

*Economic History Review* (2009)

# *Girl power: the European marriage pattern and labour markets in the North Sea region in the late medieval and early modern period<sup>1</sup>*

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How good to be a woman, how much better to be a man!  
Maidens and wenches, remember the lesson you're about to hear  
Don't hurtle yourself into marriage far too soon.  
The saying goes: 'where is your spouse? Where's your honour?'  
But one who earns her board and clothes  
Shouldn't scurry to suffer a man's rod . . .  
Though wedlock I do not decry;  
Unyoked is best! Happy the woman without a man.

Poem by Anna Bijns (1493–1575) on the benefits of celibacy and late marriage<sup>2</sup>

This article argues that the European Marriage Pattern (EMP) has played a fundamental role in western Europe's economic development. The EMP emerged in north-western Europe in the late medieval period as a result of the preaching of the Catholic Church promoting marriage based on consensus, the rise of labour markets, and specific institutions concerning property transfers between generations that encouraged wage labour by women. It resulted in a demographic regime embedded in a highly commercial environment, in which households interacted frequently with labour, capital, and commodity markets. We also discuss possible long-term consequences for human capital formation and institution building.

## I

In 1505 Janne Heyndericx, aged 31, living in the Zeeland village of Kouwenkerke, told a committee investigating the malpractices by the local magistrates the following story:<sup>3</sup> eight years earlier, she had promised to marry a young man, Adriaen Jacopsz, and he had also promised to marry her. They slept together and continued to do so without ever officially marrying as was required by the law of the holy Church, postponing their wedding until a more mutually convenient time.

<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank the participants of the Global Economic History (GEHN) workshop on 'The rise, organization and institutional framework of factor markets' (Utrecht, 23–6 June 2005), and in particular Peter Boomgaard, Bruce Campbell, Marcus Cerman, Ken Pomeranz, and Maarten Prak, and the referees of this journal, for their comments on the first draft of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Women writers*, p. 382.

<sup>3</sup> On the malpractices concerning the levying of arbitrary fines on people living together who had not been officially married by the church, see Bange and Weiler, 'De problematiek', pp. 399–400.

At that time she was still living with her mother and stepfather, who subsequently refused to maintain her, so that she was forced to find employment elsewhere and left to earn a wage. When she came to work in Kouwenkerke, she lived with another young man by whom she had a child. Four or five years before, Adriaen had tried to be released from his promise to marry her, although they were still in regular contact and were sleeping together. She said she still wanted to marry him, as although they had not been married in the eyes of the Church, as far as she was concerned they were indeed married before God. Moreover, she reported that it was his fault that she had gone so far (that is, had had a child with another man), because he had kept her waiting for so long.<sup>4</sup>

This story of Janne is strikingly ‘modern’ and when seen in a global perspective, Janne’s behaviour appears to be exceptional; such an informal ‘marriage’ occurring in other parts of the world would have been difficult to imagine. This story is typical of the marriage patterns that emerged from the North Sea area in the late middle ages. One of the elements that make this story so ‘modern’ is that the decision to marry was taken, not by parents or other members of an older generation, but by the marriage partners themselves. As followers of the Catholic Church, Janne and Adriaen promised to marry each other and considered their promise equivalent to being married before God. Secondly, Janne’s mother and stepfather decided that this ‘marriage before God’ should result in the formation of a new household, so they refused to maintain Janne any longer, thus forcing her to leave her parents’ household. The third strikingly modern aspect is the fact that Janne was capable of leaving, as she was able to find employment as a wage-earner elsewhere. Easy access to the labour market facilitated both parents and children to adopt this kind of behaviour.

This brief story tells us much about the European marriage pattern (EMP) as it emerged in the late middle ages and became characteristic for western European society in the early modern period. The existing literature on this topic has focused primarily on typical demographic aspects of this marriage pattern, such as the average age of marriage, the share of the population that had never married, and the effects of the EMP on fertility and resulting population growth. In this, the literature has followed Hajnal’s seminal paper from 1965 in which he stressed these ‘distinctive features’ of the EMP.<sup>5</sup> Far less attention has been paid to the underlying mechanisms that led to these outcomes, to the underlying causes of the EMP, which can arguably be classed as mysteries of the demographic and social history of the early modern period. The classic Hajnal paper does allude to these underlying mechanisms. He mentions, for example, that ‘the conviction that marriage should be decided upon only after the future spouses have got to know each other well’ was to be regarded as ‘a relevant factor which distinguishes modern Western populations from the majority of societies’.<sup>6</sup> Hajnal points out that unlike in many other societies where marriage consisted of an arrangement

<sup>4</sup> Story taken from *ibid.*, pp. 404–5. Of course Janne Heyndricx was not alone in her case of a consensual marriage that went wrong. Similar examples exist for the Netherlands and for England and have been mentioned by other historians. See the examples mentioned by Sheehan in ‘Formation and stability of marriage’. See also Goldberg, *Women, work, and life cycle*, pp. 248–9, and several examples of similar cases in later times in Outhwaite, *Clandestine marriage in England*, pp. 1–50.

<sup>5</sup> Hajnal, ‘European marriage in perspective’, p. 101.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

between the heads of households who exchanged a spouse with a wedding gift, marriage in north-western Europe meant the establishment of a new household by the spouses themselves, who therefore needed a conjugal fund. This 'neo-locality' meant that many were unable to marry because they could not afford this 'investment'.<sup>7</sup> In this paper we will attempt to develop these leads in order to explain the mechanisms behind the story of Janne Heyndericx and Adriaen Jacopsz.<sup>8</sup>

Central to our argument is the consideration that a household is a cooperative economic unit aimed at the fulfilment of the physical and emotional needs of its members, and characterized by certain inequalities (that is, power imbalances) between generations and sexes. It is based on implicit and explicit contracts between household members, such as the marriage contract and the implicit contracts that exist between different generations. The hypothesis at the core of this article is that the EMP is characterized by power balances between husband and wife and between parents and children, which differs from more common forms of marriage and household formation. To be more precise: the most striking feature of the EMP is that the traditional inequalities between the sexes and the generations are caused by socioeconomic, ideological, and institutional factors. The EMP in its purest form appears to be a rather 'extreme' case on the spectrum, as women have a relatively large say in the marriage itself (as it is based on the consent of both spouses)—especially when the women contributed to the income of their households. In a nutshell, it is argued in this article that the particular features of the EMP—late and non-universal marriage—are the result of its relatively 'democratic' character.

Next, we will argue that the EMP was essentially an institutional adaptation to a situation of rapidly expanding employment opportunities and relatively high remuneration in the century or so after the Black Death (although the explanation for its appearance is more complex, as we will try to show later on). In brief, it was a reproductive strategy developed by both male and female wage-earners which was embedded in a broader institutional framework in which market exchange and trust in the functioning of markets was of fundamental importance. Not only did wage income become a large part of the household income, but these households also gained access to capital markets and to markets for consumer goods (a large part of which they did not produce themselves, as their main income consisted of wages). Simultaneously they developed new strategies for survival in the long term and for enhancing their success and that of their children in the new market environment. Among these strategies were increased investment in formal schooling, in training as apprentices or as servants in others' households, and in social capital to address issues of old age or single parenthood. The result was a society in which between 30 and 60 per cent of the population were partly or completely dependent on wage labour (by men, women, and children), in which markets permeated all aspects of economic life, and in which small, conjugal households became increasingly interwoven within a social infrastructure (of poor relief insti-

<sup>7</sup> In his 1982 paper, these thoughts were specified in more detail. See Hajnal, 'Two kinds', pp. 454–5.

<sup>8</sup> This point was already made by Smith in 1979: 'The search for the European marriage pattern as a 'statistical' artefact is intriguing, but it would be unfortunate if, in being so preoccupied with actual ages . . . we failed to detect the wider social structural features that sustained it. Without this, any means of understanding the precise determinants of this unique arrangement will be thwarted' (Smith, 'Some reflections', pp. 101–2).

tutions) which sustained their reproduction.<sup>9</sup> This society emerged in the late middle ages in the North Sea area—in England and the Low Countries in particular—and it was, we claim, the long-term dynamism of this structure which helps to explain the long-term success of this region in the world economy of the early modern period.<sup>10</sup>

The special characteristics and the importance of the EMP are evident when it is compared with situations elsewhere in the world. The more general features of the EMP will be clarified on the basis of comparisons with marriage practices east of Hajnal's line, between Trieste and St Petersburg,<sup>11</sup> and in particular with China, whenever appropriate.<sup>12</sup> By doing so we hope to complement the current great divergence debate with a new approach to explaining the differences in economic growth between east and west, although we do realize that we cannot do more than briefly touch upon some of the aspects of this complex issue in this article. A comparison between marriage practices in southern and eastern Europe and in the North Sea may shed light on the reasons why the North Sea area took the lead in economic development. According to Hajnal, Herlihy, and Reher, there is considerable variety in marriage practices within Europe, and we use their broad geographical subdivisions as our starting point.<sup>13</sup>

## II

The EMP emerged in north-western Europe because of a combination of three socio-economic and ideological factors: first, the stress on consensus instead of parental authority for the formation of a marriage; second, the position of women in the transfer of property between husband and wife and between parents and children; and third, the accessibility to, and size of, the labour market.

### *a) Consensus versus Parental Authority/Neolocality versus Patrilocal Households*

The story of Janne Heyndericx illustrates how marriage among wage earners in the late middle ages was to a large extent based on consensus between the two spouses, a factor already mentioned by Hajnal as distinctive of Europe. This idea is clearly

<sup>9</sup> Kussmaul, *Servants in husbandry*, p. 26, estimates that in the 15–24 age group, 60% of the population were servants.

<sup>10</sup> It is possible to distinguish a core area—Flanders, the coastal provinces of the Netherlands, and the eastern counties of England—where we find the features of the system most clearly, and a 'larger' North Sea area, including the inland provinces of the Netherlands, Belgium, northern France, and the rest of England, where socioeconomic conditions were often different and the system can not always be found in its 'pure' form.

<sup>11</sup> We follow the line that Hajnal used as a way to divide the marriage patterns of Europe. Within the part east of this line, we compare two of the four sectors that have been described by Laslett in his overview of family and household as a work group and kin group in traditional Europe: we consider north-western Europe, where we concentrate on the Low Countries and England, and the Mediterranean, where Italy receives most of our attention (for source-related reasons). See Laslett, 'Family and household'; Wall, 'Owning real property'; Poos, 'Pre-history', pp. 228–38.

<sup>12</sup> The scope of this article is insufficient to treat the differences with China in full. We refer to the following recent works that could complement our article, at least on the issue of marriage and the position of women in China: Ebrey, *Women and the family*; Gates, 'Footloose in Fujan'; Birge, 'Women and Confucianism'; Bernhardt, *Women and property in China*; Zurndorfer, ed., *Chinese women*; Goody, *Oriental, the ancient and the primitive*, pp. 21–112.

<sup>13</sup> Hajnal, 'Two kinds'; Reher, 'Family ties'; Herlihy, *Medieval households*.

so fundamental to the EMP that the chronology can to some extent be derived from the emergence of this doctrine. In the early middle ages, marriage was, according to Biller, basically 'a lay and secular matter, whose essentials were the handling over of a girl, by her father, to the groom, the exchanging of gifts, and perhaps the girl's *deduction in domum*, her 'being brought into the house' of the groom or his family'. This changed when the Church slowly took over and 'established a near exclusive competence over marriage in most regions of Latin Christendom'.<sup>14</sup> This gradual change was also symbolized by a change in the location of the marriage ceremony, from the house of the family of the groom to the church.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the Church was responsible for defining marriage, whether it was based on mutual consent or on *copula carnalis* (physical union), an idea that dates back to St Augustine. It is significant that the north and the south had different views on this. Paris, representing the north, emphasized consent and Bologna, representing the south, focused on consummation. Scholars at the time were aware that this represented contrasting regional customs.<sup>16</sup> Around 1140, Gratian established that according to canon law the bonds of marriage were determined by mutual consent and not by the consummation of marriage, because 'where there is to be union of bodies there ought to be union of spirits'.<sup>17</sup> Gratian and his followers frequently pointed to evidence that marriages arranged against the wishes of the partners usually brought about bad results.<sup>18</sup> Gratian's work formed the basis for further theological discussions<sup>19</sup> and eventually led to the inclusion of the doctrine in the decretals of Gregory IX (1234).<sup>20</sup> Thus, boys and girls of a legally marriageable age (14 years for boys, 12 years for girls) were permitted to perform the sacrament of marriage themselves. Marriages were made by God (which was also Janne's conviction); a priest only proclaimed his will for a couple after the fact. But this doctrine also led to the problem of secret marriages—marriages that occurred privately without witnesses and disconnected from any public institution—which was one of the reasons why it came under attack during the Reformation.<sup>21</sup>

Although it has been shown that the doctrine was not well received among the aristocracy, it did reach the rest of the people via conciliar and episcopal legislation and sermons.<sup>22</sup> On the basis of an analysis of English pastoral manuals that were increasingly used after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 to instruct local pastors on their guidance of the laity, Murray concluded that the doctrine of consensual marriage had spread widely and quickly to the parish level by the

<sup>14</sup> Biller, *Measure of multitude*, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, and see also Berman, *Law and revolution*, on the papal revolution.

<sup>16</sup> Biller, *Measure of multitude*, pp. 53–4.

<sup>17</sup> Noonan, 'Power to choose', p. 425; for a more detailed description of how this marriage theory, based on consensus, came into being within the Catholic Church, see the chapter on 'Choice of marriage partner in the middle ages: development and mode of application of a theory of marriage', in Sheehan, *Marriage, family, and law*, pp. 91–117.

<sup>18</sup> Noonan, 'Power to choose', p. 434.

<sup>19</sup> Ozment, *When fathers ruled*, p. 26, and Sheehan, 'Choice of marriage partner', in Sheehan, *Marriage, family, and law*, pp. 91–117.

<sup>20</sup> Brundage, *Law, sex, and Christian society*, pp. 332–3; see also the discussion in Smith, 'Geographical diversity', pp. 18–21.

<sup>21</sup> Ozment, *When fathers ruled*, pp. 25–7.

<sup>22</sup> Sheehan, 'Marriage theory and practice'.

middle of the fifteenth century.<sup>23</sup> The problems that resulted from the application of the new doctrine—such as bigamy and clandestine marriages—were increasingly dealt with in the manuals during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when the new marriage practices had been widely and successfully disseminated.<sup>24</sup>

The fact that both the man's and his future wife's consent was necessary for marriage meant that it was a contract between 'equals' since neither one could impose consensus upon the other partner. This means that in principle the bargaining position of women in such a marriage pattern is relatively strong: a woman could (try to) select the kind of husband that suited her. In the more romantic interpretation of the EMP, marriage was based on the love between the two partners, which must have had a strong equalizing effect also—assuming that love presupposes a certain degree of equality between the partners. This equalizing effect was also visible in the way in which partners dealt with their property.<sup>25</sup>

As a result, one would expect inequality within marriage to be more common in marriage systems in which the consent of the wife is not required. In China, for example, marriage was a contract not between two individuals, but between two families. Eastman cites Mencius who states that 'marriage is a bond between two surnames', a family matter, by the family, for the family.<sup>26</sup> Chinese girls often met their husbands for the first time on their wedding day, even though they were groomed for marriage from their birth. The marriage partners were chosen by their families, through a matchmaker who was responsible for making the arrangements.<sup>27</sup>

The power of the male head of the household in Europe was much more circumscribed than in other systems (such as the Chinese marriage pattern), as the EMP was based on the consent of both spouses. Herlihy is convinced that 'The father . . . could neither force a son or daughter into an unwanted marriage, nor prevent him or her from marrying . . . The Church's doctrine was a damaging blow to paternal authority within the medieval household, and by itself assured that the medieval family could never develop into a true patriarchy'.<sup>28</sup> Engelen has stated that the essence of the EMP was that European fathers (and mothers for

<sup>23</sup> Murray, 'Individualism and consensual marriage', pp. 140–4. For the Low Countries: Bange and Weiler, 'De problematiek', pp. 399–406, and Hoppenbrouwers, 'Maagschap en vriendschap', pp. 73–4. The dissemination of the doctrine of consensual marriage went hand in hand with the spread of the Church's ideas on the right to (re)marry for widows. In 1160, Bartholomew, Bishop of Exeter, wrote a penitential that confirmed the Church's doctrine that a widow had the right to decide whether to marry or not. This type of consent was shortly thereafter extended to all marriages. Some manuals even went as far as promoting clandestine marriage. Murray refers to the work of the fourteenth-century Englishman William of Pagula, *Oculus sacerdotis*. See Murray, 'Individualism and consensual marriage', pp. 131–8.

<sup>24</sup> See, for Ghent, Nicholas, *Domestic life of a medieval city*, p. 54.

<sup>25</sup> Schmidt mentions that in seventeenth-century Leiden, in more than three-quarters of the testaments, partners named each other as the most important heirs, and in some cases they indicated in the testament that they did this because of 'conjugal affection' or 'love'. See Schmidt, "'Touching inheritance'", p. 186. See also Goldberg, *Women, work, and life cycle*, p. 273. For an overview of the debate on the emergence of the companionate marriage, see the recent work by Crawford, *European sexualities*, pp. 13–19. See also Goody, *Development*, pp. 128–9, on the relationship between age gap, companionate marriage, and monogamy.

<sup>26</sup> Eastman, *Family, fields, and ancestors*, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Maynes and Waltner, 'Childhood, youth, and the female life cycle'. It would, however, be wrong to depict China as fundamentally unchanging in this respect. In fact, some evidence suggests that the patriarchal features here became stronger as Confucianism became institutionalized and part of the official doctrines of the Empire, and that during the Sung dynasty the position of women was stronger than under later dynasties; cf. Birge, 'Women and Confucianism'.

<sup>28</sup> Herlihy, *Medieval households*, p. 81.

that matter) ‘lacked the means of controlling their adult children. They therefore let them find their own way in the world and hired other people’s children to do the work that in China would have been done by their own children’.<sup>29</sup> In his view, differences in parental authority—strong in China, weak in Europe—explain why in Europe children were allowed to choose their wedding partner and to set up their own household.<sup>30</sup>

Critics of the idea that marriage based on consent was related to the preaching of the Catholic Church have maintained that this cannot explain the rise of the EMP, because it emerged only in the north-western part of the continent, whereas ‘in other parts of Christian Europe . . . families maintained sturdy patriarchal marriage strategies, often in open defiance of ecclesiastical dictates’.<sup>31</sup> This is an important point, although it should also be acknowledged that eventually the prevalence of the EMP, which became the dominant marriage pattern in Europe west of the line from Trieste to St Petersburg, more or less coincided with the medieval presence of the Catholic Church—and it is highly unlikely that that was completely coincidental. But according to Hartman and others, other factors must have influenced the first emergence of the EMP in north-western Europe, particularly in England and in the Low Countries. In both regions during the fifteenth century, the marriage pattern was dominated by the consensus between the partners, although average ages of marriage were still relatively low at the time.<sup>32</sup>

We will now focus on the other factors that have contributed to the formation of the EMP, and may help to explain why its genesis occurred in the North Sea area: the transfer of property and access to the labour market.

#### b) *Transfer of Property between Generations and within Households*

One of the factors that can contribute to our understanding of the emergence of the EMP in north-west Europe, and not in the south, is the difference in the system of property inheritance between generations and between husband and wife in these two regions. The western inheritance system was distinctive because of women’s rights to inherit, and the ability to transfer landed property to and through women, as inheritants or as dowers. Within Europe, both the bride’s and groom’s side of the marriage had property rights in their union.<sup>33</sup> But internally there were many differences, in particular concerning the timing of women’s

<sup>29</sup> Engelen, ‘Hajnal hypothesis’.

<sup>30</sup> These claims are also reinforced when we look at other indicators such as the relationship between the position in the sequence of children within the household and the age of marriage, or the effect of the father being alive at the age of marriage. Wrigley, Davies, Oeppen, and Schofield showed for England that children born first were not favoured over children born later (*English population history*, pp. 168–9), and they showed that if the father had died before the bride or groom had turned 18, this did not have any effect on their average marriage age (*ibid.*, p. 170). In short, family circumstances had no influence on the marriage age of children. See also Laslett, *Family life*, p. 177.

<sup>31</sup> Hartman, *Household*, p. 98.

<sup>32</sup> In his 1965 paper, Hajnal concluded that the EMP was not yet in place in the late middle ages, a conclusion largely based on his analysis of the 1377 poll tax; since then it has been argued that he misinterpreted this source, and that the ‘level of marital incidence is fully compatible with the European type in late fourteenth century England’; see the discussion in Smith, ‘Relative prices’, pp. 41–2.

<sup>33</sup> Such regimes are referred to as systems of ‘diverging devolution of property’ because in all of them property goes to both sons and daughters (‘diverges’) as it descends (‘devolves’). See Goody, *Production and reproduction*, pp. 10–36.

access to their share of the inheritance. Marriage played a crucial role: the bulk of the daughter's share of the inheritance was either transferred to her at the start of her marriage, in the form of a dowry, or at her parents' death. The former was more typical in the south of Europe and the latter was common in the north, although pre-mortem endowments and dowries were not unusual in the north either. Essentially, intergenerational property transfer was less closely related to the event of marriage in the north than in the south.<sup>34</sup>

These differences have been carefully studied at the border between the two regions in France. In the south of France, in the *pays d'écrit* or the land of written law, marital property regimes were, for ordinary people as for elites, dotal in form. In the *pays d'écrit* regions, decisions about marital property relations and succession were made in accordance with principles of law derived from Roman law. The rules were written down, commented upon, and authorized by legal scholars, judges, and magistrates. In this system, custom did not govern inheritance as it did in the north. Individuals had choices about how their property was used and transferred, and the owners of family assets were given a degree of control over these decisions. In theory, it was possible for fathers to endow children differently at marriage, for example, because the dowry was part of negotiations with the family of the other spouse. These differences also concerned the way in which property was held within the marriage. The southern European system is often referred to as 'separatist' because the property of either spouse brought into the marriage was considered to be distinct, and a conjugal fund was not created at wedlock. The northern European situation is described as 'conjugal'.<sup>35</sup> The property that a bride brought into the marriage was not held separately as it was in the south, but was instead merged into a communal account that was under the full control of the husband but to which the widow also had rights.<sup>36</sup> Wealth accumulated during the marriage also contributed to the conjugal fund.

This created—at least in theory—different incentives for increasing the economic activities of women during marriage. In the north, wives could contribute to their conjugal fund and profit from its growth; in the south, their wealth was more or less fixed, regardless of what economic activities they undertook. It also had implications for their position after marriage; having the right to a share in the accumulated wealth gave greater opportunities for widows to start a new business and to find a new partner. Here again, the practice might have been quite different from the theory. Couples in the north could, by marital contract, demand a separation of property and Howell writes that the south was not uniform in this practice and considerably less devoted to the notion of separatism. At least until about 1500, marital property law in the south was similar to northern communal systems in its hybridism and mobility.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Smith, 'Women's property rights', p. 165. It cannot be denied, however, that there was a substantial difference between the continental part of the North Sea area and England; these mainly concern the somewhat separate question of primogeniture, which was still quite important in England, although in practice this was not always applied; see Spufford, 'Peasant inheritance customs', p. 158; the Low Countries seem to be particularly advanced in their equal division of property between sons and daughters. Cf. Cooper, 'Patterns of inheritance', p. 224; Leroy Ladurie, 'Family structures', pp. 51, 66; Schmidt, *Overleven na de dood*, p. 102.

<sup>35</sup> Howell, *Marriage exchange*, p. 212.

<sup>36</sup> Taken from *ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 212–3.

The distinction between the north and the south was perhaps more evident in terms of property transfer from parents to children in these two regions. Institutions such as the *Monte dell dotti* (dowry funds), established in Tuscany during the fifteenth century, are evidence of the continued importance of the dotal regime in the south in all layers of society.<sup>38</sup> Among the Romans, the main purpose of the dowry was to help the groom bear the burden of matrimony (*sustinere onera matrimonii*). In its medieval Italian version, however, the Roman *dos* was given a special twist. Unlike the original Roman practice, the medieval Italian dowry came to be regarded as the girl's share of the patrimony. This had several important effects. One consequence was that girls were excluded from a further share in the patrimony (the *exclusio propter dotem*).<sup>39</sup> The *fraterna*, or enduring joint inheritance, was for brothers alone: sisters, provided with dowries, had no further legal part to play in their paternal family's economic life.<sup>40</sup> These *fraterna* or *frèresches* were a form of peasant inheritance established in the north of Italy (Tuscany, Lombardy, and Venice) and central France in order to avoid fragmentation of the property and often resulted in an entirely different household structure (that is, co-residence of several family members and thus the de facto creation of extended families).<sup>41</sup>

In the north of France, dowries were less important, and the status of heirs and their property rights were determined by birth, not by fiat. In the north, wives did not have the same freedom of choice in terms of endowing at marriage or inheritance after their husband's death. In the few cases where they did have some freedom of interpretation, as in Douai, for example, they owed their freedoms to a peculiar interpretation of 'community' rather than to general principles that vested absolute ownership rights in individuals.<sup>42</sup>

To a certain extent we can only speculate about the potential effects of differences in property transfer regimes on marriage and on household formation. First, we claim that there was probably a direct relationship between marriage age and property transfer between parents and children, which influenced the parents' decision to marry off their daughters as soon as possible, while also affecting the wives' degree of control over when their marriage would take place. If a woman had a right to her parent's inheritance without having to marry, there was no financial incentive for an early marriage. In contrast, the southern dowry system created incentives for both parents and girls to arrange early marriages. Women acquired their share in the estate as a dowry (which was to return to the wife after her husband's death) and the size of her dowry was dependent upon the goodwill of her parents, which created the leverage for parents to control the marriage process. Thus in areas with partible inheritance, where women were certain about their share of their parents' estate, women could afford to wait before marrying. We may even go as far as suggesting that they used this time to accumulate extra resources in order to make themselves more attractive as a potential marriage

<sup>38</sup> Kirshner and Molho, 'Dowry fund'; Molho, 'Deception and marriage strategy'.

<sup>39</sup> We cannot deal in depth here with the precise evolution of the dotal system. We therefore refer to works by the experts; see Hughes, 'From brideprice to dowry'; M. Botticini and A. Siow, 'Why dowries?', working paper [WWW document]. URL <http://www.economics.utoronto.ca/siow/papers/dowry.pdf#search=marriage%20dotal%20dowry> [accessed on 26 September 2008].

<sup>40</sup> Chojnacki, 'Dowries and kinsmen', p. 575.

<sup>41</sup> Gottlieb, *Family in the western world*, p. 215.

<sup>42</sup> Howell, *Marriage exchange*, p. 212.

partner. Women had limited time to do this in those areas where women only received their part of their parents' estate on marriage. One could argue that dowry systems were also more paternal. In theory, the presence of the Catholic Church in southern Europe meant that women had a right to decide upon their marriage partners. One could argue—on the basis of evidence, for example, from England—that in the north girls also received endowments without, or before, getting married.<sup>43</sup> This could only diminish the importance of other marriage-related property transfers and thus make age at marriage even less significant in relation to intergenerational property transfers. Essentially, property transfers in the north (but not the south) may have been unrelated to the event of marriage.<sup>44</sup> This also fits with our findings of consensual marriage, neolocality, and the high number of single people in the north.

In a dowry system, women had incentives to marry early. It probably created similar incentives for parents. In fifteenth-century Tuscany, the larger the contribution of the bride to the marital household (in terms of ability to perform household work and to bear children), the smaller the dowry her parents would be obliged to pay to 'convince' the groom to accept their daughter. A woman who waited too long before marrying would become too expensive to 'sell' in the marriage market. Her parents would have to pay a larger dowry to compensate the groom's household for the smaller net positive contribution the bride would provide in the marital household.<sup>45</sup> The younger the bride, the larger her net positive contribution to the marital household and, therefore, the smaller the dowry her parents had to pay. The importance of the age of the bride is also evident from the fact that—as Molho has shown—many fathers presented their daughters as being younger than they actually were in the Catasto, in order to improve their marriage chances.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, we argue that in the southern system these elements, in combination with the separation of property within the household, may have prevented women from becoming active in the labour market (after marriage) because it remained uncertain whether they would ever benefit from their efforts after the death of their husbands. But even if they had not had such overtly opportunistic ideas before entering into marriage, their early motherhood would probably have prevented them from being as active in the labour market as north-western European women. In the north, women contributed to their future share of the inheritance in the knowledge that they would receive their share of the conjugal fund eventually. The southern system gave fewer opportunities for widows to take over their deceased husbands' businesses because they did not necessarily receive a share of the inheritance, nor were they as actively involved in the business as their northern colleagues.<sup>47</sup>

Our interpretation of the possible links between the inheritance system and their effect on the EMP are for the most part tentative. In some cases it is argued that

<sup>43</sup> Smith, 'Women's property rights'.

<sup>44</sup> See also Leroy Ladurie, 'Family structures', p. 42, on the close relationship between parental authority and intergenerational transfers in southern France.

<sup>45</sup> Botticini, 'Loveless economy?', p. 110.

<sup>46</sup> See Molho, 'Deception and marriage strategy', pp. 193–203. The Catasto is the famous Florentine tax register of 1427, containing detailed information on demographic structure of the population.

<sup>47</sup> See also Saito, 'Third pattern'.

the lineal marital property regime was devised to control women.<sup>48</sup> Others claim that dotal regimes might have been more advantageous to women than community property regimes because they protected them from the misadventures or ill will of their husbands and gave them, as wives, some property of their own in the form of their dowries.<sup>49</sup>

c) *Access to the Labour Market*

In the north, the preaching of the Church and inheritance patterns may have made it easier for young men and women to defy parental authority, decide whom they wished to marry, and set up an independent household. But it was the rise of labour markets in Europe at the time that was most fundamental to the consolidation of western European marriage habits into a recognizable pattern. Before 1348, a well-developed labour market had emerged in many parts of western Europe, in which a significant share of the population earned a living. After 1348, the sudden fall in population levels due to the Black Death led to a booming labour market with a growing demand for labour—of both men and women—resulting in a strong increase in real earnings, in particular for women.<sup>50</sup> This accelerated the general adoption of the EMP in the century after 1348.

Initially, the EMP was the marriage pattern of the poor, the wage-earners who did not own or rent a farm or any other substantial property.<sup>51</sup> This is clearly illustrated by Hanawalt in her analysis of marriage patterns among English peasants. She pointed out that marriage among the poor was characterized by the (more or less) free choice of the partners themselves:

Marriage for love has traditionally been assumed to be the dubious privilege of those without property. The lord would not bother to impose a merchet, parents would have no property to bestow and thus have no control, and the Church would not dissolve a marriage even if all the young couple did was to agree to marry while lying together in a haystack. When a young woman, through her initiative and wages, managed to accumulate a bit of chattels and land and paid her own merchet, she could choose her own marriage partner. But the freedom in choice of marriage partner may have been a larger phenomenon, going far beyond those without property.<sup>52</sup>

In the cities similar developments occurred, as is clear from Goldberg's study of York, for example. A particularly important source of female wage labour (which is often linked to the existence of the EMP<sup>53</sup>) was life-cycle servanthood.<sup>54</sup> Goldberg concluded that in the century after the Black Death young men and women

<sup>48</sup> See examples given by Howell, *Marriage exchange*, p. 223.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>50</sup> In particular as servants in urban households. Mayhew gives an overview of the number of servants and apprentices in English communities, which complements Laslett's (*Family life*, p. 93) claim that on average between 1574 and 1821, 13.4% of the population in English communities were servants or apprentices. See Mayhew, 'Life-cycle, service and the family unit', pp. 201–3.

<sup>51</sup> For example Mate, *Daughters*, pp. 33–4: 'the higher up the social scale one was, the earlier one was likely to marry, with the least freedom of choice'.

<sup>52</sup> Hanawalt, *Ties that bound*, p. 202; see also Bennett, 'Medieval peasant marriage', for more evidence on the fact that women did indeed pay their own merchet.

<sup>53</sup> Hajnal, 'Two kinds', pp. 470–6; also Kussmaul, *Servants in husbandry*, p. 26.

<sup>54</sup> Goldberg, 'Marriage, migration, servanthood and life-cycle', pp. 117–22; Smith, 'Geographical diversity', pp. 179–84; Laslett, *Family life*, p. 44; Mayhew, 'Life-cycle, service and the family unit', p. 202.

working as servants in the city of York were able to make marriage choices much more autonomously than were their counterparts in rural Yorkshire.<sup>55</sup> He also compared the reactions of two societies (England and Tuscany) to the consequences of the Plague of 1348:

In England, the labour shortage produced by the huge increase of mortality from the Plague prompted an influx of unmarried women into the towns, a rise in marriage age, and an increase in the proportion of women who never married. In Italy, however, the employment of single women did not increase much in the post-Plague era, nor did women's marriage rate increase. New employment vacancies in Italian cities were filled by men from the countryside, producing high urban male sex ratios, in contrast with low ratios in north-western European cities, where women often outnumbered men.<sup>56</sup>

Although it is claimed that the number of female servants in Italian towns has been underestimated due to the particularity of the Catasto,<sup>57</sup> it would be hard to find situations—such as in late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Yorkshire—where the number female servants outnumbered the number of male servants.<sup>58</sup> The differences between north and south are more apparent in comparing the period during which girls went into service, and the average length of their service. Goldberg calculated that Yorkshire female servants entered servanthood in their early teens and often worked until their mid-twenties—after which they married—whereas female servants in Florence and Barcelona started work at the age of eight and left service before they turned 20.<sup>59</sup> Klapisch-Zuber notices that married women and widows far outnumbered unmarried females in service in Florence. It is clear that becoming a servant as an unmarried girl was seen as a last resort, as it could endanger a girl's honour.<sup>60</sup> According to Smith, this is the fundamental difference between servanthood in the north and the south: in the north, servanthood was based on free choice and on amassing a 'marriage budget', whereas in the south, it was seen as a last resort that would in fact reduce the girl's marriage options.<sup>61</sup>

A number of studies have documented the remarkable depth of the labour market in late medieval western Europe, although there is still discussion about its growth. In the Low Countries, the trend was clearly upward, and in sixteenth-century Holland and the Guelders River area, up to 60 per cent of the working population were dependent on wage labour.<sup>62</sup> In England, the estimates range from 25 per cent to more than 50 per cent of the population being (partially) active

<sup>55</sup> Goldberg, *Women, work, and life cycle*, pp. 236, 243–55, 261–3, 273–5; idem, *Youth*, p. 5; idem, 'Female labour, service and marriage', pp. 37–8. For more data on the importance of servanthood in early modern Europe, and in particular England, see also Smith, 'Geographical diversity', esp. p. 36. See also pp. 40–1 on the freedom to move by servants in England, versus Italy.

<sup>56</sup> Summary of Goldberg's research as stated by Hartman, *Household*, p. 77; Kowaleski, 'Singlewomen', pp. 50–1; and Lynch, *Individuals, families, and communities*, pp. 40–1, give additional evidence for the differences in sex ratio and share of single women in the population between north and south.

<sup>57</sup> Molho, *Marriage alliance*; Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, family, and ritual*.

<sup>58</sup> Goldberg, *Youth*, p. 12.

<sup>59</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 5, and Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, family, and ritual*, pp. 173–4.

<sup>60</sup> Klapisch-Zuber, 'Women servants in Florence', pp. 72–3. See also Molho, 'Deception and marriage strategy', pp. 204–17, who gives a large number of interesting examples of the Tuscans' ideas about the ideal age of a bride: she should still be a *fianculla*, or a young girl in her early/mid-teens. Comparatively, her husband should be anywhere from 20 to 35 years old.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, 'Geographical diversity', p. 45.

<sup>62</sup> van Bavel, 'Rural wage labour'.

in the labour market. The most recent estimates by Dyer suggest that there was stability between *c.* 1300 and 1520, at an extremely high level of about 50 per cent—probably somewhat more than this in the most commercialized eastern counties, and less in the west.<sup>63</sup> Poos argues, in a detailed study of Essex in England, that being a wage labourer was a normal part of the life cycle of a very large part of the population.<sup>64</sup> These extremely high levels of wage labour can be compared with estimates for Ming China, where perhaps 1 to 2 per cent of the population were wage-earners.<sup>65</sup>

We therefore hypothesize that the labour market for women thus played a key role in the genesis of the EMP. Increased access to employment after the Black Death may have set in motion a process resulting in the characteristic features of the EMP. The information on female wages in medieval Europe is quite scarce, but some data are available which give an impression of what might have happened after 1348. Thorold Rogers estimated that ‘before the Plague, labour which is specially designated as women’s work is paid ordinarily at the rate of a penny a day’, which was about half of the daily wage of an unskilled labourer.<sup>66</sup> For example, thatchers’ assistants (usually women), earned a third of the wage of the thatcher himself (one versus three pence). After 1348, the wages of thatchers’ assistants increased to two pence in the 1360s and almost three pence at the end of the fourteenth century, whereas the wages of thatchers increased by only a third to about four pence.<sup>67</sup> These thatchers’ wages are probably the best guide to the relative development of women’s wage levels after 1348.<sup>68</sup> In addition, government regulation was also quite beneficial for women: the Statutes of Labourers of 1444 set the wages of female labourers at four and a half pence, which was in fact higher than that of unskilled male labourers (‘every other labourer’) which was set at three-and-a-half pence.<sup>69</sup>

A number of authors (including Beveridge and Hilton) have noted the strong increase in nominal and real wages of women after 1348, also pointing out that in some cases women were paid the same as men for the same kind of work. Hilton noted also that ‘around 1400, countrywomen were doing the same manual jobs as men, such as haymaking, weeding, mowing, carrying corn, driving plough oxen,

<sup>63</sup> Dyer, *Age of transition?*, pp. 218–20.

<sup>64</sup> Poos, *Rural society*, pp. 183–229, for England (in particular Essex).

<sup>65</sup> See Xu, Wu, and Curwen, *Chinese capitalism*, p. 37.

<sup>66</sup> Rogers, *History*, vol. 1, p. 281.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 321, and *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 274–334; see also Dyer, *Standards of living*, p. 215.

<sup>68</sup> Bardsley (‘Women’s work reconsidered’) is not convinced that wages for women were improving relative to those for men after 1348, and also doubts that (after 1348) they were often paid the same wages as men. Hatcher (‘Debate: women’s work reconsidered’), however, argues that Bardsley’s conclusions are blurred by her focus on payment according to the time spent working, whereas piece-rate wages were far more dominant in agricultural work which is the type of work on which Bardsley focuses. Women might have worked more slowly, but the payment per piece did not differ according to gender, writes Hatcher. The claim of wage discrimination due to the triumph of ‘patriarchal structures’ is according to Hatcher thus biased. Secondly, Bardsley insufficiently acknowledges the importance of labour productivity as a fundamental determinant of wages, whereas Hatcher refers to sources showing that women who could work as hard as men would receive equal pay. Though there clearly is a need for more source material, Hatcher sees it as proven that wage differentiation was more influenced by labour productivity and also institutional factors than gender prejudices. See also Bardsley, ‘Reply’, for a reply to Hatcher’s comments; other contributions to this debate include Penn, ‘Female wage-earners’, and Mate, *Daughters*, pp. 55–7.

<sup>69</sup> Luders, *Statutes*, pp. 337–9.

and breaking stones for road mending'.<sup>70</sup> There is evidence for a similar absence of a gender gap in Holland from the mid-fourteenth until the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>71</sup> A similar compression of wage levels occurred in Holland; wages of binders (mostly women) increased from one-third of the wages of mowers to about 75 per cent in the 1450s, after which these wages seem to have diverged again (declining to about 50 per cent in the 1490s and 44 per cent in the early 1500s).<sup>72</sup> In short, the Black Death caused a considerable improvement in the labour conditions of women in terms of the number of jobs they had access to and in terms of their (relative) remuneration. The degree to which European women took advantage of this situation was, however, quite different from region to region. In the North Sea area, these changes led to a marked increase in women's participation in the labour market, while in the south, where the relative wages of women also increased, other factors, such as the dowry system, constrained this process.

The expansion of the labour market fundamentally changed the balance of power between men and women and between generations. Outside Western Europe, in China for example, households were organized around the collaborative running of a family farm, and the authority of the father was based on his control over the productive resources. If the household did not own substantive productive resources, as was common in north-western Europe during the late middle ages, the economic basis for parental authority was weakened. If, at the same time, young adults gained access to the labour market, particularly when there were strong differentiations of wage labour, and there were a variety of options to choose from to escape the authority of their parents (such as becoming a servant, or a day labourer, or a migrant to the city), the power balance between generations was fundamentally affected. Adolescents over the age of 16 could earn a considerable surplus over what they needed for subsistence: they worked hard but their level of consumption was still relatively low and they did not have the fixed costs that accompany the establishment of a household. In short, it was in the interest of parents to bind their children to the household—as they were net contributors to household income. At the same time, they were attractive to employers, and often found it relatively easy to find jobs once the labour market was relatively well developed. This suggests that the rise of the EMP and the changing power balance between generations may have been caused by the growth of the labour market in late medieval Europe.

One can perhaps go one step further. In the century and a half following the Black Death, young women and men were able to free themselves from parental influence through their high real earnings. In the process, they developed strategies which were labour market-oriented: wage labour became a key stage in the life cycle, starting with work as a servant (girls) or an apprentice (boys) during their

<sup>70</sup> Hilton, *English peasantry*, pp. 102–3; Beveridge, 'Westminster wages'. See also the criticism by Bardsley, 'Women's work reconsidered'.

<sup>71</sup> Work in progress on a more detailed paper discussing the wage gap between the sexes in Holland and England; proof of the similarity in wages for both men and women in Holland in this period can be found in Hamaker, *De Rekeninghe*, pp. 423–4, 440–65, for data on carrying peat and working at chalk ovens, respectively. The work by Boschma-Arnoudse (*Tot verbeteringe*, pp. 342–4) shows that the situation in the 1550s was still the same.

<sup>72</sup> De Moor, *Lonen en prijzen*, pp. 103–6.

teens, through which they acquired the skills and the savings to set up their own household. A very mobile and flexible labour force developed—young people migrated to cities at the age of 12 or 14 when job opportunities were growing there, or moved to other regions and/or jobs when prospects seemed good. Even after marriage and the establishment of a new household, wage labour remained the main source of income. So not only did the booming labour market induce men and women to change their marriage pattern, but the changed marriage pattern in its turn resulted in an increased dependence on wage labour. In our view, the co-evolution of the marriage pattern and the labour market helps to explain the relatively high levels of waged work that can be found in the North Sea region in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The increased participation of young women in the workforce allowed women more independence and control over their lives. Traditionally the father's authority was confined to the household sphere. Also, when youngsters left their household in order to become servants before getting married, they also escaped from their fathers' authority. This independence is evident in the payment of the 'merchet', the feudal fine levied upon marriage of a daughter from a servile family. Bennett has demonstrated that in many cases the daughter was able to pay this sizeable sum herself, sometimes without specifying whom she would marry.<sup>73</sup> Women were supported in their decision to marry through the marriage law, even if their fathers preferred other marriage partners.<sup>74</sup>

Under this system, women could also create a substantial amount of social capital for themselves and for their household members. Although it is rather difficult to quantify this social capital and its impact on women's positions, women in the patrilocal system (joint households) experienced considerable disadvantages in terms of social capital; they moved in with their family-in-law, which was often in another village.<sup>75</sup> Those who could stay in the same family and village benefited more because they were more familiar with the local community, customs, and networks. A girl who left home to get married left behind all that was familiar.<sup>76</sup> To a certain degree this was also the case for European girls who emigrated in order to work as live-in maids or servants. However, because of their participation in the labour market they did manage to create new social capital, for themselves and their future spouses.

We conclude that the emergence of the EMP was the result of the interplay of three factors: an ideological factor (the preaching of the Church), the developing labour market, and a specific system of intergenerational transfers that did not encourage women into early marriage. Whereas the EMP before 1348 was just one of the possibilities in a variety of alternative modes of family constitution, and mainly 'the dubious privilege of the poor', the Black Death—by producing an extraordinary set of circumstances that made EMP the preferred option for large numbers of people—locked into place a self-perpetuating and enforcing system of

<sup>73</sup> Or the equivalent of 25–30 daily wages of an unskilled (female) labourer; Bennett, 'Medieval peasant marriage', p. 202.

<sup>74</sup> As Goldberg writes: 'Where women achieved emotional and economic independence from parents through service or other paid employment, as was more often true of urban society, they were enabled to exercise greater personal choice and to delay marriage, even to get by without marrying' (*Wo men, work, and life cycle*, p. 263).

<sup>75</sup> Cornell, 'Hajnal', p. 146.

<sup>76</sup> Maynes and Waltner, 'Childhood, youth, and the female life cycle'.

wage labour and family formation. Only the upper layers of society, where the long-term management of family property was a vital consideration in marriage behaviour, were probably to a large extent immune from these changes. In this case, parental control remained relatively strong and arranged marriages continued to be rather typical.

### III

Now that we have analysed the key factors in the emergence of the EMP in more detail, and offered an interpretation that focuses on the qualitative aspects of the EMP (consensus of the spouses, weak parental authority, and neolocality), we can revisit its 'distinctive features', such as high average age of marriage and high (female) celibacy, in order to see how they relate to these factors.

Because men and women chose their own partner, marriage under the EMP was mainly the result of a search process that could only be undertaken by young men and women mature enough to select their own partner; hence the average age of marriage was at least 18 to 20 years. In contrast, systems of arranged marriages were characterized by much lower average ages, especially for girls. But within the EMP a lot of variation was possible, depending on the level of real wages and the general state of the economy. The very high average ages of marriage that we find in western Europe in the early modern period are the result of the EMP under circumstances of 'high pressure'; that is, low real wages and relatively high population pressure. In the fifteenth century, by contrast, the same EMP could result in a somewhat lower age of marriage, as conditions were more favourable.<sup>77</sup> The data that we have for late medieval Holland and Zeeland, for example, point to a relatively low age of marriage. In sources from 1505—from which we cited the story of Janne—we find a number of married men who were 20 years of age; a man of 22 years with a wife and four children; and another man, Adriaen Jansz, citizen of Middelburg, 21 years old, who had married his wife Cornelie Adraen Vierloesdochter van Vijkenkercke three years earlier in a marriage that was 'clandestine and in order to get absolution', probably against the will of her parents, who seemed to be of noble descent.<sup>78</sup> On the basis of this evidence it seems that in 1505 in Zeeland the age of marriage of farmers and craftsmen was 20 years or somewhat less. For 1540–1, another rather fragmentary source allows us to estimate the average age of marriage of a group of men and women in the countryside around Leiden (the source mainly contains information on proto-industrial households).<sup>79</sup> It appears that women probably married at the age of 20–1 (n = 10), whereas men were one or two years older (21–2) (n = 29); nevertheless, a large share of men and women married before they reached the age of 20.<sup>80</sup> These estimates are comparable to those for

<sup>77</sup> Youngs, *Life cycle in western Europe*, p. 137, discusses some evidence that age of marriage fell after the Black Death of 1348, and increased in the second half of the fifteenth century as a result of contracting economic opportunities.

<sup>78</sup> Bange and Weiler, 'Die Problematiek', p. 402. On the other hand, the same sources reveal two men, aged 31 and 30 years old, who were still single and living with their mother (and in the first case, with three unmarried sisters).

<sup>79</sup> Posthumus, 'Een zestiende eeuwse enquête'.

<sup>80</sup> See van Zanden, *Rise and decline*, p. 28.

fifteenth-century England, which show a range between about 18 and 23 years (for women). Goldberg suggests for example, that rural women in Yorkshire married in their late teens and early twenties, but urban women waited until their early to mid-twenties.<sup>81</sup> In both countries the average age of marriage increased considerably during the sixteenth century, to reach the levels that were thought by Hajnal to be characteristic of the EMP in the second half of the sixteenth century.<sup>82</sup> In the 1580s and 1590s, the mean age at first marriage for women in Amsterdam fluctuated (according to unpublished research by Hubert Nusteling) between 23.5 and 25 years, and it remained at this level until the 1660s, when it started to rise even further. The mean age at marriage for men was about 1 to 1.5 years higher on average. Of 8,052 men who married in Amsterdam between 1578 and 1601, only 118 (1.5 per cent) were younger than 20, and none were younger than 18, whereas almost half (47.5 per cent) were older than 25.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, in the first decades of the seventeenth century, the average age of (first) marriage in England had increased to more than 25 years for women and about 27.5 years for men.<sup>84</sup> Whereas Hajnal considered those high marriage ages to be one of the fundamental characteristics of the EMP, we propose that they were to some extent the result of the deterioration of living standards during the sixteenth century in a system based on consensus and neolocality.<sup>85</sup>

The pattern found in fifteenth-century north-western Europe is clearly different from that established for the Mediterranean region. Although it is claimed that the ages of women at first marriage in the Catasto could have been underestimated in order to make them more attractive on the marriage market, women did marry rather young in fifteenth-century Florence.<sup>86</sup> Women married in their late teens (on average at age 18) while men married much later, and were much older than their brides (by 10 to 12 years). Celibacy was virtually unknown among the Tuscan women,<sup>87</sup> and remarriage of widows was rather uncommon. Men on the contrary did remarry, but usually with much younger brides.<sup>88</sup> At the age of 21, the average marriage age in England, a Tuscan girl could already be considered as having

<sup>81</sup> Goldberg, *Women, Work, and life cycle*. Data are very scarce; see Kowaleski, 'Singlewomen', pp. 41–5, which offers the best recent overview. See also idem, 'Appendix', p. 326; also Smith, 'Some reflections', for a discussion of some of the evidence; and Youngs, *Life cycle in western Europe*, p. 135.

<sup>82</sup> Hartman, *Household*, p. 39.

<sup>83</sup> van Nierop, 'De bruidegoms van Amsterdam'.

<sup>84</sup> Wrigley et al., *English population history*, p. 134.

<sup>85</sup> Similarly, one finds lower mean ages of marriage in colonial America, where marriage continued to be based on these rules, but the economic conditions were much better than in western Europe; cf. Gallman, 'Relative ages', p. 613, who estimates a mean age of marriage of 20–2 years for women and of 24–6 years for men.

<sup>86</sup> See Molho, 'Deception and marriage strategy', for an interesting comparison between ages in the Catasto and the *Monte delle Doti* (dowry fund, where parents could submit a kind of life insurance that would be paid in full at marriage, for their newborn daughter) for 1480. His analysis shows that the older a girl was, the lesser concordance there could be found between the—probably correct—ages in the records of the *Monte* and the registered ages in the Catasto. But unfortunately Molho does not tell us how much younger the girls were reported to be in the Catasto.

<sup>87</sup> For an overview of the figures on single women in Italy, and elsewhere, see Kowaleski, 'Singlewomen', pp. 43–5.

<sup>88</sup> More than 95% of the women in their late twenties mentioned in the Catasto were married. For analysis of the Catasto, see also Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their families*. See Smith, 'Geographical diversity', p. 50, n. 44.

surpassed the marriageable age.<sup>89</sup> The benchmark age was 19: after that their time to find a husband was running out.<sup>90</sup> Not surprisingly, work by Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber shows us that 97 per cent of all Florentine women had been married by the age of 25.<sup>91</sup>

Much of the literature on the EMP has concentrated on its long-term effects on population growth. Essentially, the first generation of studies which followed Hajnal argued that the EMP used Malthusian preventive checks—that is, the postponement of marriage until age 25–30, and the fact that a relatively large part of the (female) population remained unmarried—to stabilize population growth.<sup>92</sup> When times were bad, marriages were postponed, and population growth slowed down. This was contrasted (following Malthus) with the Asian or Chinese patterns of marriage which were assumed to result in unrestricted population growth because these preventive checks were missing. The new interpretation of Chinese population development, however, has shown that, within marriage, levels of fertility were much lower than in Europe, which is partially the result of the practice of infanticide and partially the effect of a lower level of fertility within marriage as such.<sup>93</sup> Again, it can perhaps be argued that the contrasting levels of marital fertility are to some extent the result of the underlying structures already discussed. When marriage is based on consensus—on mutual love—one expects a high ‘propensity to have sex’, even to have sex before the actual marriage ceremony has taken place (increasing the level of marital fertility even more) since once the decision to marry has been taken one is married ‘before God’. The EMP therefore produces high levels of fertility immediately after marriage and during marriage. Arranged marriages may have a lower ‘propensity to have sex’, or, as argued by Kok, Yang, and Hsieh in a comparative study of fertility in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Taiwan and the Netherlands, ‘in arranged marriages, a large age difference between husband and wife may have obstructed the process of familiarization’.<sup>94</sup> This seems especially true for ‘minor marriages’, which occur in parts of China, characterized by a young girl being taken into the household of a boy at a very early age, their growing up together as brother and sister, and then being declared man and wife at a certain age. As Kok, Yang, and Hsieh convincingly show, these marriages are characterized by a low level of fertility; possibly because

<sup>89</sup> In this context one should also consider the importance of marriage as a way to preserve the honour of the bride and her family. References to this are made by, for example, Klapisch-Zuber and Herlihy (*Tuscans and their families*) on medieval and early modern Tuscany, but also in a more general way by Wrigley et al., *English population history*, pp. 124–5: ‘To oversimplify in the interests of clarity, it might be said, that in most of the major cultures of the past, marriage, at least for women, was triggered by the approach to or the attainment of menarche. Physiological change provoked individual and family action backed by social sanctions. To avoid shame the family had to arrange a match. In contrast, in England, and in some other parts of western Europe, marriage was triggered by economic circumstances and was accordingly a movable feast . . .’.

<sup>90</sup> See Molho, ‘Deception and marriage strategy’, p. 206.

<sup>91</sup> Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Les Toscans et leur familles*, p. 215.

<sup>92</sup> See Wrigley et al., *English population history*, pp. 479–80, for a detailed comparison between the types of preventive checks used in pre-industrial systems. They claim that in low-pressure England, fertility was controlled by the timing and incidence of marriage, whereas in high-pressure France, control was achieved within marriage. For further explanation and refinement of the theory, in particular regarding the situation in France, see Weir, ‘Life under pressure’.

<sup>93</sup> Lee and Feng, *One quarter of humanity*, p. 8.

<sup>94</sup> Kok et al., ‘Marital fertility and birth control’. For an interesting discussion of the effect of age difference and marriage age on sexuality within the household in early modern Europe, see Crawford, *European sexualities*, pp. 22–4.

the spouses found it difficult to develop new sexual modes of behaviour (the literature suggests that at times they had to be forced to have sexual intercourse).<sup>95</sup> Living under parental authority perhaps also restricted sexual development.<sup>96</sup> More practical reasons that relate to the economic position of women within the household may offer a further explanation for the level of fertility being lower than expected. As women's work was mostly domestic, mothers were able to breastfeed their children longer than in Europe, and so extend the period between births as well as enhancing the survival chances of their children.

The European behavioural patterns were based on a large degree of mutual trust: teenagers from the age of 10 onwards (and sometimes even younger) were entrusted to the households of other individuals, the search process for a future spouse was entrusted to young adolescents, and women (and men) could actively engage in wage labour and in the social interaction that accompanied it, often in places distant from their homes, without damaging their reputation. Perhaps the best examples of these high levels of mutual trust are the practices of courting and of pre-marital sex that emerged. The EMP as it developed after 1500—with its high marriage age—did not mean that couples who had found each other, but had postponed setting up a household, had to abstain from all sexual activity. Whereas in patriarchal societies the spheres of young unmarried men and women are strictly separated—in order to protect the virginity of the girl—in western Europe practices of courting and pre-marital sex developed without resulting in high levels of illegitimacy. Hartman summarizes the literature on this as follows: 'couples hardly denied themselves all sexual activity. The important thing was to avoid having babies, and evidence on courting practices throughout north-western Europe reveals that couples, especially those already betrothed, often engaged in socially sanctioned sessions of petting and fondling'.<sup>97</sup> Kok, in a similar analysis of these practices in the Netherlands, also pointed out that it was based on a remarkable degree of trust in the young people, who were allowed to enjoy these 'games'—a degree of trust that in most cases was justified, as levels of illegitimacy were lower than elsewhere.<sup>98</sup>

The second distinctive feature of the EMP is the relatively large proportion of the female population that remained unmarried. Again, to a large extent this follows from the fact that the search process for a suitable partner started at a relatively high age (that is, at 18), and only ended when consensus with another partner was reached—or, in the more romantic version, when they fell in love with each other. Hajnal has remarked that this individualized search process is a serious limitation of the EMP:

the conviction that marriage should be decided upon only after the future spouses have got to know each other well . . . may render the finding of a marriage partner very difficult since people often have opportunities to become acquainted only with a few

<sup>95</sup> This is not to suggest, of course, that other factors suggested in the literature to explain the low marital fertility in China did not play a role, such as malnutrition and/or the conscious planning of children (see Kok et al., 'Marital fertility and birth control').

<sup>96</sup> Lee and Feng, *One quarter of humanity*, pp. 90–2.

<sup>97</sup> Hartman, *Household*, p. 62.

<sup>98</sup> Kok, 'Moral nation', pp. 12–13.

young persons of the opposite sex. If, by contrast, it is possible to arrange a marriage between people who have never met, the circle of potential spouses is greatly widened.<sup>99</sup>

It is therefore only to be expected that for part of the population, the search process was unsuccessful, resulting in a proportion of the population who never married. Kowaleski, in her useful overview of known figures on single women in Europe, concludes that there was a massive difference between the north and the south, and that the number of single women might have been even higher in England than in the continental part of north-western Europe.<sup>100</sup> This can, as we have suggested before, be related to the type of marriage system and to the large number of unmarried women who went into service (a practice uncommon in Italy where servanthood was not a respected job for unmarried women). In the system of arranged marriages, large numbers of single women appear to be very uncommon.<sup>101</sup> In this system marriage was commonplace (especially for young women who outnumbered men), as the costs of arranging a marriage were limited while the potential benefits were large, and village and family networks could be mobilized to find a suitable partner.

In short, the two 'distinctive features' of Hajnal's EMP are the result of the specific Western European way in which the marriage contract was organized. An additional feature that can be mentioned is that the differences in age between men and women were relatively small in the 'classic' EMP (northern Europe)—again, the result of the fact that it was the result of consensus between (near) 'equals'—whereas the age differences in southern Europe were in general much greater.<sup>102</sup> As the poem by Anna Bijns implies, the relative bargaining position of women before (and probably also after) marriage was improved with age at marriage and by a small age difference between men and women.<sup>103</sup>

#### IV

The EMP as it emerged in the late middle ages was characterized by a fundamental adaptation of household structures and marriage patterns to market opportunities. In that sense it was probably unique; we do not know of comparable earlier examples in history in which households became dependent on the market on such a vast scale. The fact that wage labourers were prepared to develop and carry out

<sup>99</sup> Hajnal, 'European marriage in perspective', p. 126.

<sup>100</sup> Kowaleski, 'Singlewomen', p. 46. See also her overview of average marriage ages and percentages of single women in table A1 on pp. 326–8.

<sup>101</sup> Only 1 or 2% of women in traditional China remained unmarried at the age of 30, compared to 15 to 25% in western Europe. See Maynes and Waltner, 'Childhood, youth, and the female life cycle'. But see also the literature on the influence of dowry and sex ratio on average marriage age and numbers of single women in medieval and early modern Italy; Molho, *Marriage alliance*, p. 306.

<sup>102</sup> Laslett, *Family life*, pp. 26–9. Goldberg (*Youth*, pp. 9–11) also gives estimates of age differences for fourteenth- to fifteenth-century Yorkshire and concludes that couples tended to marry one another at similar ages, which is in accordance with the data found by Razi (*Life, marriage and death*, pp. 61–3) for the manor of medieval Halesowen. The mean age difference for urban Yorkshire was 2.9 years, and for rural couples 3.8. Goldberg also noted that in those cases where men were substantially older, these were usually widowers marrying women for the first time. See also Wrigley et al., *English population history*, pp. 151 ff, for a discussion on the age gap between spouses in England. Compare with the rather large age difference between bride and groom in early modern Italy, as described by Herlihy and Klapisich-Zuber (*Tuscans and their families*) and put into its European context by Smith, 'Geographical diversity', p. 33.

<sup>103</sup> See section I above.

a strategy of depending on markets for goods and services is significant—it shows that they had sufficient trust in markets to rely on their functioning, not only for their income, but also for their consumption. This can be seen as an index of the efficiency of the market economy in the late medieval period in this region: it appears that it generated the necessary trust to make such a transformation possible.

Part of the life cycle that emerged in the later middle ages, and which would not change fundamentally before the nineteenth (and perhaps even the twentieth) century, was an extended period of on-the-job training. The EMP was in this way interwoven with the system of apprenticeship that had emerged mainly in the guilds in medieval Europe, and with patterns of ‘circulating’ servants, maids, and journeymen.<sup>104</sup> This all contributed to increasing greatly the proportion of time that people spent undergoing training and schooling in their life cycle.

One of the links with broader socio-economic changes is the supply and demand for domestic services. The distinctive western European servant phenomenon is not found in parts of the world where early marriages are common. Reher confirms this: on the basis of Hajnal’s 1965 article it becomes clear that southern Europe did not fully fit the European marriage pattern of late and low levels of marriage, although it was also fairly removed from the patterns found in eastern Europe. In Mediterranean Europe, there were far less servants than in central or northern Europe, and women married earlier too.<sup>105</sup> This led to the phenomenon that is still so typical for Mediterranean countries today: children did not leave their parents’ house before marriage, and so left home far later in Spain or Italy than they did in the North Sea area.<sup>106</sup> Among those who married, many joined their household to that of their parents, thus creating multigenerational households.<sup>107</sup>

Being a servant in another household was an important way of acquiring certain skills. The links between the EMP and human capital formation are more complex, however. In theory, it can be argued that the EMP did not result in increased investment in human capital, because the extra income that was generated as a result of such an investment did not become available to the parents who had made the investment, but to the new household that was set up by the new couple after marriage. In short, neolocality is bad for investment in human capital, whereas patrilocality—where the newly-wed couple stays within the household of the groom’s parents and they profit directly from the extra income he generates—may create better incentives for parents to invest in their children, or at least in their sons.

But there is evidence that, notwithstanding the neolocal system, western European parents did invest heavily in their children, and that also, from a theoretical point of view, ‘love marriage’ would lead to more investment in human capital than

<sup>104</sup> On apprenticeship in medieval Europe, see Epstein, *Wage labor & guilds*. There has been some discussion about the importance of servanthood; see Bailey, ‘Demographic decline’, p. 7; Goldberg, ‘Female labour’; idem, ‘Marriage’; Smith, ‘Some reflections’; Goldberg, ed., *Woman is a worthy wight*; and Fox, ‘Exploitation’.

<sup>105</sup> Reher, ‘Family ties’, p. 207.

<sup>106</sup> This is still the case today. See *ibid.*, p. 208; there is possibly also a link with the dowry system, which was so prominent in southern Europe.

<sup>107</sup> Laslett (‘Family and household’, p. 526) claims that the proportion of multigenerational households was high in the south of Europe and very high in the east, contrary to the north and west where the proportion was very low.

arranged marriage. In a pioneering paper, Edlund and Lagerlöf demonstrate that ‘a shift from parental to individual consent moves resources in the same direction, favoring young men and young women over old men’, because young adults will have more incentives to invest in their offspring than old adults ‘who will be around fewer periods’.<sup>108</sup> Another part of the explanation is that the new parents who were ‘freed’ from control by their own parents now may have had more means to do so. In a way, Chinese and Indian household structures were focused on providing an income for parents during old age, on performing the rites and ceremonies necessary for the well-being of the deceased, and on the continuation of the lineage so that the performance of these ceremonies would be guaranteed forever. Parental authority was aimed at guaranteeing that during the best years of their children’s lives, they took care of their parents and devoted much of their time, energy, and resources to their well-being. In contrast, children had less interest in taking care of their parents in the areas that witnessed the rise of the EMP. This created a problem: who would take care of the elderly in societies where the EMP was developing? It did, however, also create opportunities—it freed up resources that could be spent on the schooling and training of children. The increased investment in human capital should also be seen in the light of the simultaneous commercialization of the household environment. The measure of success in this new environment was no longer to succeed the father in the management of the family farm (and the continuation of the lineage), but became linked to success in the market economy, through maximizing income from wage labour. In such an environment, investment in the education of children became critical.

Evidence for this is abundant for the Low Countries and England, where levels of literacy rose strongly in the century and a half after the Black Death. In the Low Countries, this is relatively well documented: the spread of new religious movements (Modern Devotion during the fifteenth century and the Reformation after 1517) is clearly connected to this trend.<sup>109</sup> In the sixteenth century, a majority of the male population of Holland could read and write, and these skills were evident in both towns and in the countryside (as the famous Italian traveller Guicciardini testified in the 1560s).<sup>110</sup> In 1585, about 55 per cent of grooms and 32 per cent of brides could sign their name in the marriage registers of Amsterdam, and the differences between immigrants and native Amsterdammers were insignificant.<sup>111</sup> In England, a similar growth in education and training occurred between 1340 and 1548, as has been well documented by Moran for York.<sup>112</sup> In London in the 1470s, the levels of literacy may have been already as high as those in Amsterdam, although this estimate is less certain.<sup>113</sup> In the same region bordering the North Sea, the premium for skilled labour declined rapidly after 1348 and stayed at an extremely low level during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, which points to high levels of investment in this form of human capital as well.<sup>114</sup> Both types of human capital formation were also closely linked. Guilds in the Low Countries

<sup>108</sup> See Edlund and Lagerlöf, ‘Individual vs. parental consent’.

<sup>109</sup> See also Derville, ‘L’alphabétisation du peuple’; Uitz, *Legend of good women*, p. 71.

<sup>110</sup> van der Woude, ‘De alfabetisering’, p. 257.

<sup>111</sup> Kuijpers, ‘Lezen en schrijven’, pp. 509–13.

<sup>112</sup> Moran, *Growth of English schooling*.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20, citing an estimate by S. Thrupp; also Hanawalt, *Growing up*, p. 82.

<sup>114</sup> van Zanden, ‘De timmerman’, pp. 110–12.

and in England required their apprentices to be literate, or included training in reading and mathematics in their apprenticeships.<sup>115</sup> In Amsterdam, the poor relief institutions also ensured that orphans attended schools in preparation for apprenticeship.<sup>116</sup> Most strikingly, the gender differences in human capital formation are rather small: parents in western Europe invested in both their sons' and daughters' education and training. Although men continued to have a lead over women in, for example, literacy, this lead is relatively small compared with what we know about other parts of the world, such as China and India.<sup>117</sup> The comparatively high investment in human capital formation in the North Sea area in this period formed the necessary basis for the rapid growth of its economy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The small nuclear families that resulted from the EMP were more vulnerable than the large extended families to the loss of individual members—in particular the father or the mother—especially when they were largely dependent on wage labour and did not own many resources. Reliance on the strength of family ties—the 'traditional' support network—was not a real alternative. The EMP was quite individualistic: youngsters left home at an early age, did not take care of their parents, often remained celibate, and set up their own households, often outside their parent's place of residence. All of these factors suggest that the EMP involved rather loose family ties.<sup>118</sup> The EMP therefore necessitated the establishment of alternative social support networks—based on solidarity within the community, the city, and perhaps even the state, and on the forging of networks of mutual help which were not primarily rooted in bonds of blood.

The elderly were the obvious victims of the decline of parental authority and the trend towards neolocality.<sup>119</sup> Of course, when their children prospered, parents might have benefited from their prosperity as well. But the transactions, which were in a way 'enforced' by parental authority under patriarchal systems, were in the western European system more or less voluntary transfers of money and goods—dependent also on the proximity of parents and on the willingness of their children to contribute to their income.<sup>120</sup> This also might have given parents an

<sup>115</sup> Hanawalt, *Growing up*, p. 82.

<sup>116</sup> Kuijpers, 'Lezen en schrijven', pp. 498–9.

<sup>117</sup> The difference in human capital formation between the sexes becomes even smaller if we look at another parameter—numeracy. Elsewhere we have analysed a large number of sources to estimate on the basis of recently developed methods (such as the Whipple index) the degree to which men and women could count and calculate. It appears that in the Low Countries early on in the early modern period the overall numeracy levels was already exceptionally high—much higher than in many developing countries today—and that the difference between men and women was exceptionally small. In some areas women even did better than men in terms of numeracy. Here again we found proof that human capital formation was exceptionally high in the Low Countries and immediate surroundings; De Moor and Van Zanden, 'Van fouten kan je leren'.

<sup>118</sup> Hoppenbrouwers, 'Maagschap en vriendschap', documents the decreasing influence of family and the rise of 'individualism' in late medieval Holland in some detail.

<sup>119</sup> Laslett, 'Family, kinship and collectivity', p. 156: 'the more widespread the nuclear family, and the more strictly neolocal rules are applied, the more important collective institutions will be for the security of the individual'. This relationship had been coined by Laslett as the 'nuclear hardship hypothesis'. On the relationship between the EMP and care of the elderly, see also Kreager and Schroeder-Butterfill, *Ageing without children*, pp. 7–13. For a critical review of Laslett's thesis, see Lynch, *Individuals, families, and communities*, pp. 12–14.

<sup>120</sup> Smith, 'Transfer incomes, risk and security', pp. 199–201. Apart from this type of transaction, it might also be argued that the fact that intergenerational transfers were less important than in the south may have had a negative effect on the bond between parent and child. For England, see also Smith, 'Manorial court'.

incentive to invest emotionally in their relationship with their children.<sup>121</sup> More importantly, however, it gave them clear incentives to start saving for their old age during their life cycle. Here the developing capital market began to play a role: saving for the future became increasingly important in the new system, because simply having children was not a guarantee that one would be taken care of during old age. During their teens and early twenties, men and women were expected to save substantial sums of money in order to set up their own household at marriage, and during marriage they had to save in order to be assured of an income during their old age. So to some extent, transfers between generations, which in patriarchal systems regulated the problem of care in old age and dealt with the setting up of new households, were replaced by inter-temporal income transfers by the same generation via the capital market. The EMP was therefore not only dependent on a vibrant labour market, but was also unable to function properly if capital markets were extremely unreliable and inefficient. Fortunately, however, there is strong evidence that the efficiency of capital markets improved significantly in the century or so after the Black Death.<sup>122</sup> In the Low Countries among the most popular innovations were *renten*, life annuities on which a relatively high interest was paid out during the lifetime of the man or woman on which the annuity was established. These annuities became very popular in the late medieval period, and were probably the most important source of urban (long-term) finance in the most commercialized parts of the Low Countries (Flanders, Brabant, and Holland). This was, of course, an ideal means of saving for one's old age.<sup>123</sup> In a case study on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Edam and the surrounding countryside, we demonstrated that these *renten* were also used for intergenerational transfers; in return for handing over the farm to the next generation, parents could invest an annuity on their lives, to be assured of a decent income after retirement.<sup>124</sup> Similar developments can be found in medieval England, where pension contracts performed the same function; the elderly surrendered the use of their lands and resources to family members or non-kin in exchange for individually arranged pension benefits.<sup>125</sup>

At the same time, poor relief institutions developed, first under the initiative of the Church, but after the Reformation increasingly run by city governments and, in England, by the state. During the middle ages, poor relief was primarily the responsibility of the Church, and part of the income of the parish had to be spent on 'hospitality' (that is, the accommodation of strangers and travellers), and on almsgiving to the poor.<sup>126</sup> In urban centres, this poor relief from the Church was often supplemented by new institutions—often at the initiative of pious citizens,

<sup>121</sup> A review of the debate on emotional bonds between parents and children in the late medieval period is provided in Hoppenbrouwers, 'Maagschap en vriendschap'; on the basis of an impressive collection of evidence related to Holland, he shows the importance of emotional ties between members of the conjugal household.

<sup>122</sup> Clark, 'Cost of capital'; Epstein, *Freedom and growth*, pp. 18–25, 60–1.

<sup>123</sup> Zuijderduijn, 'Medieval capital markets'; also Verloren van Themaat and Dokkum, *Oude Dordtse lijfrenten*. See also Munro, 'Usury doctrine'.

<sup>124</sup> See de Moor, van Zanden, and Zuijderduijn, 'Micro-credit'.

<sup>125</sup> Clark ('Some aspects', p. 316) shows that in East Anglia about 40% of both men and women received a pension in the last half of the thirteenth century. In the period 1350–1457, about 38% and 23% of women and men respectively received pensions.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. the analysis of the foundations of poor relief during the middle ages as developed by canon law in Tierney, *Medieval poor law*.

but sometimes also initiated and managed by the cities themselves—to deal with (the excesses of) mass poverty. In the Brabant city of Den Bosch, these late medieval initiatives resulted in an accumulation of capital and land in poor relief institutions, which supplied the funds for poor relief in this city during the following centuries.<sup>127</sup> In the sixteenth century, the perhaps somewhat uncoordinated character of poor relief institutions that had grown out of the medieval initiatives was increasingly criticized, and attempts were made to reform the ‘system’. In the Low Countries, this led to the first national regulation introduced by Charles V in 1531, but further reform and proliferation of poor relief relied to a large extent on the activities of the individual cities and provinces. In England, through the Elizabethan poor laws of 1572–1601, the state established a national system, which also built on the medieval heritage.<sup>128</sup> These two systems were both considered to be quite generous by the standards of the time.<sup>129</sup> De Vries and van der Woude estimated, for example, that poor relief in the Netherlands may have redistributed as much as 3 to 4 per cent of national income, and linked this to ‘the modest scope of informal, family-based income redistribution practices’.<sup>130</sup> Seen in this perspective, the ‘relatively generous’ poor relief of the North Sea area can be considered as a by-product of the demographic system that emerged there in the late middle ages.<sup>131</sup>

Another vulnerable group was located at the other side of the age spectrum. There were fundamental differences in the treatment of ‘unwanted’ children in China and Europe. In China and India infanticide, in particular of female babies, was quite a normal practice. This was also linked to another important difference between the two patterns, the relative appreciation of the two sexes. The Chinese pattern was in essence patrilocal: after marriage the couple moved in with the parents of the groom, and it was their task to take care of the parents in the years to come. Boys were, therefore, a real asset: a continuation of the lineage and a guarantee that one would be taken care of in old age. Girls were a liability: expensive to raise, and requiring a dowry in order to get married, after which they moved to another household to take care of the parents living there. Such a stark contrast between the sexes was absent from the EMP. There are indications that although infanticide did happen in the west, child abandonment was a more regular practice than infanticide and showed an equal sex ratio. In the late medieval period we see the gradual disappearance of the practice of (female) infanticide from western Europe.<sup>132</sup> It can be argued that raising a foundling should not be considered as very different from raising one’s own children since these were also being raised to become labourers.<sup>133</sup> The adoption of foundlings was also encouraged through the Christian Church: it introduced during the sixth and seventh centuries the principles of *oblatio*, or the donation of children to the service of God through ecclesiastical institutions.<sup>134</sup> This can be considered as a rationalization

<sup>127</sup> Prak, ‘Goede buren en verre vrienden’. But see also Lynch, *Individuals, families and communities*, on the emergence of urban institutions for collective welfare.

<sup>128</sup> Tierney, *Medieval poor law*, pp. 139–3.

<sup>129</sup> Lindert, ‘Poor relief’.

<sup>130</sup> de Vries and van der Woude, *First modern economy*, pp. 657–60.

<sup>131</sup> Smith, ‘Transfer incomes, risk, and security’, pp. 199–201.

<sup>132</sup> Hartman, *Household*, pp. 43–4.

<sup>133</sup> Tilly, Fuchs, Kertzer, and Ransell, ‘Child abandonment’.

<sup>134</sup> See Boswell, ‘*Expositio* and *oblatio*’, p. 256.

and institutionalization of abandonment. Around the middle of the thirteenth century, new specialized urban institutions for the care of abandoned children were increasingly established, and spread throughout most of Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>135</sup> The ‘supply’ of foundlings was also closely related to the EMP: poverty was not the only reason for single and married mothers to abandon their children. In Paris, for example, two-thirds of unwed mothers who abandoned their children worked as domestics, who were exposed to promiscuous situations as servants, far away from parental supervision and left without a support network.<sup>136</sup>

Strong and weak family ties, and correspondingly weak and strong social institutions, are fundamental to the explanation that Reher provides for the differences in family systems between northern and southern Europe. He also argues that the two-generation household, in particular if exclusively dependent on wage work, was much more fragile than the three-generation household characteristic of a patriarchal society, which usually had some access to land or other resources. In southern Europe, vulnerable members of society were helped by the family or by individual charities, while in northern societies this was largely accomplished through public and private institutions.<sup>137</sup> There were several ways of dealing with the needy in Mediterranean Europe: by means of co-residence, by circulating the elderly among the households of their offspring, or by the spatial proximity between the homes of the elderly and those of their children. In England, a smaller proportion of the elderly was living with their children.<sup>138</sup> The responsibility of the community for the well-being of the elderly that is implied by this was also epitomized in the poor laws.<sup>139</sup> Perhaps it might be presumptuous to argue that it is no coincidence that the development of a strong civil society of community institutions which helped to spread risks in times of hardship occurred in the same part of Europe. As Reher claims:

The sense of individual responsibility for collective norms and needs, so essential for the concept of democracy and civil society in the West, is often conspicuously absent from southern European societies . . . In sum, the countries of northern Europe and North America have well developed civil societies that thrive on individual initiatives, but with a dark side shown by their lack of social cohesion and by the desperation and anguish so prevalent in them.<sup>140</sup>

## V

The late middle ages have been coined the ‘golden age of the labourer’, but perhaps, as Barron has suggested, it was also a ‘golden age for women’ who wished

<sup>135</sup> Boswell, *Kindness of strangers*, pp. 173, 401, 405–8.

<sup>136</sup> Ransel, *Mothers of misery*, p. 173; Tilly et al., ‘Child abandonment’.

<sup>137</sup> This difference is still visible today. Reher (‘Family ties’, p. 209) explains how a large majority of people older than 65 years in north-western European countries live in institutions for the elderly whereas in the south of Europe, this is only the case for a very small percentage of the elderly. Most are being taken care of by their children. See also Thane, *Old age*, pp. 119–24, on the relationship between the EMP and the position of the elderly today.

<sup>138</sup> Reher, ‘Family ties’, p. 209. See also his n. 24, p. 224, for more references to the care of the elderly in Spain.

<sup>139</sup> See also Smith, ‘Structural dependence’.

<sup>140</sup> Reher, ‘Family ties’, p. 217. This is difficult to reconcile with the classic study by Putnam of differences in social capital between northern and southern Italy, in which the north figures as the example of a strong civil society; see Putnam, *Making democracy work*.

to become active in the labour market.<sup>141</sup> In the North Sea region, women's earnings were relatively high (when compared with men's), and access to the labour market was relatively easy, although they still experienced serious constraints when compared with male members of the labour force.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, during the twentieth century, the same trends—increased relative pay and increased female participation in the labour force—were driving forces behind the process of the emancipation of women, which accelerated in times of labour scarcity (during the two World Wars and during the period of rapid economic growth after 1950). If we continue this line of thought, one might even mention the idea that demographers assume that increased relative earnings of women will lead to lower levels of fertility because the opportunity costs of rearing children are higher. Perhaps such a link between female labour participation and fertility may help to explain the low levels of fertility that can be hypothesized for post-1348 England, which resulted in the stagnation of the population at the much reduced post-Plague level.<sup>143</sup>

Essentially we have argued that a rather odd combination of forces—the doctrines of the Catholic Church, the system of intergenerational transfers, the expansion of the labour market, and the effect of the Black Death—lay behind the emergence of the EMP in the late medieval period. It was characterized by relatively low levels of authority of parents over their children and of men over women. The EMP was well adapted to the new commercialized environment that emerged during the same period.<sup>144</sup> Wage labour became an integral part of the life cycle of members of the small conjugal household, and other market transactions (such as the use of credit or the accumulation of savings) became part of their survival strategy. This co-evolution of the demographic regime and the emerging labour market helps to explain the strong commercialization of society and economy that occurred in this period, when one-third to two-thirds of the population became (partially) dependent on wage labour, and working for wages had become a normal part of the life cycle. In our view the 'deep' penetration of markets in late medieval and early modern European life—in particular in the region around the North Sea—should be seen in this light.

In this article we have focused on the developments during the late middle ages. From the sixteenth century onwards, however, things began to change for working women in the western European labour market. Men and women found it increas-

<sup>141</sup> See Barron, "'Golden age' of women', who coined the term 'golden age of women' in her study of medieval London, but see also Dale, 'London silkwomen', and Hilton, *English peasantry*, pp. 95–110, for earlier proponents of the idea that women were in a rather favourable position during the late middle ages. It is perhaps also significant that historians of feminism have identified the late medieval period as the 'first wave' of feminism; see, for example, Stuurman and Akkerman, eds., *Perspectives*; according to Kelly (*Women, history and theory*), early feminism began with Christine de Pisan's *Book of the city of ladies* of 1406. However, there is also substantial opposition to the idea of a golden age; see, for example, works by Kowaleski and Bennett, 'Crafts, guilds, and women'; Bennett, *Ale, beer and brewsters*, pp. 47, 120.

<sup>142</sup> Critics of Barron's ideas about a 'golden age' of women have rightly pointed out that women were only active in rather limited segments of the labour market, and not, for example, in the 'specialized crafts' with the highest earnings, and that the range of options for women who wanted to earn a living in this way were 'generally quite restricted' (McIntosh, *Working women*, pp. 210, 250); cf. Mate, *Daughters*, pp. 193–4; Bardsley, 'Women's work reconsidered'; Bennett, *History matters*, pp. 85–6.

<sup>143</sup> A critical examination of this hypothesis can be found in Bailey, 'Demographic decline'; in this article we have not concentrated on the 'pure' demographic effects but rather on the social and economic consequences of the EMP.

<sup>144</sup> For the opposite situation, in southern France, see Leroy Ladurie, 'Family structures', p. 62.

ingly difficult to survive on labour alone during the sixteenth century because of the sharp decline in real wages during that period.<sup>145</sup> Women's wages probably fell more than those of men, because of a labour surplus, a situation that depressed the wages of unskilled workers probably more than those of skilled labourers.<sup>146</sup> As we have seen, the average age of marriage increased dramatically, to the levels that Hajnal considered typical of the system. From our perspective, one can perhaps argue that the golden days of the EMP in the North Sea region in the fifteenth century—of self-empowerment of men and women as a result of a booming labour market—were over by then.<sup>147</sup> Also, in the ideological arena, there was a tendency to stress parental authority again—both by Protestants, following Luther, and by Catholics, following the Counter-Reformation.

The emergence of the EMP had important long-term consequences. We have argued that income transfers between generations changed dramatically as a result. First of all, the young profited from increased investment in human capital. To some extent the EMP, in which the number of children was limited as a result of the age of marriage, can be considered to be a reproductive strategy to increase the quality (not quantity) of offspring. Investment in human capital (schooling and on-the-job training) became a normal part of the life cycle of young men and women, effectively delaying their entry into the marriage market. In short, instead of being backward-looking (that is, focused on taking care of the parents), the household became forward-looking (that is, focused on investing in its offspring).<sup>148</sup>

The elderly were the main victims of the new regime; their authority was undermined, and they did not receive the income transfers that were due to parents in patriarchal marriage systems. Saving for old age was one of the options open to them, and we speculate that there are connections between the emergence of the EMP and the strong development of capital markets in western Europe in the late medieval period. Moreover, because households were smaller, the chances that they might 'fail' (for example, disintegrate due to the death of one of the parents) was higher. We suggest that, in response, new institutions emerged that to some extent formed safety networks for the old, the very young, and the infirm.

Perhaps the point can also be made that the 'industrious revolution'—the changes in the orientation of households during the early modern period towards market opportunities resulting in an increased labour supply, which, according to de Vries, preceded the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century—may be interpreted as a continuation of the changes that occurred during the late medieval

<sup>145</sup> See Rappaport, *Worlds within worlds*, pp. 375–87, for a more moderate view on the decline of living standards during the sixteenth century. He claims that Tudor London—contrary to the rest of England—did not experience an enormous increase in social problems and inequality.

<sup>146</sup> Clark ('Long march of history') for example, estimated that in England relative wages of women after 1599 were substantially lower than before 1599 (the difference for wages of unskilled men was 31% before and 58% after that date).

<sup>147</sup> Smith ('Geographical diversity', p. 38), for example shows—with Goldberg—on the basis of the sexual composition of the urban servant labour force in York that, starting from the late fifteenth century onwards, female servants were increasingly being excluded from the craft households.

<sup>148</sup> Although the contrast with the eastern way of life is not acknowledged by him, Goody (*Development*, p. 153) has coined this as the 'child-oriented' family and sees this as a consequence of the Church's preference for a family that was bound by affectionate ties and created by mutual consent.

period. As de Vries has argued, the labour provided by women and teenagers played an important role in the economic transformation that occurred in the North Sea region, resulting in the Dutch Golden Age of the seventeenth century and, even more importantly, the British industrial revolution of the eighteenth century.<sup>149</sup> The emergence of the EMP and the resulting success of the North Sea region in the post-1600 period were due to increased participation in labour markets, increased investment in human capital, and the development of labour markets and capital markets. Of course, we do not claim that the EMP explains it all; but nevertheless we hope to have shown that the stubborn behaviour of Janne Heyndericx did make a difference.<sup>150</sup>

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Date submitted</i>            | 9 January 2007               |
| <i>Revised version submitted</i> | 12 June 2008, 6 October 2008 |
| <i>Accepted</i>                  | 27 November 2008             |

DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-0289.2009.00483.x

<sup>149</sup> de Vries, 'Industrial revolution'. In a recent paper by Voigtländer and Voth ('Why England?') in which they addressed the question why the industrial revolution occurred in England, they distinguish two underlying causes: the EMP and the generous terms of the poor relief. Both were, as we have tried to demonstrate, interrelated and rooted in the changes in reproductive strategies and labour market orientation of the late medieval period.

<sup>150</sup> The comparison with China may be instructive once more; Goldstone, 'Gender, work and culture', argues that there was a stage in the life of European women (between puberty in their early teens and marriage in their mid-twenties or later) during which they were available for the wage labour market which was not the case in China. Chinese women did not have a stage like that in their lives and were thus not available for the wage labour market. Factories could not compete with the household labourers who worked for next to nothing. Goldstone claims that the development of cotton spinning was slow in China because of the restrictions on the deployment of female labour outside the home, as a consequence of Confucian ethics. Because of this situation, factory production could not compete with household production.

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