nineteenth century in those areas of central Europe where capitalism proliferated amidst traditional labour relations. In agriculture and in urban crafts and trades, an employer’s household remained the basic economic unit. Economic growth led to an increase in the live-in labour force of

farmhands, apprentices, and journeymen, all of whom were single young men and women. Both the marriage age and the share of life-long unmarried individuals rose as the formation of a working-class family became more difficult than it had been in the past (Ehmer 1991, pp. 16–18). These developments resulted in an enormous increase in ‘illegitimate’ births (Mitterauer 1983).

In the long run, however, working-class families stabilised. Rising living standards, the introduction of the first rudimentary safety nets of the welfare state, the spread of birth control and family planning, and the gradual adoption of the male breadwinner–female housekeeper model (see below) reduced the peculiarities of ‘proletarian’ family life.

To sum up, the early phases of industrial society experienced a clear differentiation between middle class and working-class family patterns. In addition, as industrialisation took place highly unevenly throughout Europe, gaps between forerunners and latecomers widened with respect to both region and class. A certain convergence of family patterns only happened in the twentieth century, albeit not evenly in the whole of the continent, but particularly in western Europe. ‘In the two decades right after World War II ... homogenization and standardization reached its zenith’ (Therborn 2004, p. 314). However, this was a ‘temporary standardisation’ only, which was replaced, in the last third of the century, by what one might call a ‘return to ... historical complexity’ (Therborn 2004, p. 314) – which is, of course, a different kind of complexity than in the past (Cherlin 2012, p. 597).

3. FAMILY AND GENDER: THE CONJUGAL COMMUNITY

Right from its beginnings, family history was closely linked to the history of women and of gender – although, from the 1980s onwards, gender surpassed the family in its attractiveness for historians (Wiesner-Hanks 2006; for an excellent current structured and commented bibliography on gender history which includes all aspects of gendered family life, see the open access website at Cambridge University Press that accompanies Wiesner-Hanks 2019). Research focused on patriarchal concepts and structures, asymmetric power relations, the gendered construction of family roles, and the gendered division of labour. While in a first phase of gender history, the emphasis was on male authority and the oppression of women, in the 1980s the focus switched to the agency and the activities of women, particularly of married wives vis-à-vis their husbands (Fairchild 2007, p. 3). Two insights are particularly important for family history: Firstly, in spite of the general predominance of patriarchal attitudes there was a rich diversity of women’s positions in the family in pre- and early industrial Europe, mainly due to differences in the family type, in religion, law (particularly in respect to property rights, inheritance systems, and dowry), and in the socio-economic setting of households. To a certain extent this reflects the overall diversity of pre-modern family forms as discussed above. Secondly, the nuclear families of western Europe were characterised by an ambivalence between patriarchal predominance and a strong position of women, both in family ideology and in practice. Many historians and sociologists are convinced that the ‘Western European family was by far the least patriarchal in a very patriarchal world’ (Therborn 2004, p. 297). Therefore, the following section concentrates on gender relations in western-type nuclear families and particularly on the relations between husband and wife.

3.1 Medieval Roots

The historical roots of tight conjugal relations in nuclear family households reach far back into the European past. Michael Mitterauer (2010), in his seminal study on the medieval origins of Europe's 'special path' (*Sonderweg*), locates these families in an agrarian system that first developed in the seventh century in the Frankish Empire, and subsequently spread to England and to east-central and southern Europe (Mitterauer 2010, particularly chapter 3). In this system, peasant families were tied to manorial estates, which allocated plots of land to (free or unfree) peasants, who were, in turn, obliged to provide labour services for the manor. The plot of land they received, called a 'hide', was of a size that could be worked by one simple family household consisting of a married couple and their children, and potentially one or more children of neighbouring peasants who were not needed in their own families, and who worked in other households as farmhands or maids. In medieval sources, a hide was described as a *terra unius familiae* (Mitterauer 2010, p. 58).

The typical peasant family in this system was a work group with the married couple at its centre. Both the husband and the wife were needed to execute all of the tasks, and if one of them died, s/he was frequently replaced by remarriage. Some historians even speak of 'compulsory complementary roles' (Mitterauer and Sieder 1982). In contrast, kinship ties beyond the household played a marginal role, and the male kinship line was not privileged over the female kinship line. All of these features strengthened the autonomy of the married couple and the status of women.

3.2 Early Modern Redefinitions and Rearrangements

In the following centuries, the conjugal unit of the 'working couple' prevailed in a wide range of social groups, particularly among peasants, artisans, and merchants. Married women's work remained crucial to the multiple activities that took place in and around the family household (Wunder 1998; Sarti et al. 2018, pp. 9–15). In the early modern era from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, however, family life was increasingly influenced by discourses on gender roles and by state regulations which strengthened male patriarchal authority (Hardwick 2006; Cavallo 2010, pp. 15–19). Two factors shaped the intensification of patriarchal power relations in families. Firstly, the implementation of the social and political role of 'household head'. The household was seen as the basic unit of the state and the social order, to be ruled by the husband and father, whom all family members owed obedience. The superiority of the male head and the inferiority of his wife and of all other household members was elaborated in intellectual and religious thought and popularised by a widespread literary genre, the 'books of husbandry' or 'domestic conduct books'. In a British example from 1617, the author recommended that 'good wives' take the following maxim to heart: 'mine husband is my superior, my better; he has authority and rule over me; nature hath given it to him ... God hath given it to him' (Stone 1979, p. 109). On the other hand, rulers and political theorists conceived the state as a family governed by the sovereign, thus using family rhetoric to legitimise political power (Hanley 1989).

The second factor was a revaluation and strict regulation of marriage, particularly in the context of the Reformation, and later by the Catholic Church as well. The main reformers, such as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, shared the conviction that the ideal form of life was within the institution of marriage, while the Catholic Church emphasised the character of marriage

as a sacrament. While the voluntary and mutual consent of bride and bridegroom was still regarded as a precondition for marriage, its legal validity now required public and political control and parental consent (Hardwick 2006, pp. 348–52).

The tension between a still strong position of women in the everyday life of families, their weak official and legal position vis-à-vis their husbands, and in society as a whole, gave rise to debates among historians from the 1970s until the present. Debates were fuelled by very rich evidence on these issues in historical sources of all kinds, which allow for diverging interpretations. Initially the early modern period was depicted as a setback for women, whose status was seen as deteriorating. One of the most prominent advocates of this view, British historian Lawrence Stone, wrote that the ‘enhancement of the importance of the conjugal family’ was accompanied by the ‘reinforcement of patriarchy’ (Stone 1979, p. 109). More recent research strives for differentiated lines of reasoning. Despite the severe restrictions imposed on women by patriarchal attitudes and structures, a younger generation of historians put emphasis on women’s – probably widening – room for manoeuvre. From ‘1500 to 1700 the patriarchal paradigm was not only increasingly challenged by intellectuals, both male and female, it was also routinely ignored or subverted by ordinary men and women going about their daily lives’ (Fairschild 2007, p. 3).

Ideas about the ‘inseparability of the roles of husband and wife’ in the conjugal relationship backed this trend (Cavallo 2010, p. 17). As sixteenth-century urban sources put it, husband and wife were expected to ‘work faithfully with each other’ and to secure their ‘sustenance’. This vision also bridged ‘the divide between labour within the workshop and what we might term housework – the labour of cooking, cleaning, and caring for a workshop labour force’ (Roper 1989, p. 40). However, these ideas were contradicted by the spread of a new, more restrictive definition of ‘work’ as occupational activity and gainful employment, partly in the context of an increasing specialisation and professionalisation of work. Although women’s income-generating activities remained essential for middle- and lower-class families, there was a tendency to exclude women from skilled work and from vocational training (Crowston 2008). Thus, work-related gendered hierarchies also expanded (Wunder 1998, chapters 4 and 5). Early modern gender relations in families remained ambivalent and did certainly not develop linearly towards the better or the worse.

3.3 Industrialisation and the ‘Bourgeois Age’

The long-term separation of the family household from paid work was a basic feature of industrialisation. The household became the quintessential venue for (female) unpaid domestic and care work, and for leisure. These developments led to a fundamental redefinition of the relationships within the conjugal community. While the households of peasants, artisans, shopkeepers, and similar social groups kept up traditions of family economy, at least to a certain degree, these family and household forms were no longer the predominant models.

What implications do all of these developments have for the conjugal unit and for gender relations in the family? To answer this question, we have to adopt a work-centred perspective, and to factor in cultural tradition as well as cultural change (Tilly and Scott 1978). The pre-industrial tradition that all housework and childcare were the responsibility of women and not of men continued to be a powerful norm throughout industrialisation and urbanisation.

Among the major changes that occurred at this time were that more value was placed on privacy, and that a new interpretation of the essential differences between men and women

emerged that had started to become entrenched by around 1800 (Davidoff and Hall 2019). The basic idea was that there were natural differences between the two genders, and that these differences should determine men's and women's respective social roles. Men were characterised as energetic, bold, ambitious, intelligent, and capable of reasoning. Therefore, it was assumed that the natural destiny of men was to be active in public life. Women, by contrast, were characterised as weak, devoted, modest, emotional, and intuitive, as well as graceful and beautiful. Thus, it was argued that the natural spheres of women were family and domestic life, love, religion, etc. In her seminal work on this shift, the German historian Karin Hausen explained it as follows:

These character schemata, which did not begin to lose their persuasiveness until the second half of the twentieth century, were 'discovered' in the last third of the eighteenth. During the nineteenth century the underlying principles remained the same and were 'scientifically' supported by medical sciences, anthropology, psychology and psychiatry. At the same time, preconceptions about the essential nature of the sexes were so successfully popularised that ever greater sectors of the population came to accept them as the proper standards of masculinity and femininity well into the twentieth century. (Hausen 1981, pp. 55–7)

The combination of all of the trends presented above led to a rearrangement of gender roles in accordance with the ideal of 'separate spheres' of women and men (for an intensive discussion of ideologies and practices of 'separate spheres' see Davidoff and Hall 2019, pp. xvi–xix, xxx–xxxvii, 149–92). The allocation of housework and care work to married women was now accompanied by their withdrawal from gainful employment. The male breadwinner–female housekeeper model came to be seen as the ideal family form, and, in the course of the nineteenth century, it became the predominant cultural norm. There has been a growing research in family and gender history on the breadwinner–housekeeper model since the 1980s (for an overview see Janssens 1997).

The process by which this model was put into practice was, however, characterised by class-specific variations. It was first implemented by the educated bourgeoisie and in the middle classes in general, who had a strong cultural preference for the new family and gender ideology, as well as the financial means to implement it in their own lives (Davidoff and Hall 2019). The norm that wives should be excluded from gainful employment became particularly rigid in this social group. The educated daughters who gained access to higher education during the second half of the nineteenth century, and who aspired to having an occupational career, usually had to either remain single or forego occupational activities (Kuhn 2000).

In the working classes, this process took a different path. It was initiated in a small segment of highly qualified workmen with good wages and stable jobs; the so-called 'labour aristocracy'. These workers strove to have a solid family life, and they can be seen as forerunners in the working classes for a proletarian adoption or variation of the bourgeois family ideal of a nuclear family living in a neat and clean home with a well-managed household and well-cared-for children (Secombe 1993, pp. 111–24). Among lower earners, the male breadwinner model became established later, and it was always precarious given that the male breadwinner could lose his employment. Nevertheless, the single earner became part of the identity of male workers, and an expression of their masculinity. On the other hand, working-class women gained self-esteem from their ability to manage a proper household and to bring up their children well despite their family's lack of financial means (Secombe 1993, pp. 47–9, 111–24).

Detailed research on working-class families, however, cautions against any harmonising interpretations of working-class breadwinner families. Firstly, this model reinforced women's dependence on male earnings, which had particularly negative consequences for female single-parent families and, generally, for female-headed households. Secondly, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, 'few households could rely entirely on a male breadwinner for their security' (Horrell and Humphries 1997, pp. 9, 63). Therefore, working-class women never completely withdrew from wage labour. Rather, they tended to follow a specific life course pattern that has been called a 'U-curve' by gender historians, whereby a woman usually worked outside of the home while young, reduced her labour force participation after marriage, and tried to stop working completely when the number of her children increased and at least some of them contributed to the family income. When their children were grown up or had left the parental home, women tried to go back to work (Sarti et al. 2018, pp. 13–14; Seccombe 1993, pp. 32–4; Tilly and Scott 1978). Moreover, a working-class wife and mother was expected to 'step in' if her husband lost his job. If she did so, she had to find ways to reconcile wage work with her domestic duties – almost in the same manner as women in pre-industrial societies did long before the separation of the private and the public sphere took place.

The rising labour force participation of married women from the middle of the twentieth century onwards, which has often been dominated by part-time rather than full-time employment – albeit with striking differences across European countries – can be regarded as a continuation of this social and cultural tradition. All in all, the ambivalence between male dominance and female agency was present throughout the whole second millennium, albeit in highly variable combinations. Only during the twentieth century did patriarchal power become gradually illegitimate. However, gender inequality and, particularly, an asymmetric gendered division of labour remained, perhaps even more so in families than in society as a whole.

4. CHILDREN, THE ELDERLY, AND GENERATIONAL RELATIONS

4.1 Living Together or Living Apart? Demographic and Social Constraints

The popular view that pre-modern families typically consisted of numerous children and of at least three generations has been refuted by family historians. Decades of research in historical demography on household structures and family attitudes have revealed a much more differentiated picture. In addition to finding that family forms varied, these studies showed that the co-residence of generations was limited by demographic constraints, by norms that governed the life course, and by housing preferences.

4.1.1 Children

In Christian Europe during the medieval and early modern periods, marriage was deemed to be the sole legitimate setting for procreation, and births out of wedlock were rare. The age at first marriage was high in areas where the 'European marriage pattern' prevailed. In some regions, the age at first marriage for women was between 25 and 27, and it was even higher for men. As menopause often started at about age 40, the period during which married women could reasonably expect to bear children was only 12 to 15 years (Flinn 1981, pp. 28–9). In

addition, the intervals between births were long due to the breastfeeding practices in many regions of Europe. Therefore, an average married woman was unlikely to have more than five or six births during her reproductive lifespan. In addition, a considerable proportion of men and women – at times up to 20 per cent – remained single and childless over their whole lives (Ehmer 2011, pp. 22–32).

The number of surviving children per family was considerably lower than the number of children born due to the high rates of infant and child mortality in pre-modern times. On average, roughly one-quarter of infants failed to survive the first year of life, and another quarter died in childhood before they reached their 15th birthday (Flinn 1981, pp. 17, 94). In regions where the joint family system prevailed and the average marriage age was low, the fertility of married women was higher, but infant and child mortality was also higher. Thus, the average marriage would at best produce two and a half to three children who survived to adulthood. Tony Wrigley estimated that 20 per cent of all married couples in pre-industrial Europe had no surviving heirs, and another 20 per cent had only one heir (Wrigley 1978).

As in the case of children, elderly people were not present as frequently in pre-modern households as might be expected. While males and females who survived infancy and childhood had a good chance of reaching old age, mortality rates were high throughout the adult years. Even when some people survived beyond age 60, it was not at all a matter of course for younger people to have living parents or even grandparents. Mortality severely hampered generational relations in families.

Moreover, whether people were or were not expected to live with their families depended on the predominating family type. In the multiple families of southern Russia and a few other regions, we find three and sometimes even four co-residing generations under one roof. Peter Laslett (1989) has found evidence of ‘perennial family groups’ in which young people became parents at very young ages due to early marriage for both men and women, and families stayed together ‘as head gave way to head, normally though not always by the succession of a married son to his late father’ (Laslett 1989, p. 118).

The situation was different in regions where a nuclear family system predominated. In such societies, children were expected to leave home at an early age. In particular, the children of smallholders, cottagers, or labourers who were not needed to contribute to a family economy often left their parents at early ages – typically between age eight and 12 – to work and live in the households of peasants or master artisans, or as domestic servants in middle- or upper-class households. The sons and daughters of affluent families were much more likely to stay home with their parents, often until marriage (Schlumbohm 1994, pp. 341–54, 1996, pp. 86–7). Nevertheless, life-cycle service was common for boys and girls in north-western and central Europe. By contrast, in the patriarchal family systems of southern Europe, it would have been hardly thinkable to release girls from paternal authority before marriage (Kertzer 2002, p. 51).

4.1.2 The elderly

The living arrangements of the elderly were different in urban and rural areas. In early modern cities, a male head of household usually remained in that position for life. In cities like Zurich or Salzburg in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a large majority of the elderly population – up to two-thirds – were not sharing a household with their sons or daughters (Ehmer 1990, p. 175). The households of elderly people were usually small, consisting of two or three individuals: i.e., the household head and his wife, or a widowed man or woman, a servant, and perhaps a lodger. Thus, living with kin was hardly the predominant living arrangement for

elderly people in pre-industrial central European towns. Instead, many urban elderly people were living independently and alone, sometimes until death.

Generational relations in rural communities were different. Property and status were less flexible in the country than in the city, and were much more likely to be connected to a certain piece of land or to a particular farm. For older people living in the countryside, their house and the land they owned were a particularly important resource, which they utilised and/or which they were dependent upon even when they no longer occupied the uppermost position in their household (Ruggles 2009).

This form of generational co-residence relied on the institution of 'retirement', which increased in importance throughout the early modern period in many central European regions. Retirees who were turning over the farming operation to their successors retained free lodging and sustenance for the rest of their lives – or for a specific period of time – on their former property. If a farmhouse was very small, retirees might have been assigned just one corner of a room. But if the farmhouse was larger, retirees might have had their own room, or even an apartment consisting of a chamber and a kitchen. Indeed, very large farms sometimes had a cottage located in the immediate vicinity of the main farmhouse where elderly relatives could live. Thus, three-generational households played a role in pre-industrial Europe, especially in areas where access to land was the main resource for making a living and for obtaining social status. But the general conclusion of researchers who have examined these patterns is that the household economy, rather than the family, was the basic resource for subsistence in old age (Ehmer 2009).

4.2 Intergenerational Relationships

Until the 1970s, studies on the history of family and kinship were dominated by two diverging assumptions regarding their inner emotional climate. Functionalist sociologists claimed that pre-modern families were characterised by deep kinship ties and emotional bonds, which were lost on the way to modernity (Humphries 2010, pp. 48–51). Historians of sentiment, in contrast, developed a reversed version of modernisation theory. They assumed that pre-modern family relations were mainly instrumental and lacked affection between husbands and wives, parents and children, and generally between generations. Affectionate family relations were regarded as an achievement of modernity (Shorter 1975). More recent research has called all such assumptions into question and developed far more nuanced approaches. This concerns, firstly, parent–child relations. Earlier histories of sentiment rooted in modernisation theory assumed that children were first of all valued as part of the family economy's labour force. It was also assumed that the high infant and child mortality rates, as well as the early ages at which young people left home, hampered the development of strong emotional ties between parents and children (De Mause 1974). Meanwhile, improved research has cast a much more friendly light on parent–child relations in pre-modern times (Jarzebowski and Safley 2014). Barbara Hanawalt concluded that already 'by the late Middle Ages, English society became pre-occupied with rearing and educating children and youth so that they could successfully pass into the adult world' (Hanawalt 1993, p. 6). This revision is based on two strands of evidence: one on discourses and one on ego-documents, such as diaries, letters, and autobiographical writings. These sources reveal a long-term trend towards people paying increasing attention to and having a greater appreciation for children (Cunningham 1995). Humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries showed a strong interest in children, and encouraged parents to behave

tenderly and affectionately towards their children, and to raise them without resorting to physical punishment. This trend was further strengthened during the Enlightenment. Among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century bourgeois families, children had assumed a central position (Bailey 2012). Childrearing became regarded as primarily the function of the mother, but the father was also expected to contribute to his children's education, albeit to a lesser degree due to his role as the breadwinner.

In practice, of course, there were numerous exceptions to these trends, and childhood in pre-modern Europe must not be idealised. Children who laboured in the family economy or participated in their family's wage labour, be it in agriculture, in service, or in factories, often suffered from overexertion and rigid discipline, and the authority of their masters was often abusive. Poor and orphaned children were forced to work in orphanages at very young ages, or were apprenticed by 'poor law' authorities to workshops or farms (Humphries 2010). During the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries trade with child slaves from eastern Europe or Africa was common in Mediterranean Europe, due to a demand for young domestic workers (Beattie 2010, pp. 58–61).

Secondly, the relationship between children and their aged parents was also more nuanced than is widely assumed. Findings pointing to the scant presence of three-generational families and the preference for independence may suggest that the levels of interaction between married couples and their aged parents were low. However, recent research on generational relations in eighteenth-century England found evidence of 'reciprocal ties between the generations [which] led to close bonds of affection and clear sense of responsibility', both in families in which the generations co-resided, and in families in which the adult children and parents lived in separate households (Ottoway 2004, pp. 142, 147). Elderly parents who were living independently assisted their adult children when needed, and vice versa. Children who had already left their parental home often returned in case of need or illness, or when their parents needed help. Married children sometimes took in their elderly parents when they became reliant on care. Thus, evidence that there were strong emotional ties among the generations has been found for all social classes, although it appears that poor people had much more modest material means to put these bonds into practice than those on the higher strata.

Both the growing esteem for children and the nurturing of affectionate relationships with the elderly paved the way to the emergence – or 'invention', as some historians call it – of new social roles: namely, of grandmother and grandfather (see Skopek in this volume). Before the eighteenth century, these terms were used rather seldom; the sources speak instead of an 'old father' or an 'old mother' (Göckenjan 2000, pp. 199–212). While many children had no living grandparents, a majority of people over age 60 could expect to have at least one living grandchild. While parenthood came with responsibilities for providing children with necessities and education, grandparents' relationships with their grandchildren could be based to a much greater extent on cultivating emotional ties. Nevertheless, these relationships also included providing mutual help and care when needed (Bailey 2012, pp. 200–10; Ottoway 2004, pp. 155–65). It is not entirely clear to what extent the picture of positive and intense generational relations, as it has been painted in recent historical research on the family, childhood, and old age, spanned the various social, economic, and cultural groups of pre-modern European societies, both in terms of norms and practices. However, as a set of role models, these enhanced generational relations certainly existed.

5. CONCLUSION

The history of the European family is not only a history of change. As the three thematic fields presented above show, there were also substantial – and perhaps surprising – continuities. These continuities include the long-lasting tradition of the nuclear family with a married couple at its centre, which has been dominant since medieval times in parts of Europe and in specific social groups; the conjugal unit of husband and wife with a high degree of autonomy and independence from their wider kinship networks, including from their parents and ancestors; married women with a strong position in the household and in the family in varying combinations depending on the degree of patriarchal dominance; a gendered division of labour in which women participated in a wide range of economic activities within and outside their household, while also having the sole responsibility for housework and care work; and the existence of emotional ties between generations within and beyond the co-resident group, which included feelings of responsibility and a desire to provide mutual help. It is, of course, possible to write a history of the European family as a history of suppression, violence, and bitter conflict. But in this chapter, I focused instead on those long-lasting traditions that promote equal and relaxed family relations, and thus support both solidarity and individual autonomy.

However, pointing out that there are long-running continuities and social traditions is not meant to suppress awareness of the fundamental transformations European societies underwent throughout the second millennium in all dimensions of economic, social, cultural, and political life; not least in the legal order. Families were embedded in these transformations, suffering from as well as shaping and forming social change. In this chapter, I concentrated on the long-term developments in pre-industrial Europe and on the transformation from an agrarian to an industrial society. My aim was to shed light on the rearrangements of family structures and the redefinitions of gender and generational relations in which established norms and patterns were not simply abolished, but adapted to overcome new challenges. For example, in the early industrial age, kinship bonds were revived by bourgeois families, working-class households were enlarged, and the numbers of life-cycle servants in the households of peasants and artisans rose. But there were certainly new elements as well, such as the separation of the domestic sphere, the emergence of the ideology of the natural character of the sexes, and the spread of the male breadwinner model in all social classes.

The nineteenth century, in particular, was characterised by various mixtures of tradition and innovation in all aspects of family life. However, from a long-term historical view, the history of the European family in general does not so much appear as a series of radical breaks, but as an evolutionary process characterised by the continuous recombination of old and new elements.

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