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Structure and strategy. Two rural communities in the Kempen region of Belgium, 1850–1910

Eric Vanhaute*

Vakgroep Nieuwste Geschiedenis, Blandijnberg 2, B-9000 Gent, Belgium

Abstract

This article starts with a methodological question: By carrying out a structural analysis of a local community, is it possible to gain insight into the labor strategies of the families within that community? This structural analysis is based on the reconstruction and integration of population, labor, and income data of individual households within two villages in 19th century Belgium. Basically, this exercise is to understand two sets of correlations: (a) between social differentiation and the family cycle and (b) between shifts in the social relationship between families and generations and the survival strategies of those families. This article shows that a structural approach to labor and income strategies can reveal how and why former strategies can lose their relevance and new choices are made relating to new networks of solidarity.

Keywords: Rural communities; Survival strategies; Family cycle

1. Introduction: Kempen farmers and Chayanov

"Making money, accumulating more wealth, becoming an owner, buying more land: these are the things that matter." This was how the Kempen regional writer Gustaaf Segers (1911, p. 75) summed up the key ambitions of farmers in the Kempen region of Belgium during the 19th century. The family-cycle-related development of farms is, in many ways, reminiscent of the peasant model of Chayanov (1986). The "ideal" peasant economy is based on three main things: the household as the center of production and consumption (labor–consumer balance within the household), labor deployment within a family context, and the production of consumer goods to meet the household's own needs (Thorner, 1986; see, also, Knotter, 1994, pp. 22–23; Smith, 1984, pp. 6–12; Fauve-Chamoux, 1993, pp. 138–141;

* Tel.: +32-92644008; fax: +32-92644189
E-mail address: eric.vanhaute@Ugent.be (E. Vanhaute).

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Vilar, 1998). The key explanatory variable in this balance between labor and consumption is the amount of deployable labor. "The labor force is *something given* [sic], and the farm's production elements are fixed in accordance with it" (Chayanov, 1986, p. 92). One such production factor is acreage: "We can establish a clearly expressed dependence between family development and size of area for use" (pp. 61–63). There is a clear direction to this relationship: "the connection between family size and the size of agricultural activity should be understood as a dependence of area of land for use on family size rather than conversely" (p. 68). Chayanov qualified this by saying that this connection depended on a number of prerequisites being met. The term "open land market" summarized them. Unimpeded access to the open land market and egalitarian rights of inheritance would guarantee farmers the ability to build up and scale down their farms in a flexible way. But this family life-cycle-related accumulation of land and capital conflicts with the structuralistic interpretation of social differentiation within a number of social groups or classes. Chayanov therefore introduced a new concept—demographic differentiation, linked to phases in the life cycle of the household—but was quick to add that he was not jettisoning the concept of social differentiation (Chayanov, 1986, p. 68). Smith (1984, p. 7), however, emphasized the difference: "Social mobility (in a peasant society) consequently takes on a cyclical form, carrying the typical peasant farm during its lifetime through most of the statisticians' and historians' categories of 'rich,' 'middle,' and 'poor' peasants." This is at odds with "a rural society (which) is divided into strata made up of the permanently rich and poor."

Although a great many other factors obviously affected the relationship between farm size and the supply of family labor (such as the composition of family income and the type of farm involved), it was demonstrated in a study of rural households in 19th century Kempen that the internal relationship between production and consumption diminished as old survival mechanisms eroded (Vanhaute, 1992, 1993). As long as the actions of the families continued to be geared to those survival strategies aimed at achieving independence, one would expect to find family and farm cycles consistent with those described by Chayanov (1986). This will be tested here by linking individual-level data from the 1856 farm census of Dessel, a village in the Kempen region of Belgium, to data on family composition and the average age of family heads. Average age is used here as an indicator of the family cycle (see Fig. 1).

The breakdown of farms based on the (average) age of family heads was remarkably diverse: Farms expanded until the family heads reached age 50–55; from that age onward, they tended to be scaled down. Acreage was predominantly increased by buying new land. In the under-45 age group, 44% of farmers worked on land that was leased rather than owned, and more than half of all land was leased. Only one in five older families (where the head of the family was over 45) did not own land, and barely 21% of land was leased. The correlation between farm size and family composition was striking and, in particular, with the amount of available labor. A regression analysis based on individual-level data confirmed the significant relationship between the supply of labor (the potential labor force: see below) and land use (R=.60) and land ownership (R=.51). The relationship with the amount of leased land, however, was very weak (R=.24). There was a strong correlation between farm size and the labor potential within the family and, therefore, the life cycle of the family. This was equally true of owned acreage. There was also a strong correlation between the potential labor force and the possession of horned cattle (R=.60), horses (R=.56), and pigs (R=0.52).

The correlation between farm development and age and the supply of labor showed similarities with the Russian peasants of Chayanov (1986). This article will examine how this "agrarian model" was supported in 19th century Kempen and the extent to which it declined in importance towards the end of the century. Was a cyclical distribution of wealth based on demographic differentiation in fact replaced

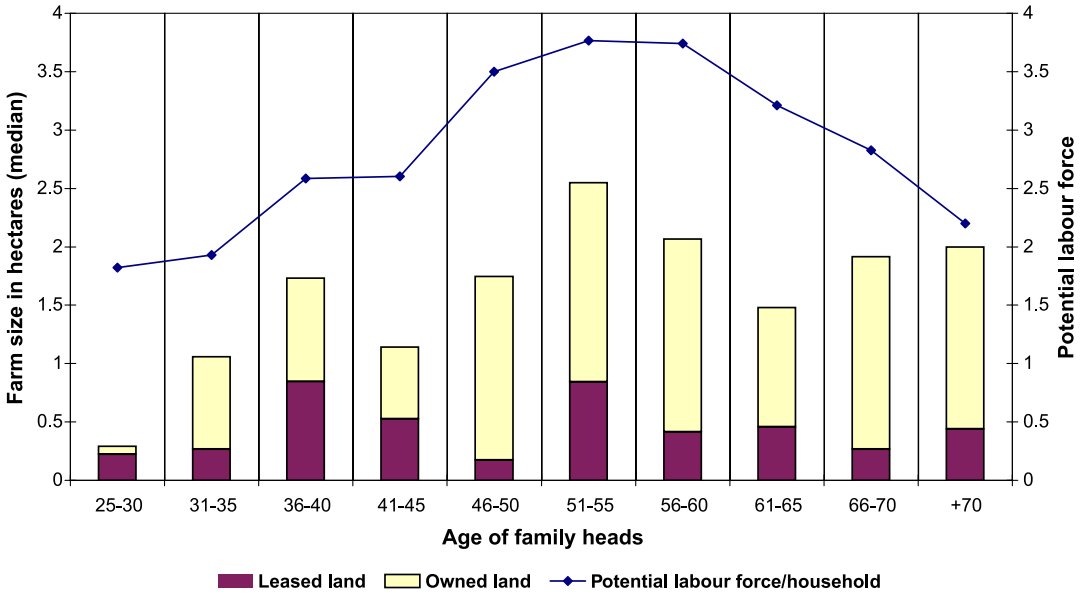


Fig. 1. Farming in Dessel, 1856. Farm size and supply of labour.

by a structural differentiation within social groups (Knotter, 1994, p. 23)? The second issue to be investigated is how families adapted their strategies within these changing circumstances. Or, to rephrase it, whether it is possible to comment on shifts in the purposive actions of families by focusing on the family cycle, labor deployment, and income status.

2. Central research question and method: from structure to strategy?

This article also has a basic methodological question: By carrying out a structural analysis of a rural community, is it possible to postulate the labor strategies of the families within that community? In other words, can a structural analysis do more than delineate the circumstances within which actors made their choices? Can this method be used to gain an insight into the interaction between "external" constraints and "internal" strategies?

In their general article, Moen and Wethington (1992, pp. 234, 243) compared a structural approach with other methods of approach, such as life-course reconstruction. The structural approach "emphasizes the ways that larger social structural forces constrain, and to some extent determine, the repertoire of adaptations available to individual families in a given society." The strategy metaphor refers to a household as "an actor responding to, reworking, or reframing external constraints and opportunities." In other words, the structure is the demographic, social, and economic framework that the families both shape and are part of, and the strategies of the families are the choices they make, and the results of these choices, or the choices that they are forced to make in response to the prevailing opportunities.

The structural analysis used in the current research is based on the household as a unit of analysis and attempts to place it as fully as possible within the local community. The rural community, rather than the

individuals within it, is the object of research. The local social structure is made up of the households, collectively, and, in particular, their demographic and economic position. This structure was analyzed using a static cross-section. This static analysis was then "dynamized" (de Belder, 1976) in two ways. First, a variety of census data derived from a range of sources was integrated (Vanhaute, 1992, pp. 16–18, 337–359). Combining data on occupational status with data on age, family composition, and income status revealed much about the past histories of the different families and provided an indication of family strategies when used in conjunction with two cross-sections across time. A combined analysis of the different variables (a) for the various age groups and social groups and (b) at different points in time, provided an insight into the type of choices that people made with regard to family formation and labor deployment, and possibly even why they made those choices.

Using structural analysis to investigate family strategies presupposes that it is possible to draw conclusions about the objectives underlying those strategies. These can only be ascertained indirectly, however, by analyzing the results of the households' actions. To establish whether those results were based on family-related behavior, the relationship was examined between three different types of variables assembled for each household: (1) the composition of the households and the age of the family heads, (2) the potential supply and division of labor, and (3) income status. The emphasis here was on the potential and actual deployment of labor (family composition, age of family members, potential labor deployment, and choice of occupation). Age structure was regarded as a determining variable and income status as a dependent variable.

The basic hypothesis is that the very age-specific labor market position and income status characteristic of traditional farming communities were disrupted and then altered completely once alternative sources of income became available. Some "old" links between age, family formation, and labor deployment were severed, particularly when new, wage-dependent employment opportunities became a permanent reality for more households. In the "new" industrial municipalities, the social status of the household was determined less by the family cycle than by income status. In short, the old family strategies, aimed at gearing the farm to available labor, and the life cycle of the family became less effective and eventually disappeared.

The data for this study were derived from demographic and occupational censuses and tax records, the shortcomings of which are well known (Bourke, 1994, pp. 167–170; Gubin & van Neck, 1981, p. 365). Not only do they give an incomplete picture of the social status of the household because they were based on criteria relevant to the government (for tax purposes), but the data are also often hard to interpret, primarily because of the ambiguity of the questions and/or because of the selective nature of the responses. Nonetheless, these records still provide a useful basis for research.

The present study builds on some of the basic data collated for a dissertation on the Kempen region of Turnhout (Vanhaute, 1992, pp. 337–369) that involved compiling four cross-sections (1750, 1800, 1850, and 1910) based on household records for three villages in the Kempen region. The family records of two of these villages from the cross-sections of 1850 and 1910 were supplemented with other data (Vanhaute, 1999, pp. 197–199). The basic set of data comprises a total of nearly 2000 family records distributed across the four cross-sections mentioned above. These records contain information for all the households about (a) the composition of the family and the age of family members, (b) potential labor deployment and actual occupational status, and (c) income and social status. The data set was compiled from censuses or population registers, in this case, the population registers of 1 January 1847 and 1 January 1911. These provided the basic data for the family records: name, place of residence, age, occupation, and relationship between household members. The tax registers provided a second set of

records and contained details of land, patent (paid by self-employed traders and shopkeepers), and personal (taxation on outer signs of wealth) taxes.

Details of land ownership were recorded in the Land Register, which formed the basis of land taxes. The main drawback in using the Land Register, however, is that it only listed property that lay within the municipal boundaries. Therefore, the totality of property owned by the inhabitants, particularly property in other villages, cannot be reconstructed. Personal taxation was based on the rental value of the dwelling, the number of external doors and windows, the value of the furniture, the number of hearths, the number of servants, and the number of riding horses. These records therefore provide an excellent measure of differences in wealth because everyone—regardless of their income or property—was included. We therefore assume that the hierarchy evident in the personal taxation records is a close approximation of the actual social hierarchy.

3. The Kempen region of Belgium in the 19th century

To the east of the Belgian port of Antwerp is a large sandy plain, part of a sandy plateau that stretches as far as the Dutch and Flemish provinces of North Brabant and Limburg. The most important physical features of this region were its barren sandy soil and erratic soil hydrology, which combined to make cultivation difficult. In 1800, only a quarter of all land in the region of Turnhout was used as farmland (70% of the land was vacant, 3% was woodland). A century later, farmland had increased to a half (25% of land was vacant, 20% was woodland; Vanhaute, 1992, 1993; see, also, the following sections). Three factors underlie the reason why it was not until the 19th century that this area began to be developed: roads, population pressure, and the agricultural system.

Up until the early part of the 19th century, all major roads bypassed Kempen. The first access road to the region was the paved road built in 1819, which connected Antwerp and Turnhout (see map in Appendix 1). Apart from the branch road leading to Hoogstraten, however, the villages of Kempen did not become part of an integrated network of macadamized roads until the second half of the century. The advent of shipping (following the completion of the Kempen and the Turnhout Canals) and the railway were of major importance. Yet, what really opened up the rural communities was the expansion of a dense network of branch lines that begun in 1885. Three decades later, all villages in the region were linked by steam-powered trams.

In the early part of the 19th century, the population of the Kempen region of Turnhout numbered barely 46 people/km^2, which was considerably fewer than the 190 inhabitants/km^2 in nearby Flanders, which was equally sandy but more intensively farmed. Despite the population nearly doubling in the course of the following century, the Kempen region remained relatively sparsely populated (87 inhabitants/km^2). Population growth in the 18th century was modest (+0.38%/yr) but increased fairly rapidly in the following century (an average of +0.76%/yr). In the 18th century, three quarters of the population still lived and worked in villages with fewer than 5000 inhabitants. By 1910, this figure had shrunk to one quarter.

This relatively low population pressure was largely due to the prevailing agricultural system that revolved primarily around subsistence farming (Vanhaute, 1992, pp. 85–128, 222–226). Throughout the period, more than 90% of households were able, at least in part, to live off what they produced on their own farms, no matter how small in size. But despite this, the percentage of true farms (where more than 2 ha of the land was used for farming) declined sharply, from roughly half of all

households in the 18th century to one in three households by 1900. Moreover, from the end of the 19th century onward, the majority of farmers had to lease most of their land, compared with only a quarter of them a hundred years earlier. The importance of agricultural earnings to most families is evident from their livestock (cattle): Throughout the period, 70–80% of families had at least one head. Farming was dominated by cereal production. In the 18th century, cereal crops were grown on 80–90% of the land. By 1900, the figure was still as high as 70%. The resulting vacant land was given over to pasture and for potato crops. If the late harvest were included in the equation, which accounted for up to 50% of arable land from 1850 onward and was fast becoming an important source of revenue, then, the pivotal importance of fodder crops becomes clear. Their prominent role indicates the key importance of cattle breeding to Kempen farmers who, on average, had 2.5 to 3 head of cattle per hectare of farmland. Half of their stock consisted of horned cattle and 5% of horses. Sheep farming had all but died out by 1875.

The 19th century saw a sharp increase in agricultural productivity in the Kempen region. In 1900, land yield was generally double of what it had been in 1800, and livestock was 50% more productive. The extremely low land yields of the 18th century could be increased largely because of the manure that these livestock produced: The ratio per hectare trebled during the period studied. More intensive farming and larger numbers of livestock resulted in a 60% to 80% increase in the demand for labor per hectare of farmland, and there was an ample supply of labor to meet this demand. In the agricultural villages, roughly half of the available labor, measured in man-years, was employed in farming over the course of any given year. If farm work was combined with some sort of cottage industry work, then, the percentage fell even further to 35%. In the early part of the 20th century, 30% of the available labor force in the industrialized canal side villages (such as Dessel and Rijkevorsel) was still employed in farming. But this large labor force accounted for only a modest percentage of wage earners in the farming sector: no more than 20% of total labor deployment in the 18th century, 25–30% in 1850, and less than 10% in 1900. In the vast majority of cases, it was the live-in workers with long contracts who were the wage earners. In other words, although farming in the Kempen region had relatively little difficulty meeting the basic needs of the population, it was not growing fast enough to keep pace with the growing supply of potential labor.

The regional capital, Turnhout, had long boasted a thriving, although traditional, textile industry. It was unable, however, to expand into a regional growth sector, unlike the protoindustrial yarn-, cloth-, and hosiery-producing industries that were independent of the textile industry and developed in the villages to the east of Turnhout during the 18th century (Vanhaute, 1991). Production in this sector peaked during the first two decades of the 1800s and then rapidly declined. From 1850 onward, the population in the villages on which these industries had centered reverted completely to the old agrarian labor and survival structures.

The construction of the two canals in Kempen brought about the demise of these old structures. During the last quarter of the century, new, centralized enterprises sprung up along the two waterways: brickyards and tile works, white sand mines and glassworks, chemical works (dynamite, artificial fertilizer), heavy metal works, and cigar factories. But despite all these new industries, the family farm remained the basis of Kempen's regional economy.

Two representative villages—Dessel and Rijkevorsel—were selected for this study of the composition and strategies of households in Kempen. Both villages are situated close to the district capital, Turnhout, in the heart of the sandy area of Kempen. Up until the last quarter of the 19th century, Rijkevorsel remained a closed farming community, with a modest level of secondary and tertiary

activities. Dessel, situated in the protoindustrial region to the east of Turnhout, was a major worsted- and cloth-producing center up until the middle of the century. The advent of large-scale industry along the Kempen canals brought about a major transformation in the nearby villages from the 1880s onward. This was particularly true of Rijkevorsel, which evolved its own brick-making district besides the canal.

But despite all this, agriculture continued to play a key role in both of these Kempen villages up until the 20th century. As Table 1 shows, the vast majority of households owned or leased a farm, which they could fall back on as a source of, at least, some of their income. There was, however, a sharp decline in the percentage of independent farms (more than 2 ha in size).

Farming continued to be one of the mainstays of the household's income structure. Virtually every family worked a plot of land, and roughly three in four households had at least one cow. But as farms increasingly were subdivided, the agricultural sector lost ground as a source of employment (Table 2). Activities in the secondary and, to a lesser extent, tertiary sectors were able to absorb some of the surplus labor. The sharp decline is striking in primary income derived from self-employment between 1850 and 1910 in Rijkevorsel. The decline was much less dramatic in Dessel. This was because a large proportion of households had been deriving part of their income from waged labor (in the textile industry) since the first half of the century and because the impact of new industries was much less pronounced there than in Rijkevorsel.

Rijkevorsel, in the north of the Kempen region, was adversely affected by its proximity to the nearby border that had separated the northern and southern parts of the Netherlands since the 16th century. Agriculture in the villages there was characterized by subsistence farming, which only enabled small

Table 1
Agricultural profile of Dessel and Rijkevorsel, 1800–1910

	1800	1850	1910
Dessel			
Farmland (% of land)	41	43	37
Hectares of farmland per inhabitant	0.83	0.66	0.36
Head of cattle per inhabitant	1.5	1.2	1.1
Labor deployment per hectare of farmland (days per year, including time devoted to cattle breeding)	54	68	97
% Households with a farm			
Total	95	95	90
More than 2 ha in size	50	47	32
% Households with cattle	67	75	80
Rijkevorsel			
Farmland (% of land)	22	28	38
Hectares of farmland per inhabitant	1.06	0.93	0.44
Head of cattle per inhabitant	1.8	1.1	1.0
Labor deployment per hectare of farmland (days per year, including time devoted to cattle breeding)	57	69	75
% Households with a farm			
Total	95	95	95
More than 2 ha in size	58	53	35
% Households with cattle	65	70	70

Table 2
Labor deployment in Dessel and Rijkevorsel, 1800–1910

	1800	1850	1910
Dessel			
Number of inhabitants	1364	1949	2719
Potential labor force (aged 15–64; %)	62	63	52
Distribution of economic activity (total 100%)			
Agriculture (%)	51	66	50
Industry (%)	40	22	30
Trading and service sectors (%)	9	12	20
Percentage of total waged labor (% of labor force)	36	31	37
Percentage of families deriving main income from self-employment (agricultural and nonagricultural, maximum)	75	75	65
Rijkevorsel			
Number of inhabitants	982	1458	4112
Potential labor force (aged 15–64; %)	64	62	53
Distribution of economic activity (total 100%)			
Agriculture (%)	73	72	47
Industry (%)	17	13	39
Trading and service sectors (%)	10	15	14
Percentage of total waged labor (% of labor force)	21	29	44
Percentage of families deriving main income from self-employment (agricultural and nonagricultural, maximum)	95	95	50

amounts of surplus produce to be marketed occasionally. The traditional production of goods likewise rarely exceeded the needs of the local market, and work in the skilled trades remained as a part-time activity for most craftsmen (Vanhaute, 1992, p. 136). This relatively closed regional economy gradually opened up during the 19th century. Some of the mainstays of the existing economic structure were undermined. The first of these were the independent farms. The rise in modern industrial activity also generated a new, overwhelmingly wage-dependent population group. Industries sprang up on the banks of the Turnhout Canal, which was completed in 1874 and linked several Kempen farming villages, including Rijkevorsel, with the port of Antwerp and the industrial region of Liège. In the last quarter of the 19th century, a large number of brickyards and tile works opened in and around Rijkevorsel, followed by numerous chemical works. In 1880, the three brickyards in Rijkevorsel employed 210 workers (who came from both inside and outside the village), but by 1910, the workforce had increased to 650, working at eight different sites. In 1910, the new industries employed 750 people from the village of Rijkevorsel, the majority of whom were men. This corresponded to nearly one-fifth of the potential labor force. Work in the brickyards was seasonal, however; hard labor, long working hours in the summer, low wages, lots of child labor, and high level of winter unemployment were factors that explain the dire economic and social state of affairs within the new industrial households.

Dessel's agricultural substructure was similar with that of Rijkevorsel, but developed in a slightly different direction due to its location in the protoindustrial region to the east of Turnhout. A thriving wool-processing industry developed in and around Dessel from 1750 onward as a result of several urban manufacturers subcontracting work to laborers in rural Antwerp. In 1811, as much as 38% of the potential labor force in Dessel was employed (usually on a part-time basis) in the production of worsted

and cloth. But the tide turned rapidly in the second quarter of the 19th century. Of 28 manufacturers that existed during the so-called French period, 19 remained in 1831 and only three remained by 1846. Some 12% of the potential labor force was still employed in the protoindustrial textile industry in 1846. Almost all of them were spinners. The last manufacturer of Dessel cloth closed its doors in 1860. Although Dessel had a canal link as early as 1846, it was not until 1875 that the industrial consequences of this link became apparent. The most important stimulus came from the mining of white sand for the nearby glassworks. From 1870 onward, an average of 150 to 200 male laborers from Dessel worked in the white sand mines, although most did not work during the winter months. Their labor market position and income status were comparable with those of the brickyard workers in Rijkevorsel.

By the mid-19th century, the agricultural economy of the Kempen villages was stretched to its limits. This economy was characterized by family farms that strove to be as independent as possible, and in which income from farming was supplemented as necessary and, where possible, by extra earnings from work in the textile industry and elsewhere. This inward looking society opened up towards the end of the century. The ongoing fragmentation of farms and the new employment opportunities in the modern industries resulted, among other things, in a less strictly regulated demographic profile.

The rate of growth of the population of Dessel between the mid-18th and early 20th centuries was constant—on average, between 0.5% and 1% per year. The population fell by 12% during the mid-19th century crisis in the protoindustrial wool industry, but in 1880, it reverted to its 1846 level. The decade between 1900 and 1910 was characterized by a remarkable acceleration in growth—more than 2% per year. Population growth in Rijkevorsel came about primarily after 1875, when the new industries established themselves. Between 1890 and 1905, the population grew faster than ever, with the result that around 1900, Rijkevorsel had 50% more inhabitants than Dessel had, in contrast to the mid-19th century, when it had fewer inhabitants than Dessel had.

This population growth was, first and foremost, the result of almost continuous natural population growth, which increased sharply from 1875 onward. The only period of net inmigration in Rijkevorsel was between 1870 and 1890 (as a result of the new canal side industries), but the crisis period around the middle of the century saw substantial net outmigration. The advent of modern industry in Rijkevorsel increased the mobility of the population. In 1850, 75% of the population had been born in Rijkevorsel itself; by 1900, the figure had fallen to 60%. This decline was not apparent in Dessel (80% of the population having been born locally) because most of the canal-side industries were based in neighboring villages.

The excess of births over deaths, which increased from 1850 onward, was primarily the result of a falling mortality rate and, to a lesser extent, a rising birthrate. Relative mortality fell from an annual average of 30 per thousand in 1800 to 15 and 20 per thousand from 1900 onward in Rijkevorsel and Dessel, respectively. An annual average of 30–35 children per thousand inhabitants were born up until the second half of the 19th century (the figure being slightly higher in protoindustrial Dessel). From 1840 onward, the birthrate fell to under 30 for a considerable period, but rose again to above 40 in the last quarter of the century. An annual excess of births over deaths of 20 per thousand and above was recorded during these years.

This excess of births over deaths was the result of an increase in marital fertility. In the second half of the 18th century, there had been 4.7 births per marriage. In the second half of the 19th century, this increased to 5.1, and from 1900 onward, it increased to nearly 6. This increase was coupled with a fall in the age at marriage (the age at first marriage for women fell from 28 to 26, on average), which caused a sharp increase in nuptiality. In 1910, 6 in 10 women "of marriageable age" (older than 15) were married.

A few decades earlier, the ratio had been less than 3 in 10. In other words, toward the end of the 19th century, the restrictive marriage pattern became more flexible, without constraining natural fertility; if anything, it had the opposite effect.

Up until the last quarter of the 19th century, the villages in the Kempen region were characterized by a very "closed" demographic profile. The old economic substructure, which was based on the family farm, was made up of a population characterized by relatively high age and a large proportion of celibates. In addition, males dominated the economic substructure, and the population was place and region bound. Once agricultural structure was disrupted, the demographic profile of the region changed within the space of a generation. The Kempen population around 1900 was younger and more mobile, with a much less rigid attitude toward marriage and procreation.

Now that a sketch of Kempen in the 19th century has been drawn, the research question can be further refined: (a) Did the shifts in the economic structure outlined above coincide with a change in social and, in particular, intergenerational relationships? In other words, was there a shift from a model based on "solidarity," in which the family cycle was the most important determinant of the household's social profile, to a "competitive" model, in which social differences were much more group specific? Did the link between family cycle, development of the farm, and social status disappear? (b) What impact did those shifts have on the families' labor strategies? Were other decisions about family formation and labor deployment affected by the changing sources of income (self-employment vs. waged labor)?

Initial focus will be on household formation, the age cycle, labor deployment, and occupational status as explanatory variables. The most important criterion in this analysis is the average age of family heads. It provides the basis for examining differences in family composition, occupation, and taxable wealth. The data will then be classified according to each occupational group and examined to establish the extent to which age or social group determined income status.

4. The age cycle of the families

4.1. Family composition

The Kempen population's changing attitudes toward marriage and family size obviously had an impact on the size and composition of households. Table 3 calculates the number of family members per occupational group in four reference years.

The 18th century villages were full of small households. Barely one in four (protoindustrial) to one in three (farming) families had more than five members. Average household size and the percentage of large families increased sharply during the 19th century. The high values in the category of independent farmers and the small households in the category of waged laborers come as no surprise. Protoindustrial households in Dessel were typically small, particularly in 1750 (young families with few children), whereas the households of those that worked in the white sand mines and brickyards (waged laborers) in 1900 were relatively large (young families with many children). But to what extent was this changing family pattern the result of changes in age structure?

Households in the Kempen region became noticeably younger between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries (see Table 4). In 1850, barely one in six families had a family head younger than 35. Half a century later, one in three households were headed by young parents. The percentage of the population living in young families doubled in Dessel and almost quadrupled in Rijkevorsel (to 31%).

Table 3
Family size per occupational group in Dessel and Rijkevorsel, 1750–1910

	1750	1800	1850	1910
Dessel				
All households	4.1	4.4	5.0	5.4
With main occupation as/in:				
Independent farmer	4.7		5.7	6.0
Self-employed and tertiary sectors	4.1		5.6	5.2
Waged laborer	3.6		4.5	5.5
Number of families with				
1 and 2 members (%)	17	18	13	15
3 and 4 members (%)	47	39	31	26
5 or more members (%)	36	43	57	60
Rijkevorsel				
All households	4.5	4.5	4.9	5.4
With main occupation as/in:				
Independent farmer	5.4	5.2	5.9	6.4
Self-employed and tertiary sectors	4.0	3.4	4.5	5.5
Waged laborer	3.5	3.0	3.5	5.3
Number of families with				
1 and 2 members (%)	22	20	18	14
3 and 4 members (%)	27	29	29	27
5 or more members (%)	51	51	54	59

Figs. 2 and 3 show the relationship between the age of the family heads and the composition of the families. To ascertain the composition of the households, three groups have been distinguished: family heads (husband/wife), children (by age: under age 12, 12–15 inclusive, and 16 and older), and coresidents (all other relatives, lodgers, and live-in servants). The average mid-19th-century Kempen household consisted of five members. The composition of these families was not the same in both villages. Compared with the traditional farming community of Rijkevorsel, Dessel had more married

Table 4
Breakdown of households based on the average age of family heads, 1846 and 1910 (in %)

Age	Dessel		Rijkevorsel	
	1846	1910	1846	1910
20–25	0	7	0	8
25.5–30	7	11	7	12
30.5–35	9	13	9	15
35.5–40	13	15	17	13
40.5–45	13	13	14	10
45.5–50	16	9	15	9
50.5–55	12	7	10	9
55.5–60	11	6	6	8
60.5–65	8	7	7	7
65.5–70	5	5	8	4
+70	5	6	8	5

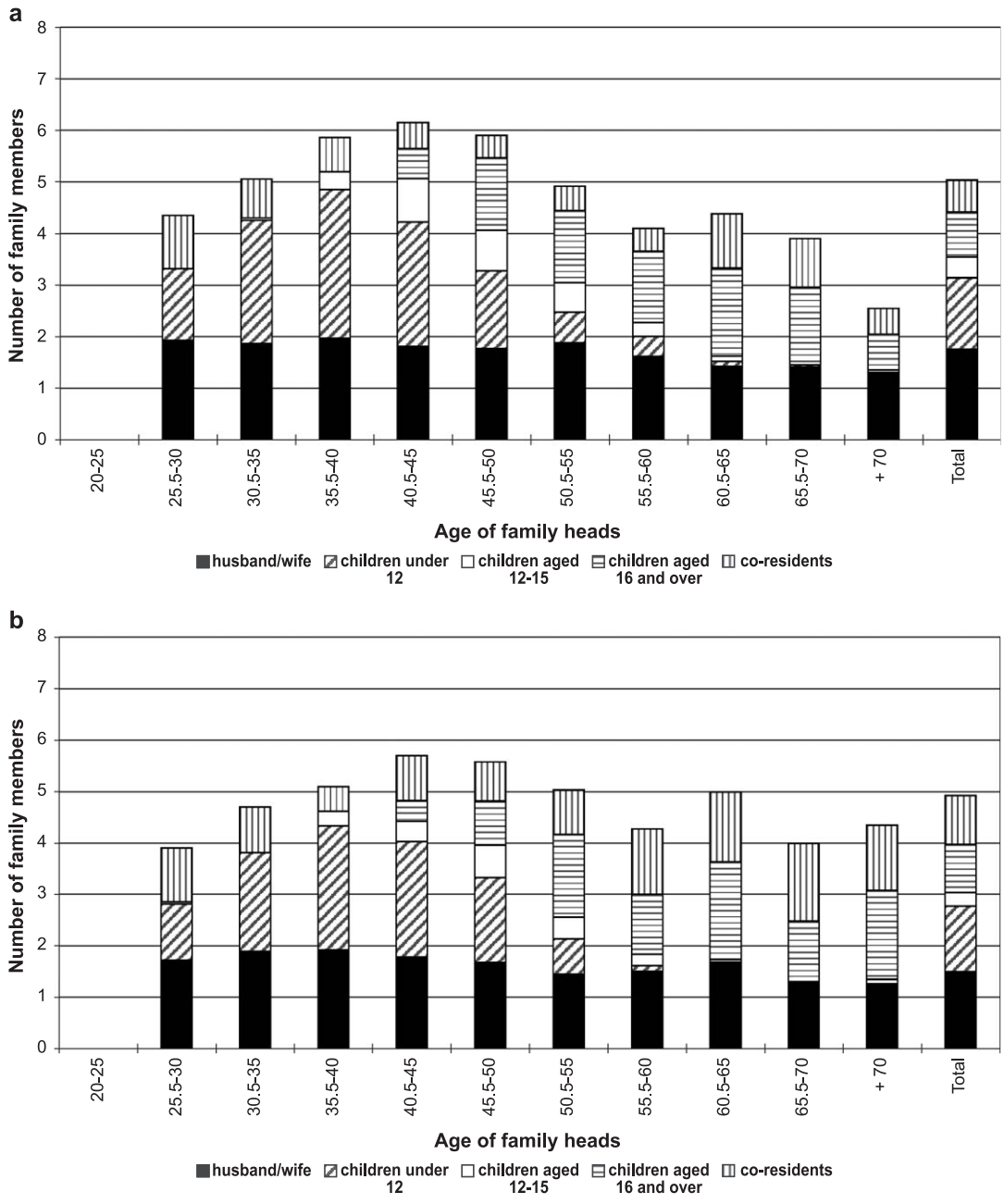


Fig. 2. Family composition by age of family heads in 1846 in (a) Dessel and (b) Rijkevorsel.

couples, more coresident children, and fewer live-in servants. The wool industry was a determining factor here in two senses. Although the earlier boom in this industry had resulted in large family sizes and fewer unmarried family heads, its rapid decline in the second quarter of the 19th century imposed a heavy burden on households because older children remained at home longer. In Dessel, the larger size

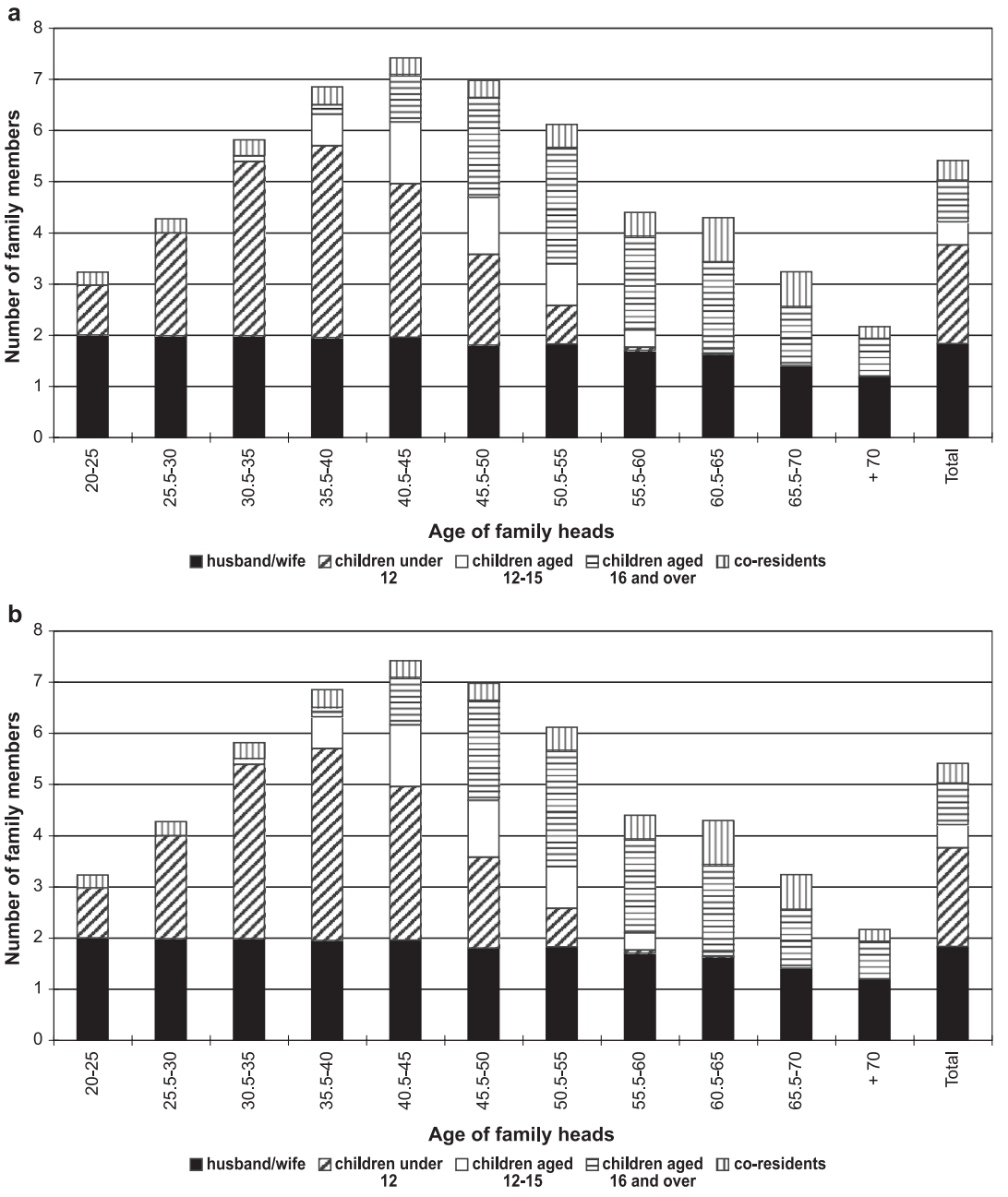


Fig. 3. Family composition by age of family heads in 1910 in (a) Dessel and (b) Rijkevorsel.

of households, up until family heads were 50 years old, was due to their having greater numbers of children, which exemplified the higher fertility characteristic of this textile village until shortly before the crisis of the 1840s. The smaller family sizes in Rijkevorsel resulted in a shortage of child labor. Households there were consequently often obliged to enlist the help of (live-in) servants and farmhands

(in 27% of families compared with only 15% of families in Dessel). In 1850, a third of all household members in older households (where the family head was over 55) were not related to the nuclear family. In Dessel, the figure was only 19%. In Rijkevorsel, one in three households had only one family head. This category included not just an abundance of widows and widowers but also unmarried, single people (5% of the families) and unmarried, cohabiting couples. Approximately 30 households (almost 10% of the families) consisted entirely of blood relations, mainly brothers and sisters. These *frérèches* are characteristic of a closed rural community. They were virtually nonexistent in Dessel, and, as a result, only 25% of households there were headed by one person.

Family size continued to increase throughout the 19th century. The average household in 1910 had one more family member than did a family a century earlier, and in 1850, half a family member more than a century earlier. These increases were the result of larger numbers of young children (on average 1.3 to 1.9) and a decrease in the number of households with only one family head (15%, consisting almost exclusively of households headed by older widows and widowers). There was also a sharp decline in the number of unrelated coresidents, fewer servants in particular.

One difference that stands out is the more convex curves for 1910. These were the result of larger numbers of small, very young families (with a family head who was less than 25 years old) and larger households with family heads between the age of 30 and 60. This is indicative of both higher fertility and fewer coresidents in households with older family heads. In what way did this determine the division of available labor?

4.2. Labor deployment

To show the relationship between family size and labor deployment, data on the number of coresidents must be converted into a measure of the potential labor force (see Figs. 4 and 5). This measure has been used to calculate the actual deployable labor within the household, excluding labor devoted to childrearing. This potential labor is expressed in man-years. The following reduction coefficients were applied: male family head: 1; female family head: 1 if she was the sole head of the family and 0.5 if she had a male partner; family members aged 12–64: 1; family members aged 65 and older: 0.5; family members under 12: 0. The ill and infirm, and lodgers who had nothing to do with the household were not included. Childcare responsibilities within the household were therefore attributed exclusively to the wife (Vanhaute, 1992, pp. 81–84; Lundh, 1995, pp. 59–60).

The supply of available labor within the households in 1846 followed the life cycle of the family (Fig. 4). As the children grew older, the supply of deployable labor increased up until family heads, on average, reached the age of 45 to 55. In Dessel, it then decreased when the average age of family heads was 55 and over. In Rijkevorsel, this occurred when family heads were, on average, 65 and older. This was because the older households in Rijkevorsel contained many more live-in servants. An interesting feature of the mid-19th century was the relatively high ‘‘family formation threshold’’ threshold—the minimum age at which to start a family. Even recently formed families enlisted the help of more than two full-time labor units, on average. Generally, one additional worker needed to be available if a couple was to start a family, and, frequently, additional people (relatives and nonrelatives) took up residence in the households of young families.

There were few fluctuations in the curve of available labor, while farming remained the cornerstone of the household’s income. This was evident in Rijkevorsel around 1850, where the number of labor units remained high (between three and four), even in households where family heads were 55 or over. The

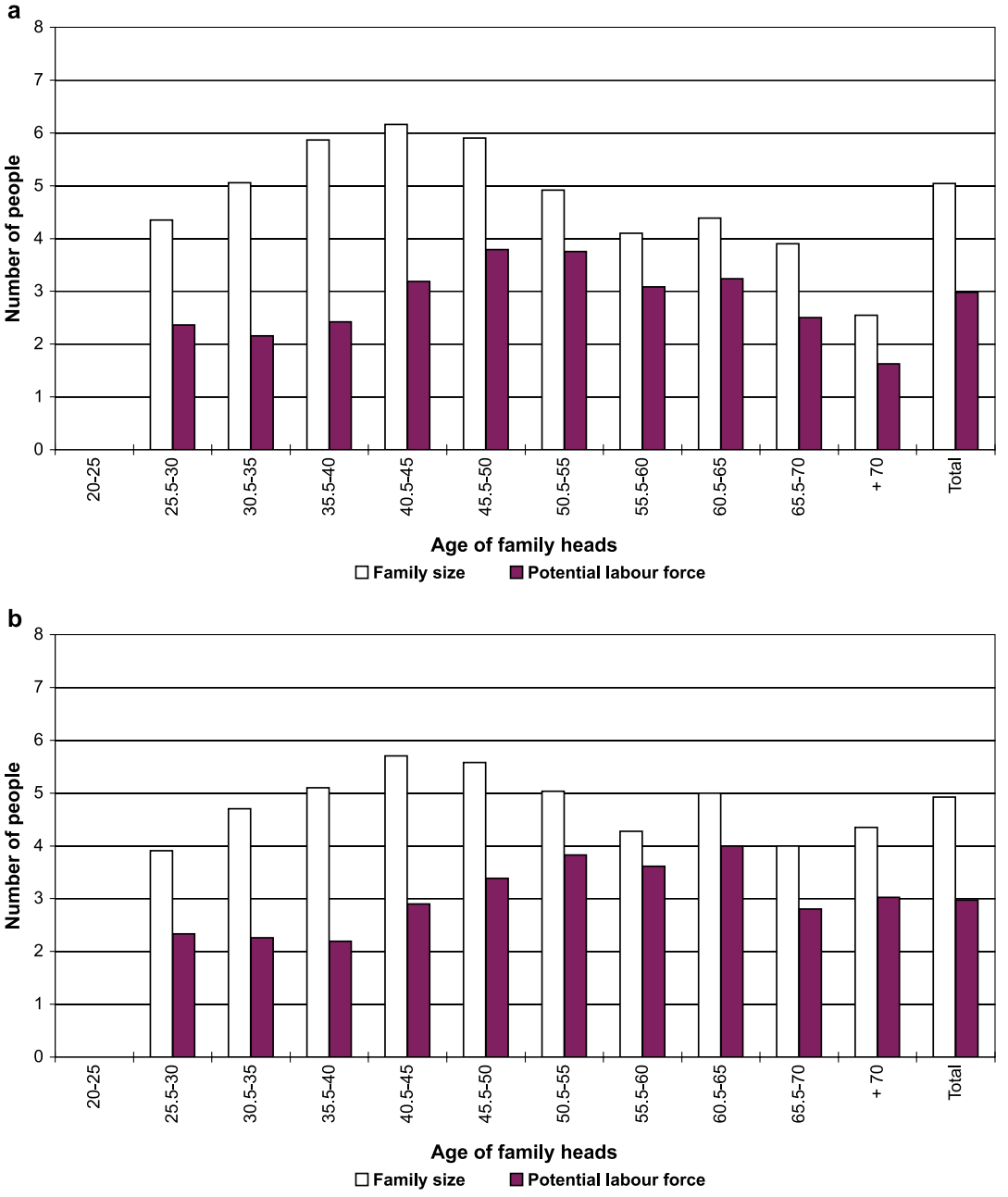


Fig. 4. Family size and potential labor force in 1846 in (a) Dessel and (b) Rijkevorsel.

family formation threshold was less absolute in protoindustrial Dessel, where other sources of income were available. Older families in Dessel enlisted the help of additional live-in workers to a much lesser extent, which might suggest that the family farm was scaled down at an earlier age and passed on to the children.

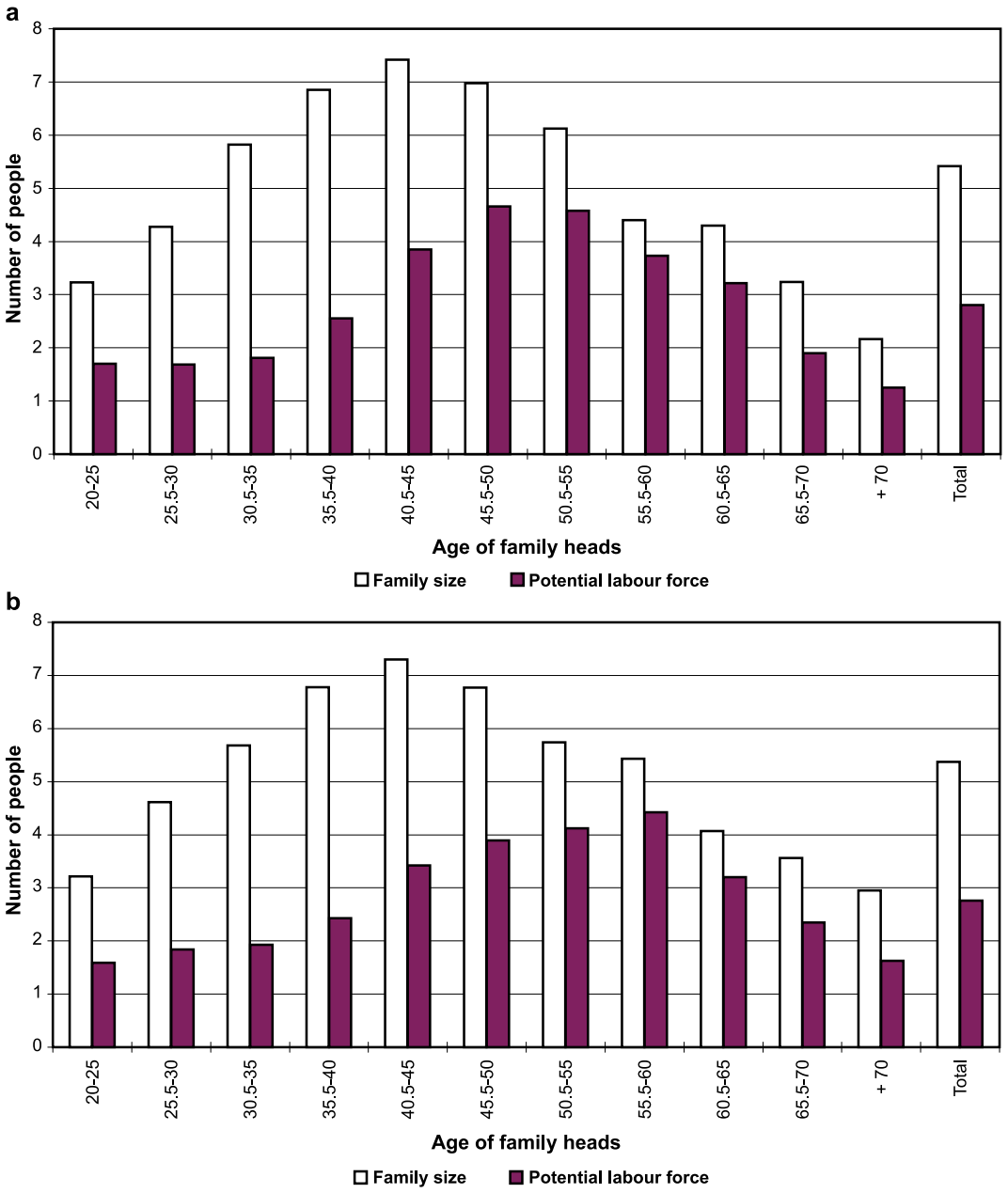


Fig. 5. Family size and potential labor force in 1910 in (a) Dessel and (b) Rijkevorsel.

The average household in 1910, although larger than its counterpart 50 years earlier, had less access to potential labor (Fig. 5). This was due to the decline in the percentage of coresident adults and older children. A more important feature of the households in this era was the far less equal distribution across the age groups. In 1910, more households had a limited supply of labor (less than two labor units), but

during the households' productive years, when family heads were aged between 45 and 60, the supply of deployable labor was higher, with more working-age children in the household. The agrarian model was disrupted in two ways. First, the need to have access to more than two full-time workers dwindled. Second, differences within the family cycle became much more pronounced. In 1846, the potential labor force curve fluctuated between two and four labor units. Half a century later, this widened to between 1.5 and 4.5 workers. In the mid-19th century, only one in three families had access to fewer than two full-time workers. By 1910, this figure had risen to almost one in two. This was largely the result of a lowering of the "family formation threshold". The need to have access to additional workers to start a family, based on the notion that a husband and wife could not manage on their own, had disappeared.

4.3. Choice of occupation

The households were also subdivided according to occupation. This classification was based on the number of reported occupations. In other words, double and treble indications of occupational activity for each household were taken into account. These data were derived from the population registers and were also supplemented by occupational details recorded in numerous other registers. How did the families characterize themselves, as being wage-dependent or independent? The data were grouped in the following occupational categories, which are as homogeneous as possible: (a) farmers: independent income from farming; (b) casual laborers: waged labor in the farming sector and in large nonindustrial works; (c) craftsmen: small businesses (food, construction, timber, clothing, textiles, leather, and metal); (d) protoindustrial laborers: wool spinning, cloth weaving, and several other ancillary activities (only in 1846); (e) industrial-waged laborers (factory workers); (f) those working in the trading, service, and transport sectors; and (g) people of independent means: living off non-work-related income.

The rationale behind income generation for families in farming communities was to achieve an independent income and to build up their own farm (Garrier & Hubscher, 1988, p. 9; Vanhaute, 1992, pp. 310–314). The breakdown of reported occupations, by age, in Rijkevorsel in 1846 provides a new indicator. During the first phase of the life cycle, casual labor was still enlisted to a great extent, but occupational relationships seemed to stabilize once family heads reached the age of 40–45: 50–60% were independent farmers, 10% were casual laborers, 20% were craftsmen, and 15% worked in the trading and service sectors. That age 45 was not an arbitrary threshold is illustrated in Fig. 4, which shows the supply of labor, at that age that the supply of available labor rapidly peaked.

Agriculture was equally important in Dessel, but, as we saw earlier, the agrarian pattern was disrupted by employment opportunities in the textile industry, from which one in six families still derived their main income in 1846. That these were primarily older inhabitants of Dessel is indicative of the crisis in the wool industry, although spinning, in particular, continued to be an important ancillary industry for several years. This might explain why the young families in Dessel were able to achieve an independent status (as farmers) so quickly or, at least, more quickly than their counterparts in Rijkevorsel did. A century of intensive wool processing in Dessel had not fundamentally disrupted its agricultural substructure. With this additional source of income disappearing, the families that remained in Dessel reverted to farming. The supply of casual (day) laborers in both Dessel and Rijkevorsel was composed primarily of young families. This situation was comparable with that in the rural part of Twente (the Netherlands), which was characterized by cottage industry and where the percentage of independent farmers increased from 35% in the under-25 age group to more than 70% in the 65 and over age group (Hendrickx, 1997, pp. 194–196).

The most important new development in the occupational pattern of 1910 was factory work, which proved to be a double-edged sword. Although the new industries provided an alternative source of income for young families, factory work increasingly became a lifetime job. This was particularly evident in Rijkevorsel, where one in three family heads, in their 40s, derived their main income from the new industries. If we assume that the chances of anyone starting up their own farm after the age of 50 were extremely slim, this effectively means that one in every three families in Rijkevorsel was already destined for a lifetime of factory work. This proportion mirrored the percentage of agricultural households and was undoubtedly a major turning point in the region's history. Only one in four to one in five breadwinners from the previous generation (those age 60 or older in 1910) were waged laborers for life.

If we apply the same breakdown to Dessel, we see that factory work was only a starter job. Fewer than 20% of families in 1910 had lifetime jobs in factories, which was equivalent to less than half of those who were able to start up their own farms. The old pattern, in which casual labor was a means of acquiring one's own farm, was less disrupted in Dessel than in Rijkevorsel. In Rijkevorsel, in particular, a new social category emerged, whose links with income from land and the model of agrarian society became further weakened.

The preceding analysis confirms the relationship between changing demographic and economic patterns. Changing labor and income prospects disrupted the agrarian life cycle of families. As old goals (owning a farm) became less attainable and was replaced by new goals (acquiring income through wages), households increasingly adapted their family formation and labor deployment strategies. But what impact did this have on the income cycle and income status of the families?

4.4. Income and property

An age-specific pattern was apparent in terms of both family formation and occupational status, which, in turn, reflected shifts in the prevailing economic structure. But was there a relationship between differences in income status and the life cycle of the family? Income tax returns and land tax records were used to measure income and property. Fig. 6 sets out the number of taxpayers in each age group (see Vanhaute, 1999, pp. 200–201 for the relevant figures).

The age-specific distribution of land ownership and taxable wealth can be linked to the demographic and occupational life cycle. The values for the mid-19th century indicate that upward social mobility was age-related. In Rijkevorsel, there was a correlation between an increase in land ownership and the extension of the family and expansion of the farm. The accumulation of taxable wealth did not stop when older families became smaller, again, as a result of children leaving home. Property was not divided up until either the husband or wife died. Young families in Dessel were quicker to achieve the status of farmers and owners, but once family heads reached the age of 55 to 60, the process of accumulating moveable and immovable property ended. The high percentage of young households in Dessel featured in the tax returns is another indication that the income derived from the cottage industry was conducive to achieving independence more quickly. This indicates a more rapid intergenerational transfer of wealth, which obviously made it easier for young households to become independent entities. It took the young families in Rijkevorsel much longer to acquire an independent status; on the other hand, farming was regarded as more of a long-term investment.

The wealth curves for 1910 are also much more convex than those for the mid-19th century. The parallel with the age-related curves for the potential labor force is also striking (Fig. 5). Taxable wealth

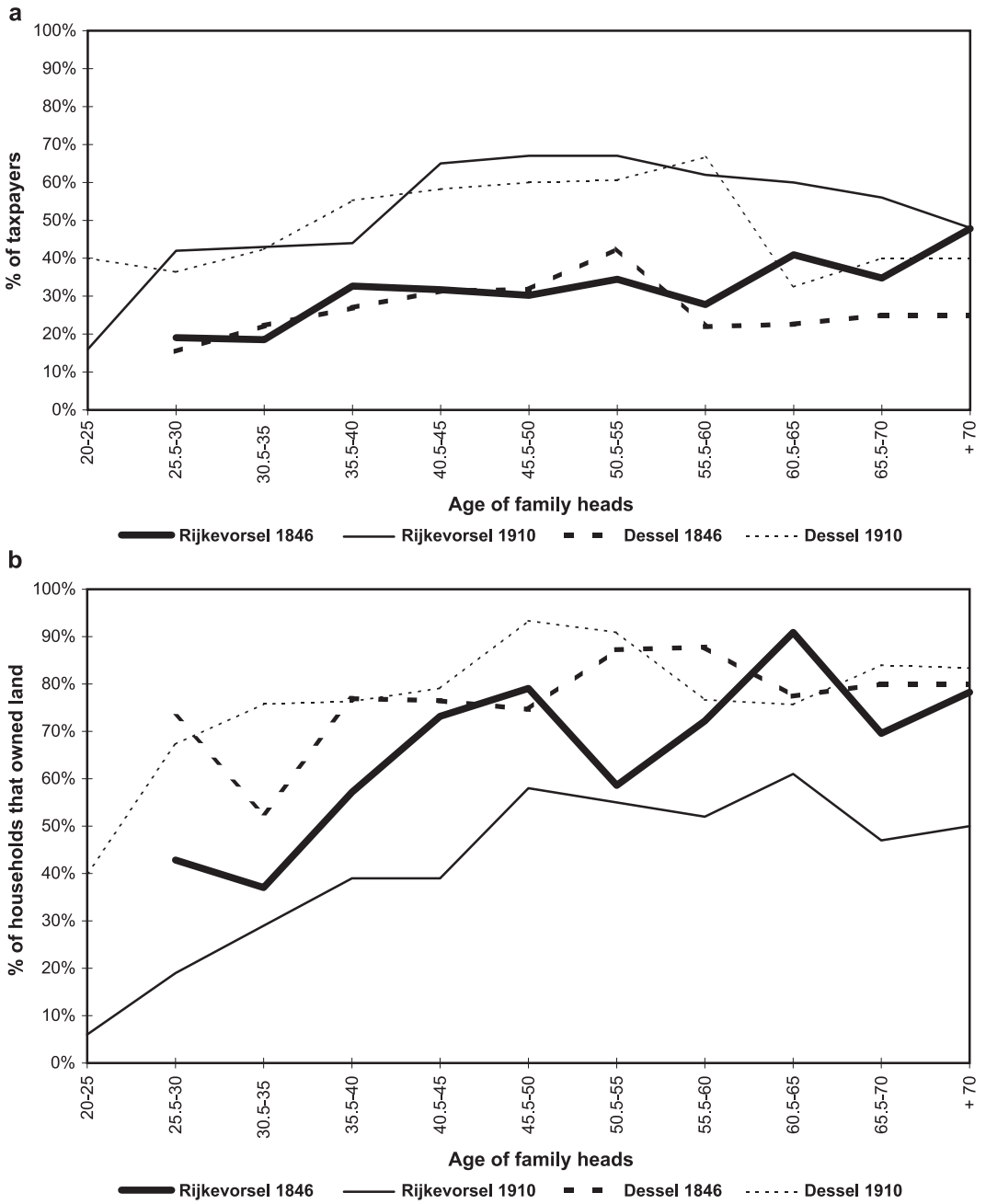


Fig. 6. (a) Percentage of taxpayers by age of family heads, 1846–1910. (b) Land ownership by age of family heads, 1846–1910.

increased (often doubled) until family heads reached the age of about 50. Once they passed 60, more and more families disappeared from the tax records, indicating a reduction in land ownership and a less prosperous income status. This age-specific differentiation was particularly pronounced in Rijkevorsel,

where a large number of very young households owned no property of any kind and had no income other than from factory work. In addition, for the majority of older families in Rijkevorsel, farming had ceased to represent a lifelong guarantee of income.

For many "starting" families in Dessel, waged labor continued to be a stepping stone toward eventually acquiring their own farm. An important factor was the land market in Dessel, which remained much more democratic than the one in Rijkevorsel. Households had to wait until the family head reached age 40–45, however, before they could attain the property status of previous generations.

The increasing importance of casual labor to household income generation resulted in a further undermining of the agrarian model, which revolved around gradually building up one's own farm and then earning a lifelong living from it. The first signs of this were apparent in protoindustrial Dessel, although no fundamental disruption occurred in its agricultural substructure. The income-creation opportunities offered by the textile industry gave older generations the incentive to transfer some of their moveable and immovable property to their children earlier, within their own lifetimes. Not only was it additional earnings from industrial work that enabled couples in protoindustrial villages to start a family sooner and to have children in quicker succession. The strategies of these families' parents must also be taken into account. Unlike their agricultural counterparts, people in protoindustrial villages had less need for the security of an independent income due to the additional employment opportunities available to them. Interestingly enough, this intergenerational family cycle still existed even in 1846, in the waning years of the wool industry in Dessel. It was the older families that filled the majority of the remaining jobs in the textile industry. The new households used the support that they received from their parents to set up farms more quickly than their counterparts in farming villages. More than likely, this cycle was interrupted after 1850, and the population of Dessel reverted to the slower agricultural pattern.

The first place, where this pattern was permanently disrupted was in Rijkevorsel. In the early part of the 20th century, households increasingly fell outside the income pattern that was based on earning a living from the family farm. Everything points to a greater degree of differentiation by age, but can the differences in income status in 1910 be explained by the age cycle (social mobility within one generation)? Or was it more a case of social differentiation, in which social groups spanned different age groups?

5. Did occupational groups become social groups?

In the early part of the 20th century, Emile Vliebergh, the famous champion of *Belgische Boerenbond* (the Belgian Farmers Union), compiled a report on the prevailing state of the agricultural industry in the Kempen region. As far as the impact of "large-scale industry in the northern part of Kempen" was concerned, Vliebergh (1908, p. 168) was fairly confident of the following:

> 'Small farmers derive a welcome additional income from the factories: the farmers' sons work there until they make enough to marry and start their own small farm. In this respect, the factories were a substantial benefit to agriculture and it is remarkable how quickly the farmers' sons leave the factories as soon as they have enough to start their own little farm' (see also Monographie, 1899, p. 42).

This was how he expressed his faith in the old rural household, whose strategy was to build up one's own farm. But did this pattern actually mirror reality? The labor strategies of families were closely

interwoven with the so-called family cycle, which is represented here by the age-specific composition of the family. One crucial variable was the supply of deployable labor. The preceding analyses showed a correlation between the labor deployment cycle and the accumulation of external forms of wealth. When family cycles were linked to occupations, a correlation was found between the occupational group and the supply of labor within the family. This was particularly evident in the agricultural community of Rijkevorsel, in 1846. More older children and more related and unrelated coresidents lived in farming families. As a result, the average farming family had access to a larger number of full-time workers, almost four. This was one person more than in the category of craftsmen and two more than in families who worked in the trading and service sectors or as casual laborers. The profile of this latter category of households corresponded much more closely to that of young families. Only one in five households had a coresident older child; in the category of farming families, the ratio was one in two.

The breakdown according to age, occupation, and family formation was much less precise in Dessel in 1846. The profiles of families that worked in farming, trading, the skilled trades, and the textile industry were similar. These occupational groups had access to an average of three full-time workers, as a result of the relatively large number of older children and coresidents in their households. This indicates less differentiation between the age groups. The group of casual laborers was the only one that deviated by being particularly young.

The link between large families and a large supply of labor was disrupted in 1910 by the group of industrial laborers. Although their households had more young children (under age 12), the working-age sons and daughters in older families left home at a younger age. By contrast, farming families, such as those in Rijkevorsel, kept their children at home as long as possible (Table 5).

The most important dividing line in terms of income and property, once again, was between income from self-employment (from farming, the skilled trades, and trading) and income from waged labor (casual labor as well as the service sector). Proletarian households appeared much less frequently in the 1846 tax records for Rijkevorsel. This was equally true of young households, which again indicates the link between age, occupation, and status. In Dessel, families that worked in farming, trading, and the skilled trades also had the strongest profile. Clearly, the payment of personal taxes was more closely related to having an ‘‘independent’’ income status than to owning land. A less clear-cut distribution of occupational groups across the age groups meant that a person’s occupational group became a more important indicator of social differentiation. In Dessel, the link between age and occupation was disrupted by a substantial number of older textile workers, who featured marginally in the personal tax returns.

The differentiation between self-employment and waged labor became less distinct in the tax registers of 1910. The Rijkevorsel example makes it clear that taxable wealth was no longer primarily derived from independent income. It was now predominantly among the group of industrial laborers that an additional pattern emerged. First, there was a rapid increase in the number of working-class families, for whom land ownership was never going to be an option. Second, a growing group of older working-class families ceased to resemble the traditional profile of rural families, and there can therefore be said to have been a greater degree of social differentiation that was not age-related. This was less apparent in Dessel because (limited) land ownership was still an option for the vast majority of families. Nevertheless, a group of working-class families emerged that would definitely fall outside the old pattern.

Where there was a strong correlation between social mobility and the family cycle, the impact of age within the different social categories was minimal, given that people moved from one social category

Table 5
Taxpayers per occupational group, 1846 and 1910

	Personal taxes (%)		Land ownership (%)	
	1846	1910	1846	1910
Dessel				
Farmers	36	51	89	81
Casual labor	0	25	53	63
Skilled trades	43	67	68	81
Protoindustry	8		75	
Industrial workers		38		71
Trading sector	75	73	88	81
Service sector	30	43	30	65
Independently wealthy	14	52	86	80
Total	28	49	77	76
Rijkevorsel				
Farmers	51	69	85	52
Casual labor	0	50	37	17
Skilled trades	20	71	66	62
Industrial workers	0	33	0	20
Trading sector	60	77	60	67
Service sector	5	44	15	31
Independently wealthy	0	45	20	60
Total	32	51	66	39

(wage dependent) to the other (independent) within the life cycle of the family. Differences in social status were primarily due to differences in the family cycle. Where there was an increase in social differentiation, irrespective of age, then, the part played by occupational group increased. Social mobility then remained confined to mobility within one's own social group. This is a basic assumption for the following analysis, in which several occupational groups are examined individually. They are divided into two age groups: the under and the over 45 (Table 6). What family labor (potential labor force) did they have access to? Who paid personal taxes, and how much did they pay, who owned land, and how much did they own? This method will be used to establish whether age had an impact on these occupational categories.

Virtually no age effect was apparent in the differences in status within the occupational groups in 1846, although attaining the status of farmer was accompanied by an increase in income status, which could be achieved as the farm expanded. This depended on the supply of deployable labor. The category of protoindustrial workers presented an entirely different picture. The older working-class families fared even worse than their younger counterparts did. In other words, any social advancement that was apparent within the family cycle tended to be a transition from one status (semiproletarian) to another (independent). This age effect was more pronounced in Rijkevorsel. The age effect in Dessel was partly disrupted by the category of older families that worked as spinners and weavers.

Another pattern emerged in Rijkevorsel from 1900 onward. First, increasingly fewer young farmers were able to build up their own farms and were obliged to continue to supplement their income with factory work, in particular. As a result, they ceased to be included in the land tax registers and personal tax records. Second, fewer households that derived their main income from waged labor were able to

Table 6
Occupational and age groups

	n Households	Potential labor force	Personal taxes			Land ownership	
			Fr/taxpayer			ha/landowner	
		%	*Mean*	Median	%	*Mean*	Median
1846							
Farmers Rijkevorsel							
<45	61	3.14	48	11.57	11.50	80	16.33	10.80
>45	95	4.21	54	10.59	10.00	88	20.84	19.90
Farmers Dessel							
<45	75	2.99	36	9.28	7.74	89	5.70	3.08
>45	104	3.77	38	9.72	8.84	89	5.59	4.00
Protoindustrial workers Dessel							
<45	21	2.48	14	N.A.		76	3.01	0.27
>45	51	3.15	6			75	0.73	0.38
1910							
Farmers Rijkevorsel							
<45	91	2.88	58	11.68	11.00	43	11.15	4.79
>45	120	4.56	77	12.29	12.00	59	13.11	7.64
Factory workers Rijkevorsel							
<45	240	1.94	31	12.46	10.00	15	2.06	0.45
>45	79	3.44	41	15.60	10.50	38	5.29	0.38

N.A.: Amounts too small to include.

attain an improved, independent income status. Only a few managed to advance within their own group. Not only did it become increasingly difficult to make the transition from the (temporary) status as a waged laborer to independent status, but social differences within wage categories became greater as well.

6. The import of an industrial proletariat?

In an agricultural community such as Rijkevorsel was in 1846, upward social mobility up to the age of 45–55 was the end result of the individual courses that many families followed. Only 10–15% of families failed to rise above their proletarian status. As a result of industrial work becoming a widespread feature of the countryside at the end of the 19th century, this percentage quickly increased to 20% in Dessel and to more than 30% in Rijkevorsel.

It seems that the perception of Vliebergh (1908) of industrial work as being an intermediate stage in the family cycle was something that became unattainable for a rapidly growing group of families in the canal side communities of Kempen. When August De Winne, a journalist for the socialist newspaper *Le Peuple*, traveled through Kempen in 1912, he was shocked by the many factory workers he encountered in this rural district:

> The laborers! To see them trudging along the paved road at the end of a day's work—thin, pale, emaciated, with cadaverous faces. They look like wandering corpses. There are no old people among

> them. After toiling for 10 or 12 years in the factories, they are physical wrecks. By the time they reach 40, they are decrepit creatures, incapable of carrying out the least taxing work (Vanhaute, 1992, p. 301).

Segers (1911, p. 71), a contemporary of De Winne and Vliebergh, also seemed to realize that Vliebergh's perception that factory work benefited farmers corresponded less and less to reality:

> Factories have sprung up in some of the villages. The people who work there earn twice as much as agricultural laborers do. "Well," a town clerk assured me, "I have yet to meet a factory worker who was able to improve his lot in life; if poverty exists around here, it is amongst these people.

The question that this raises is the extent to which this polarization was the result of the proletarianizing of the new generations of Kempen inhabitants, or whether it was primarily due to the influx of new workers from outside the villages. Population trends in Rijkevorsel were determined by in- and outmigration to a greater extent than in Dessel. In the mid-19th century, newcomers annually added 4–5% to the total population. By around 1900, the figure had increased to 6–7%. A more mobile population reduced the percentage of locally born inhabitants. In Rijkevorsel, this percentage declined from more than 70% in 1846 to 60% in the period between 1880 and 1910. The nonindigenous population in Dessel remained negligible throughout the entire period, at 20%. Outmigration exceeded inmigration in both Dessel and Rijkevorsel between 1846 and 1910. Population growth was primarily the result of a growing excess of births over deaths, although the brick-making village of Rijkevorsel experienced several major waves of immigration during the last quarter of the 19th century; the most important of which took place between 1895 and 1905. The composition of its population in 1910 bore evidence of this influx.

If we focus on the place of birth of the primary family heads (usually the man), we find that in 1846, 44% were born outside Rijkevorsel. Despite being a region that was largely dependent on its own resources, the northern part of Kempen was still characterized by relatively high mobility. Many young adults moved away from the municipalities where their parents lived but did not venture farther than one or two villages away. The most mobile of the primary family heads were those in the under-40 age group: 51% had been born outside Rijkevorsel compared with 40% in the over-60 age group. The high percentage of nonindigenous individuals in the younger age group was partly due to a sizeable number of customs officials having settled in Rijkevorsel. The farmers, as anticipated, were much more reluctant to leave home: Only one in three came from outside the municipality. The percentage of nonindigenous villagers in the younger group of craftsmen was higher at 42%. As anticipated, these differences within the occupational groups corresponded to differences in wealth: 74% of the indigenous family heads owned land (an average of 11.8 ha), and 39% of them paid personal taxes (an average of 4.3 francs). Only 55% of family heads who came from elsewhere owned land (an average of 5.9 ha), and 23% paid personal taxes (an average of 3.0 francs). It was slightly more difficult for family heads who came from outside the village to establish an independent household; however, they were younger than average, and more of them were at the start of their family cycle.

Did the massive influx into the village during the last quarter of the 19th century impact the community in any other way? Barely 35% of all primary family heads in Rijkevorsel in 1910 had been born locally. One striking feature was the virtual absence of differences between the age and

the occupational groups: 64% of young family heads in the under-30 age group had been migrants. In the 30–50 age group, the figure was as high as 70%. In the older population, the percentage fell to 60%. Some 66% of family heads who were recorded as being factory workers came from outside the village. Curiously enough, this figure was similar with that of the group of farmers, 62% of whom had not been born in Rijkevorsel. Thus, the dividing line between the different occupations did not coincide with whether the individuals had been born locally or not. The increasing mobility applied to the entire local community. In the mid-19th century, two in every three farmers still lived in the place where they had been born. In 1910, the figure was only one in three. In 1910, as in 1846, differences in status and wealth were significantly affected by where one had been born. Of family heads born in Rijkevorsel, 61% owned land (an average of 7.0 ha) and 57% paid personal taxes (an average of 6.4 francs). Those who had migrated to the village owned less land (27% owned an average of 1.17 hectares) and paid slightly less in personal taxes (47% paid an average of 8.2 francs).

It would be difficult to attribute the process of social change to the increasing level of inmigration, but the increased prevalence of migrants accentuated the difference between those who were able to build up an independent income by utilizing the land they owned and those who remained dependent on earnings from external sources. The appeal of the new industries to young male and female workers from outside the village partly accounted for the rapid social changes that took place in Rijkevorsel between 1880 and 1910. The locally born population was not unaffected by these changes either. A substantial proportion of the local youth was equally mobile and equally prone to change their place of residence or place of work, or both.

7. Conclusion: A move from solidarity to competitiveness?

This article addresses two basic questions. First, how strong was the correlation between social differentiation and the family cycle in the two villages studied? Second, how did shifts in the social relationships between families and generations affect the purposive actions of those families?

The agricultural and rural society of the Kempen region of Belgium in the mid-19th century revolved around the independent family farm. A fairly rigid and controlled process of demographic reproduction (children) and material reproduction (wealth) supported this arrangement. But the relationship between family size and farm development was subtler than in the peasant model of Chayanov. Rather than being a one-sided relationship, there was more reciprocity between the family and the farm. Not only did the farm grow as the household became older, but the available labor was also supplemented, at both the beginning and end of the family cycle, when there were too few family members available to work on the farm (compare Lundh, 1995, pp. 58–64). The choices that the Kempen families made in terms of family formation and labor deployment shaped an agrarian model. This model was based on (a) the prospect, and gradual accumulation, of an independent income; (b) ensuring the availability of sufficient workers in the form of child labor and labor provided by additional coresidents; and (c) ensuring that parents were able to transfer their wealth to their children.

The liberalization of the agrarian pattern came about as a result of the opportunity of earning additional income from the cottage industry. As long as work remained available in the textile industry, more rapid family formation and larger family sizes went hand in hand with economic

independence being achieved more quickly. The older generations were also quicker to divide up their property, which was of further benefit to young families in terms of achieving independence. Although these factors combined to increase the chances of achieving rapid upward mobility, they also increased the level of risk. If the economy took a downturn, it curbed people's ability to earn additional income and transfer their wealth more quickly. Their economic vulnerability therefore increased.

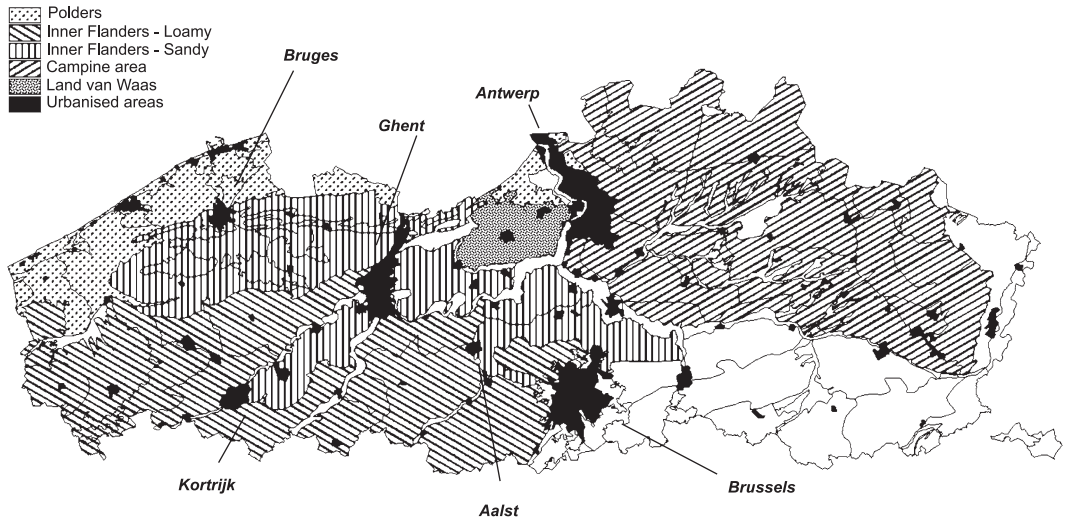
The most striking new development that occurred toward the end of the 19th century was not so much the advent of industrial work, which already existed in various forms, but the rise of the full-time, lifelong factory worker. Increasingly, families lost touch with the idea of earning an independent income from farming. The three cornerstones of the agrarian model fell by the wayside: (1) more families lost any prospect of generating an independent income, (2) the family-cycle-related deployment of labor ceased to determine the ability to generate an independent income, and (3) the intergenerational transfer of wealth declined. The transition of industrial work from being a start-up job to being a lifelong career meant that a particular form of labor developed an entirely different role within the labor strategies of the families. This resulted not only in a more rapid family formation, often at a very young age and with factory work providing the only source of income, but also, people's prospects of building up their own farm were reduced.

The emergence of the lifelong proletarian as a separate social group had a profoundly disruptive effect on the relationship between parents and children. Parents had less control over their children's plans for the future. Children left home to try to make it on their own at the very point when they could have contributed the most to the family's income. Income status became less related to the family cycle and more a matter of which social group a person belonged to. Or, to put it in the terms of Chayanov (1986), demographic differentiation was replaced by social differentiation.

What does all these have to do with family strategies? A lot and a little, depending on your point of view. It has little to do with it inasmuch as we have no real insight into the specific decision-making processes of the families in terms of family formation and labor deployment. But it has a lot to do with it if we go back to the definition of the structural approach to strategies. The families adapted their choices to take account of the limited options available to them. People in agricultural villages married late. A substantial proportion of adults refrained from starting families and instead maintained their farms by collaborating with other family members. As soon as families achieved an independent status, they strove to optimize the relationship between potential labor deployment and the farm. This was achieved through a combination of gradually building up the farm and deploying additional workers when the need arose. These narrow margins were widened by a structural supply of other, usually wage-dependent sources of income. It became possible to accumulate sufficient income more rapidly, even without the help of additional labor. The older generation could divide their property more quickly. The chances of achieving rapid upward mobility increased.

On the other hand, social polarization increased. A lifelong proletariat emerged to a much greater extent in protoindustrial and industrial municipalities than in the agricultural villages. Old intergenerational bonds of solidarity disappeared. Within this new context, old strategies lost their relevance. People began making new choices, which, much more than previously, were geared to achieving material independence as quickly as possible. The decline in solidarity from one generation to the next undermined the social role of the age groups. People's sense of identity and solidarity depended less on the generation that they belonged to and more on the occupation that they were engaged in.

Appendix A



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