

BETWEEN PATTERNS AND PROCESSES: Measuring Labor Markets and Family Strategies in Flanders, 1750-1990

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ABSTRACT: *Although the relationship between "internal" household strategies and "external" constraints has received much attention in recent family history, the debate about the conceptualization of "historical time" and the measurement of the micro-macro-linkages is still in its infancy. The aim of this article is two-fold: (a) to emphasize the importance of recurrence in historical time, by tracing three periods of acceleration in the societal changes of the two last centuries, and (b) to test the possibilities of comparative statistics that link micro-patterns and macro-processes. The exercise is applied to two rural regions and one urban area in Flanders.*

BETWEEN FAMILY TIME AND HISTORICAL TIME

The most important innovation of two decades of "family history" is without doubt the introduction and elaboration of the concept of household or family strategies (Hareven 1991).¹ Defined as "actions families devise for coping with, if not overcoming, the challenges of living, and for achieving their goals in the face of structural barriers," household strategies move between Tamara Hareven's "family time" and "historical time" (Hareven 1991, p. 95; Moen and Wethington 1992, p. 234). Careful micro-investigation of "family time" challenged linear modernization perspectives and replaced the concept of "family economy" (Knotter 1994). In addition, the introduction of a more flexible gender approach

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undermined the stringent paradigm of patriarchy (Lis 1984; Milkman and Townsley 1994). However, the interaction between family strategies and "historical time" continues to be more a rhetorical question than a concrete research project. As Tamara Hareven concludes in her overview article: "... achieving the proper equilibrium between the reconstruction of time-specific family patterns and their linkage to larger social processes continues to be a major challenge" (Hareven 1991, p. 124).

A major obstacle in this research is the lack of a clear definition and conceptualization of "historical time"—the macro-level societal changes (Moen and Wethington 1992, p. 233). In most research publications these changes are defined on the level of the local community, which is the world of reference of the actors in the story (e.g. Vanhoute 1992; Hareven 1991). An incomplete incorporation of these localities in broader social and economic networks seriously mortgages comparative research.

That is one of the reasons why we still lack interpretative overviews, systematically integrating household strategies of labor and income into the structural changes in the labor markets. Notable exceptions are the interpretations presented by Joan Smith and Immanuel Wallerstein (1992) and by Wally Seccombe (1992; 1993). The analytical and interpretative power that supports their ambitious research program is derived from the thesis that the production of means of production, the production of means of subsistence, and the production of labor power, are part of one coordinating mode of production. Family formation and family survival strategies are not only an integral part of the socioeconomic system, but are vital for its functioning. The "internalization" of a substantial part of the reproduction costs not only lowers the cost of labor, but also absorbs the shocks that are inherent to the capitalist labor market. Even though they may still be defective and undiluted, these models of analysis make one thing clear: integrated research into labor strategies and labor markets has to go beyond some classic antitheses in family history, such as market versus antimarket (subsistence), production versus reproduction, and wage labor versus nonwage labor.

THE KEEPING OF HISTORICAL TIME

In a well-known lecture delivered a few years ago, Jan De Vries introduced the concept of "industrious revolutions," intending thereby "to call for a renewed attention to the economic history of the household or the family unit" (De Vries 1994, p. 225). His analysis suggests a new internal pattern for economic history in (western) historical time. The first phase of the industrial household (second part of the eighteenth century) comes to an end with the general diffusion of the breadwinner-homemaker model (second part of the nineteenth century). With the breakdown of this model we encounter from the 1960s onwards a "second industrious revolution" (De Vries 1994, pp. 264–265). However sketchy it may be, the timing proposed in this model parallels more profound analyses of family formation strategies (Seccombe 1993), as well as general descriptions of the capitalist world-system (Arrighi 1994; Arrighi 1996, pp. 344–345).

Considering the possibilities of measuring the interrelationship between household strategies and changes in the labor markets, the family has to be regarded as a social construct, constantly transforming itself as it rides on the waves of historical time. The question is whether these dynamics can be calculated.

A STRUCTURAL APPROACH

Macroeconomic labor market studies offer a large supply of labor statistics. These generally stick to traditional, often nonhistorical definitions of labor, although a more historical analysis stresses the coexistence of sometimes parallel, but at times integrated, markets (Tilly and Tilly 1994). The deficiencies of this kind of labor participation statistics are well known. Nevertheless, integration of these rates with data about the share of the potentially active population (between fifteen and 64 years old), yields some crude indicators of the structure of the labor market (Pott-Buter 1993, esp. pp. 5–34). The reconstruction of household budgets and income-pooling strategies represents the other side of the scientific continuum. This kind of research is extremely labor intensive, and can therefore only be carried out on a very small scale (Vanhaute 1992). An alternative is offered by budget inquiries. First, they provide historical data on the subdivision of the monetary income of families. They can also be used as a corrective to the rates of labor participation (Scholliers 1991; Horrel and Humphries 1992; 1995). A better method, feasible only in research on contemporary populations, is to be found in time-budget studies, measuring labor input in (nonweighted) time-units (Smith and Wallerstein 1992; Daru 1993; Van Dongen 1992). The question of how this input is to be valued remains open, however.

An equally important methodological observation is that all the information is, and has to be, household-centered. Until recently, microscopic investigations into the flexibility of household strategies formed the most productive research direction (Lis 1984; Knotter 1994; Vanhaute 1992). As already mentioned, a combined or integrated analysis of internal and external labor division is still in its infancy. Coordinated by Joan Smith and Immanuel Wallerstein, a set of case studies has been published, all tracing the decision margins of households under the restraints of the capitalist economic organization and in different settings (Smith, Wallerstein, and Evers 1984; Smith and Wallerstein 1992). In two recent publications, Wally Seccombe interprets family formation strategies within transformation processes in the coordinating mode of production and in relation to strategies of capitalist entrepreneurs and government policies (Seccombe 1992; 1993).

The present article follows a structural approach, focusing on “the ways larger social structural forces constrain the repertoire of available adaptations” (Moen and Wethington 1992, pp. 234, 243–244). The main purpose is to work out an exercise in comparative statistics. By compiling and rearranging some crude indicators—most of them derived from existing studies—we hope to link transformation processes in the population structure and the labor markets to strategies of household organization. Strictly speaking, the parameters used here do not point to the strategies themselves, but to their outcome. Our starting point is that if there is a correlation between family formation strategies and fundamental changes in economic organization, this can be seen in the “indirect” population and labor statistics. That is why this exercise is an experiment, outlining the possibilities of interpreting statistical data in a new, more integrated study domain.

The research questions that guide this article come from the contemporary debate on family strategies and labor markets:

- how “eternal” is the twentieth-century division between male productive and female reproductive labor?
- how general is the breadwinner household, surviving on the basis of one income?

- how decisive is the rise of the male wage in the process of expulsion of married women from the formal labor market?
- what is the relation between the "static" nuclear family and other forms of cohabitation?

MARKETS AND STRATEGIES IN FLANDERS, 1750–1990

We compiled parameters on three levels: (a) organization of the labor market, and especially the position of women on this market, (b) household income formation, especially the share of the various family members, (c) population structure and household nuptiality and fertility strategies. In addition to general Flemish indicators, we worked out three subcases, tracing regional patterns: the rural district of Turnhout, the rural district of Tielst, and the city of Antwerp (Figure 1). This information is set out on a time axis of more than two centuries. In this way we hope to be able to distinguish shifts in the long run, as well as transition periods where trends are reversed. What is missing is a clear vision of the interaction among the three variables. Within this context, we cannot do more than put forward some general suppositions.

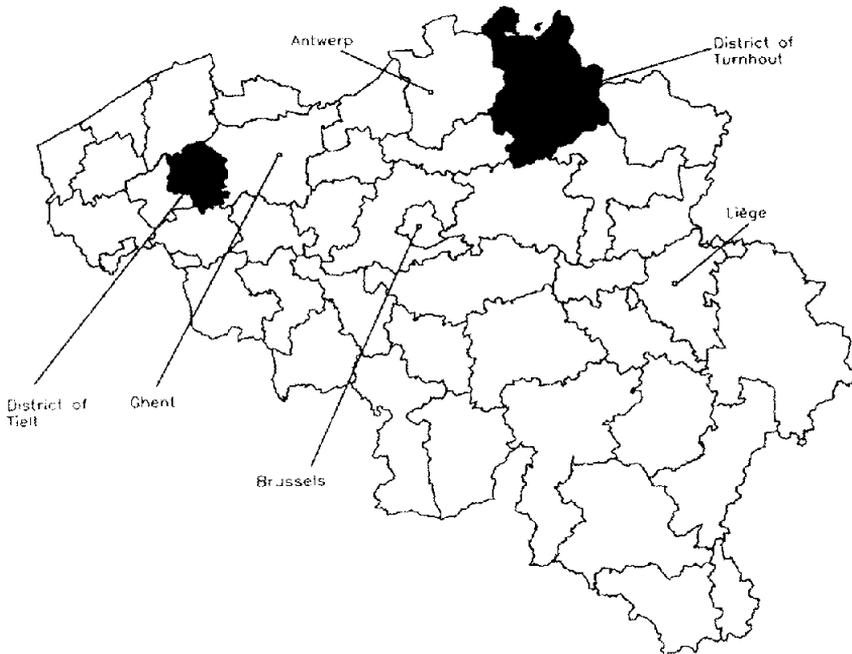


FIGURE 1
Map of Belgium and the Regions Researched

The Restructuring of the Labor Markets

In general, historical labor market studies have focused on the output side, measuring what is called productive labor supply, and calculating productivity per labor unit (for Belgium: De Brabander 1981). However useful these data may be in macroinvestigations into the economic sectors, it is extremely difficult to link them to social analyses of labor input. “Weighted” labor units, often excluding women’s and children’s activities, do not tell us anything about the real participation of individuals and families in the labor markets, let alone about the household strategies of labor division and income pooling. One example can illustrate this. Although the share of full-time employed farmers drops dramatically after 1850, the exploitation of a (generally small) piece of land remains an important income supplement for a majority of rural households until the second half of the twentieth century (Table 1).

To relate changes in the labor markets to household strategies, we need information on labor participation, divided over as many population groups as possible (sex, age, class, etc.). In this exercise, we concentrate on the gender division of labor participation. For this reason data from a selection of occupational censuses are recomputed and rearranged and presented in Figures 2 and 3.²

Most striking in these figures is the growing gap, in the period 1850–1950, between the group of potentially active women and the female participation rate in the “formal” labor market. In the middle of the nineteenth century, one of every three women between fifteen and 64 years old is part of the “housewife labor reservoir.” One century later, a majority of women belong to this category. From the 1960s onwards, this long-term trend changes. Nowadays, only 29 percent of the potentially active women are full-time housewives, against 56 percent in 1950 and a maximum of 43 percent in 1900.

The drop in the participation rate of women after 1850 is, among other things, a result of the dismantling of wide protoindustrial networks, especially in East- and West-Flanders.

TABLE 1
 Professionally Active Population and Agrarian Exploitations,
 Flanders 19th and 20th Centuries

	<i>Professionally Active Population (%)</i>			<i>Households with an “Agrarian” Exploitation (%)</i>	
	<i>Primary Sector</i>	<i>Secondary Sector</i>	<i>Tertiary Sector</i>	<i>All Exploitations</i>	<i>Exploitations + 1 Hectare</i>
1750–1800	50–60	35	10–15	65–70	35–40
1850	50	40	10	65	30
1900	25	45	30	50	15
1950	15	45	40	35	9
1990	3	32	65	35	2

Note on parameters: Professionally active population according to population censuses, divided per sector (total = 100 percent). Agrarian exploitations according to agricultural censuses and budget analyses (1990), related to the totality of households in Flanders (Vanhaute 1997).

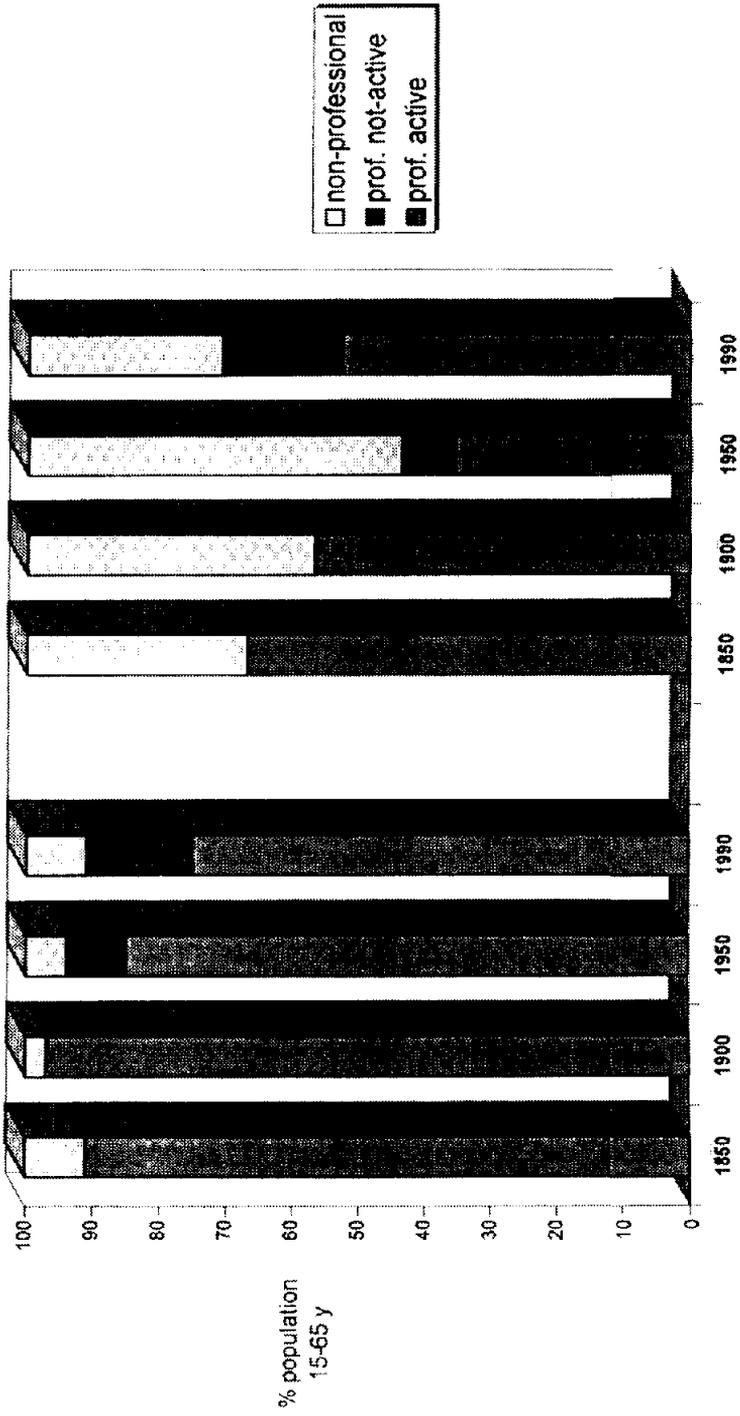


FIGURE 2
Labor Participation in Flanders (1850-1990), Percent of Potentially Active Population

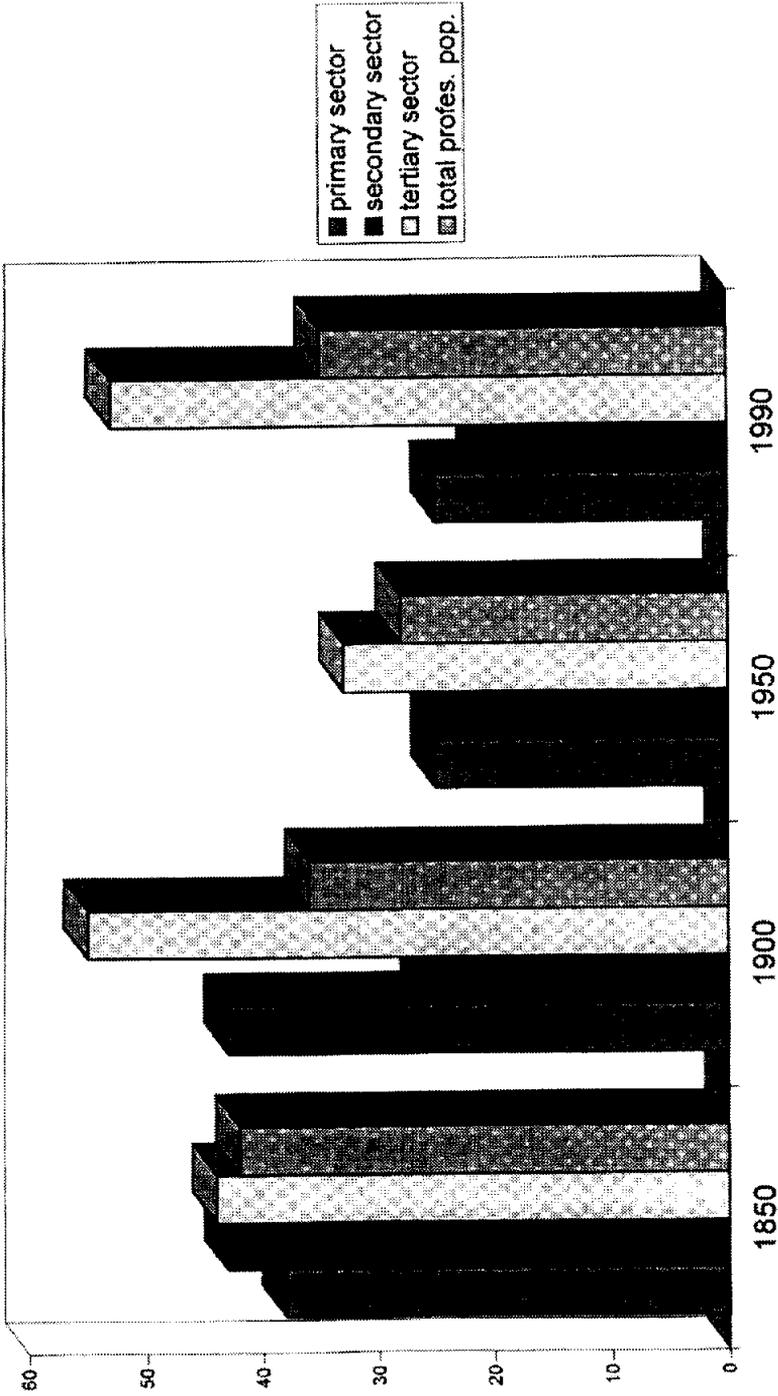


FIGURE 3
Share of Female Labor Force in Economic Sectors (1850–1990) (%)

More labor possibilities in new sweat-shop industries (especially in the lace industry), and in agriculture and (personal) services do not compensate for this loss. When these niches in the labor market narrow in the interwar period, the possibilities for female workers on the formal labor markets deteriorate further. The reentry of women in the labor market after 1960 happens predominantly via the expanding services sectors, of which an important number "feminize" in a short time.

This restoring of former sex ratios in the labor market happens, of course, in a completely new economic context. Until the middle of last century, two-thirds of the women are employed in the interconnected sectors of agriculture and rural industries. Both sectors decline—rural industries after 1850 and agriculture after 1900—whereas the new industrial activities do not enhance labor prospects for women, certainly not after 1880.

The expulsion of female labor from the formal markets affects first married women. Around 1900 only eighteen percent of the married women formally have a profession. In centralized industries only 39 percent of the female labor force is over 21 years old, and barely seventeen percent is married. In 1950 over 40 percent of the women in the age group of fifteen to 24 years is active in the labor market (the figure for men is 75 percent), a ratio that drops to below 30 percent in the age group of 25 to 34 years (men: +90 percent). This means that fewer than three out of ten women in that age group are professionally active. Four decades later this participation ratio has risen to more than eighty percent. This reentry of women in the labor market is primarily the reentry of married women. In 1950 only fifteen percent of all married women are active on the labor market, while in 1990 the figure rises to 60 percent. Between 1990 and 1994 another 100,000 women have entered the Flemish labor market (+twelve percent), the majority of whom are older than 35 years. Due to the expansion of part-time work, the increase of the total female labor input is smaller. Almost half of the active women have no full-time job (44 percent), whereas only a small fraction of their male partners (sixteen percent) have half-time jobs (Vanhaute 1997, p. 176).

This general picture hides regional patterns, based on divergent structures of labor organization: rural and urban, agrarian and protoindustrial. To illustrate this, we outline some basic features of the labor markets in the rural region of Turnhout (agrarian, situated in the province of Antwerp), the rural region of Tielt (until the second half of the nineteenth century protoindustrial, situated in the province of West-Flanders) and the city of Antwerp.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, three-quarters of the professionally active population in the agrarian villages in the Antwerp Campine (the region of Turnhout) are working in the agrarian sector. About one-third of the agrarian labor input is female, a ratio which increases after 1850. Nevertheless, official labor statistics show that an important number of potentially active women is not employed full-time in one of the economic sectors. In 1900, 58 percent of the women between fifteen and 65 years are professionally active, half of them in agriculture and one-third in services. This participation ratio drops rapidly until the 1950s (25 percent), to rise again to 41 percent in 1991 (70 percent in the tertiary sector). Female participation rates are much higher in the Flemish industrial countryside (region of Tielt). In the first half of the nineteenth century, more than half of all adult men and women are engaged in protoindustrial flax processing. This industrial activity collapses after 1850, only to be (partly) replaced in the last quarter of the century by new monoindustries such as lacemaking. In 1900, 78 percent of all potentially active women officially have a job, half of them in (cottage) industries and only 20 percent in

agriculture. These income opportunities disappear in the interwar period; by 1950 the female participation ratio had dropped to a minimum of 26 percent. Forty years later 50 percent of the women between fifteen and 65 years old are once again active in the formal labor market, six out of every ten in the tertiary sector.

In the urban labor market women are generally confronted with a similar process of expulsion, at least until the second half of the twentieth century. In contrast to the cotton city of Ghent, Antwerp (Table 2) loses its status of industrial textile center at the end of the eighteenth century. At that time, one-fifth of the active male and half of the active female population are engaged in the lace industry, the production of siamoises, and cotton printing. The two last sectors are novelties in the second half of the eighteenth century, and do not persist after 1800. After the reopening of the river Scheldt (1795), Antwerp gradually becomes a center of trade and services, with a large market of casual labor in harbor activities and in old (lace) and new (clothes) sweat-shop industries. This restructuring of the labor market seriously affects the position of women. Between 1750 and 1800, the expanding cotton industry creates new opportunities (for men, women, and children). In this period, the relative share of single maidservants in the female labor supply drops by a half. In the nineteenth century, working women withdraw to the unstable labor markets of sweat-shop industries, personal services (growing again after 1850), and other casual labor (Lis 1986). About one-fifth—and probably more—of the male and female active population lives from irregular earnings from harbor labor. These female niches in the labor market gradually disappear in the twentieth century, resulting in a massive withdrawal of women into household activities. The settlement of new industries in the Antwerp region from the end of the nineteenth century onwards promotes mainly male labor opportunities. Only after 1960, a growing number of potentially active women is absorbed by the expanding services sector.

TABLE 2
Parameters of the Labor Market in Antwerp, 1750–1990

	1750		1800		1850		1900		1950		1990	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Prof. Active Population (% 15–64 years)	68	32	100	66	88	41	103	39	90	25	69	41
Professionally Active Population in Economic Sectors (%)												
Industry	58	45	60	62	48	57	53	25				19
Trade/Services	27	46	33	34	30	22	28	50				81
Casual Labor			2	2	22	20	20	25				
Professionally Active Population in Economic Subsectors (%)												
• Textile	17	40	21	50	5	41						
• Clothing					10	15		16				
• Personal Services	10	43	6	22	0	9	0	20				

Source: Vanhaute 1997.

In general, the reorientation of the rural and urban labor markets towards external, commercialized economic activities, pushes away the female worker from these visible/official labor markets. First, family based production strategies such as agriculture, crafts and home industries dissolve in the twentieth century. Second, the formalization of the distinction between male “productive” market labor and female “reproductive” family labor results in the undercounting of female activities in labor statistics. The reentry of the “housewife” in the formal labor market from the 1960s onwards is partly a correction of a historical constant, partly an innovation, because of the integration in production circuits outside the household.

This general trend is the result of a multiplicity of household labor strategies, sometimes congruent, but also often divergent (agrarian versus protoindustrial families; industrial versus commercial urban settings).

Household Income Strategies

Budget inquiries are the most direct way to gain an insight in the composition of the monetary sources of income and the structure of family spending. Here we focus on the income sources, but looking first at pay packets. We are well aware of the many disadvantages of such inquiries (small number of respondents, underrepresentation of the lower

TABLE 3
Monetary Income Sources in Urban Working-Class Families by Percent,
According to Budget Inquiries (Flanders, 1800–1990)

	1800	1850	1900	1930	1950	1990
1. Income Sources (Total = 100%)						
• Wages						
Male	60	55	65	75	66	53
Female	15	10	8	5	3	15
Children	15	25	22	15	5	-
• Public Social Security					17	19
• Other	10	10	5	5	9	13
2. The Share in the Total Wage Income (= 100%)						
Male Wage	67	61	68	79	90	78
Female Wage	17	11	8	5	4	22
3. The Male Wage, in Relation to						
• Total Family Spending	66	53	65	64	65	73
• Food Expenses	100	80	100	109	142	414
4. Food Expenditures:						
• The Share in the Male Wage	100	125	100	90	70	25
• The Share in the Family Budget	65	65	60	50	45	15
• The Weight of Bread and Potatoes in the Food Budget		65	24	20	17	15

Source: 1800 (end of 18th century): Vandenbroeke 1975, p. 606; Lis 1986, pp. 175–176, own calculations; 1850 (1853): Ducpétiaux 1855; Jacquemyns 1928, pp. 210–220; 1850 (1853) 1900, 1930 (1928): Scholliers 1991, 1950 (1949): Jacquemyns 1953, 1990 (1988): *Huishoudbudgetonderzoek* 1994. Cf. Vanhaute 1997.

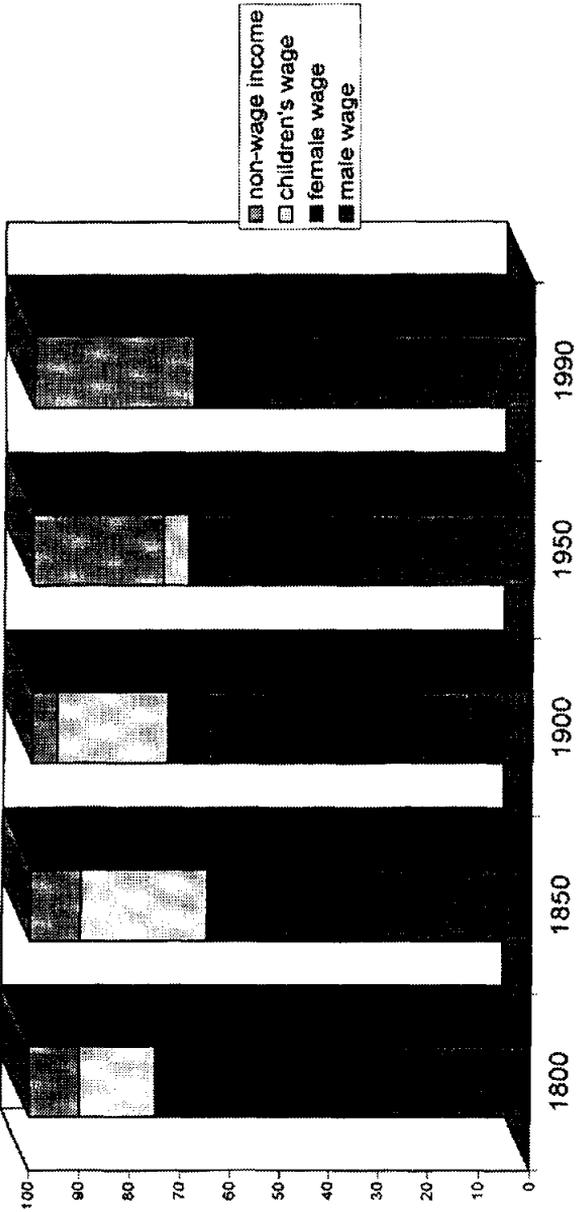


FIGURE 4
Monetary Income Sources (1800–1990) (%)

social strata, the exclusion of nonmonetarized income sources, etc.). Nevertheless, budget series allow us to fix the share of male, female, and children's wage earnings in household income, and to relate these ratios to each other. The following overview, shown in Table 3 and Figure 4, is based on a selective list of budget inquiries, all focusing on urban working-class households.

Urban working-class households live predominantly from wage income. That is why budget inquiries are primarily addressed to this population group. Until the first half of the twentieth century, this wage income is a shared responsibility of all family members. In the most optimistic case (full-time employment), the male wage is sufficient to buy the necessary food. Extra living expenses can only be met with extra earnings from the labor of women and children and from irregular income (sale, rent, services, poor relief, etc.). Higher women's and children's labor input in the first half of the nineteenth century at most compensates the diminishing purchasing power of the male wage.

Together with the rise of the real (male) wages from the end of the century onwards, the share of female and children's income decreases. However, this rise is not enough to meet the "breadwinner's norm." In fact, this norm was never achieved in the average worker's family. Rising consumption expectations (cf. Table 3, line 4) require extra income sources, which occurs through the substitution of the income of family members by public allowances from the interwar period onwards, and by the reentry of the married partner in the labor market in the last two or three decades. Nonlabor income, in the first place returns of savings and investments, also gains in importance. Parallel with the crumbling of the group of one-income families (in 1976, 63 percent of all households with two partners; in 1985, 46 percent; in 1995, 40 percent), the households with two wage earners have set a new, and again higher consumption norm.

Of course, the composition of the household purse of urban working families differs greatly according to economic sector and region. In textile towns such as Ghent in the nineteenth century and in Antwerp until the beginning of that century, the input of women's and children's labor is higher than average. The share of mother's and children's wages rise to 20/30 percent and 15/20 percent, respectively. In 1900, industrial families in Ghent still obtain fifteen percent of their income from the labor of the woman, which is twice the average (Jacquemyns 1928, pp. 210–220; Scholliers 1991, pp. 159–162).

The analysis of the monetary income structure of rural households is even more delicate. Until the first half of the twentieth century, rural families draw a substantial share of their income from nonwage income sources (cf. Table 1). For rural working families, such as weavers and day laborers, this share rises to one-third of their total income (Ducpétiaux 1855, e.g. region of Tielt). The other two-thirds are equally distributed over male/female and children's wage income. In spite of extra rural earnings, wage income from family members is not redundant. On the contrary, the ratio between male, female, and children's wage income in rural working families is remarkably similar to the ratios in the households of their urban counterparts.

The budget series point in the same direction: in wage-dependent households, a combination of income sources is necessary to make ends meet. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, the decline of real wages requires a higher labor input of all family members, together with the "pooling" of all kinds of earnings from vending, services, and poor relief. The relatively fast rise of the male wage from the end of the century onwards encourages the withdrawal of women and young children from the external labor market,

however, without ever reaching the level of the “family wage” (Scholliers 1991, p. 169). Only after public subsidizing of family budgets through a range of allowances (family allowances, unemployment benefits, health insurance, pension allowances) and tax benefits, the myth of the one-income family could become a reality. In the 1980s, the double wage income becomes the standard again, this time supplemented not in the least by public allowances and income from savings and investments. The extent of the male “breadwinner” wage is back where it was in the middle of the nineteenth century, around 50 percent of the total household income.

Family Formation Strategies

Table 4 brings together some demographic indicators, focusing on the composition of the labor supply (age, sex, civil status) and on the outcome of strategies of family formation (household size, nuptiality and fertility).

In a first period, 1750 to 1850, an acceleration of the population growth runs parallel with an extension of the average household and, after 1800, the process of urbanization. During that century, the Flemish population doubles, though not as a result of a less rigorous marriage and birth pattern. On the contrary, a more restrictive demographic behavior characterizes both rural and urban societies towards the middle of the nineteenth century. In the protoindustrial area below Ghent, the eighteenth century model of a young and growing population with a relatively free nuptiality and fertility pattern is turned upside down. In agrarian regions such as the Antwerp Campine (Turnhout), the process is less drastic because of the traditionally tight marriage market. More large families with aging children are the result of this.

The demographic profile of Antwerp in 1850 is in no way comparable to the one of a century earlier. The typical *ancien régime* town, with an old population and a preponderance of (single) females and small families, gives way to a nineteenth-century proletarian

TABLE 4
Demographic Parameters, Flanders 1750–1990

	1750	1800	1850	1900	1950	1990
1. Flanders						
• Population: Annual Growth Rate (%)		+0.65	+0.85	+0.81	+0.64	+0.40
• Urbanization Ratio (%)	35	31	41	60	70	
• Age Groups (%)						
15 Years	33	32	32	33	21	17
+ 64 Years	4	5	5	5	11	18
• Sex: % Males over Females	94	97	98	97	96	98
• % Married People	33	31	31	34	48	52
• Members per Household	4.5	4.7	4.9	4.5	3.1	3.0
• Birthrate (‰)	36	33	28	29	17	12
• Nuptiality Rate Im	0.400	0.420	0.350	0.460	0.600	0.600
• Fertility Rate Ig	0.900	0.850	0.800	0.700	0.320	0.200
• Marriage Age of Women	27/28	28/29	29	26	23	25

(continued)

TABLE 4
(Cont.)

2. District of Turnhout						
• Population: Annual Growth Rate (%)		+0.38	+0.78	+0.74	+1.20	+1.10
• Age Groups (%)						
• 15 Years	36	32	33	40	31	19
• Sex: % Males over Females	95	100	105	108	104	102
• % Married People	35	35	32	30	42	53
• Members per Household (% + 5 Members)	4.3 (30)	4.5 (33)	5.0 (38)	5.3 (46)	3.9 (10)	3.1 (6)
• Birthrate (‰)	35	35	32	40	24	13
• Nuptiality Rate Im		0.450	0.350	0.500	0.600	
• Fertility Rate Ig		0.850	0.800	0.900	0.500	
• Marriage Age of Women	27	28	28	26		
3. District of Tiel						
• Population: Annual Growth Rate (%)		+0.75	+0.55	-0	+0.09	+0.34
• Age Groups (%)						
• 15 Years	33	36	28	32	27	19
• Sex: % Males over Females	104	103	101	99	98	100
• % Married People	33	32	27	29	41	54
• Members per Household	5.0	4.9	5.1	4.9	3.8	3.0
• Birthrate (‰)	40	35	30	33	20	13
• Nuptiality Rate Im	0.500	0.475	0.325	0.400	0.600	
• Fertility Rate Ig	0.900	0.850	0.800	0.940	0.350	
• Marriage Age of Women	25/26	26/27	28/29	25		
4. City of Antwerp						
• Population: Annual Growth Rate (%)		+0.50	+0.96	+2.28	-0.08	-1.03
• Age Groups (%)						
• 15 Years	24	28	31	36	17	16
• Sex: % Males over Females	73	80	94	91	90	93
• % Married People	31	33	30	35	54	47
• Members per Household	4.1	4.6	4.9	4.0	2.6	2.1
• Birthrate (‰)	33	37	35	32	18	13
• Nuptiality Rate Im		0.400		0.500	0.650	
• Fertility Rate Ig			0.750	0.560	0.250	

Source: Vanhaute 1997.

Note on parameters: annual growth rate: (percent) of the total population; urbanization rate: percent of the population living in towns with more than 5,000 inhabitants; age groups: percent of the total population; sex: x males for every 100 females; married: percent of the total population; members per household: general average; birth rate: pro mille; nuptiality rate Im: married women between fifteen and 49 years old divided by the total number of women in this age group, corrected with the coefficient of natural fertility (model Hutterites). The rate 0.400 means that at that time women spent 40 percent of their "fertile" life in a marriage bond; fertility rate: legitimate births divided by the number of married women between fifteen and 49 years old, corrected with the coefficient of natural fertility (model Hutterites). The rate 0.900 means that 90 percent of the natural fertility of the married women is effectively used. Ratios below 0.700 point to methods of family planning; age of women at the first marriage.

city. Immigration feeds this growing proletariat (in 1850, 36 percent of the population consists of immigrants against 27 percent in 1800), which tries to survive in a more unstable labor market. Fewer economic prospects affect the possibilities on the marriage market. The protective functions of the family come under pressure. At the end of the eighteenth century five percent of all births are illegitimate; in 1850 the figure rises to fourteen percent (Lis 1986, p. 145).

From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, a new demographic pattern breaks through. Although nuptiality rates go up and the average marriage age goes down, population growth slows down. An increasing number of households, especially in urban areas, start to apply methods of birth control. The ratios of births and children drop, the average family size shrinks strongly.

In regions with an open labor market, for instance in the industrial countryside of East- and West-Flanders, this process becomes visible in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In the Campine area east of Antwerp, it is preceded by a short though remarkable period of high marriage and birth rates around 1900. At that time there is a young and quickly-growing population, living in large families with many small children. In 1900, 46 percent of all households consist of more than five members, while in 1750 the proportion was only 30 percent and in 1850, 36 percent (Vanhaute 1992, pp. 58–59). In the middle of the twentieth century, this percentage drops to ten percent, as a result of the introduction of birth control in the countryside.

From the end of the nineteenth century until World War I, Antwerp is a real demographic growth area, thanks to the rapidly expanding harbor activities and to the establishment of modern industries. Easier and quicker family formation rejuvenates the urban population and reduces the average household size. In the interwar period a long-term process of population loss sets in. The town-dwellers who stay are older and live in family units smaller than average.

In the second half of the twentieth century, this interconnected process of diminishing rates of population growth, a declining fertility, smaller households, and an aging population continues (nowadays, the number of elderly [+64 years] exceeds the children [-fifteen years]). The parameters in Table 4 do not point to a change. This is partly due to a lack of data on family types. According to the population census of 1991, 34 percent of all “households” fall outside the traditional two-partner model (24 percent singles [fifteen percent in 1950], eight percent one-parent households, two percent other). Only half of the families raise children. This means that more and more people live in relationships other than the traditional family. As a result, demographic strategies are or will be subject to new changes.

THREE PERIODS OF ACCELERATION

Previous analyses point to a congruence between the restructuring of the labor markets and changes in family formation. This can be studied in depth if we focus on the three periods of acceleration in the societal changes of the last two centuries, from the end of the eighteenth through the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the end of the nineteenth through the beginning of the twentieth centuries, and the end of the twentieth century (see, e.g., Arrighi 1994).

From the second half of the eighteenth century, paralleling the economic changes known as the first industrial revolution, a deterioration of labor and income prospects in both rural and urban societies narrows the margins of family formation. In spite of an intensification

of female and children's labor participation, certainly in the first decades of the industrial revolution, the balance in family budgets is more fragile than before. The gradual substitution of a home-based production model by open and unstable labor markets blocks the prospects of marriage and family formation for a growing number of adults (Vanhaute 1992 pp. 314-318). In cities such as Antwerp, the protective functions of the household become more and more the responsibility of broader networks (Lis 1986, pp. 158 ff.; Seccombe 1993, pp. 54-60; Berg 1992).

The production model of the first industrial revolution, based on low wages and a high labor turnover, exhausts the labor force and affects the strength to reproduce families (Seccombe 1993). Towards the end of the century, this bottleneck is avoided thanks to higher male wages, protective legislation (banning women and children from strong industrial sectors), better schooling, a higher quality of housing and living. The housewife is forced to withdraw to unprotected/informal niches of the labor market (domestic service, sweat-shop industries, agriculture) and, during the interwar period, to household labor. The development of a public transfer system of family allowances and tax benefits is the final step in the realization of the myth of the breadwinner wage. The marriage market opens up, followed by a restriction of the fertility rate (Seccombe 1993, pp. 183-193; McBride 1992; Berg 1992; Honeyman and Goodman 1991; Finkel 1996).

Since the 1960s, (married) women have reappeared on the labor market, applying for jobs in new industries and the services sector. However, this reentry seems to have been a means for the entrepreneurs to deregulate the labor market (irregular and part-time work). Now, not only marital fertility is reduced, but the traditional family with two adult partners clears the way for new, even smaller units of cohabitation.

In short, the history of labor between 1750 and the end of the twentieth century is marked by three periods of transition, which outline labor organization for the next century or so. This becomes even clearer when we focus on government policies and ideological discussions. The first period is characterized by the liberalization of the labor market and an ideological offensive of labor disciplining (Lis and Soly 1979, Honeyman and Goodman 1991, pp. 618 ff.). From the last decades of the nineteenth century, measures to promote protective legislation and a new ideology of the breadwinner-and-housewife-model go hand in hand with a more regulated labor organization (Taylorism-Fordism) (Honeyman and Goodman 1991, pp. 621-622; Daru 1993, pp. 396 ff.). This changes again in the last two decades of our century, when new forms of flexible production are backed by a less stringent labor legislation, the fragmentation of formerly collective life transitions, the individualization of consumption, and the commercialization of leisure.

THE LAST FRONTIER OF CAPITALISM?

The combination on a time axis of some crude demographic and economic parameters referring to household labor strategies and the restructuring of the labor markets illustrates the possibilities of a more profound integrated research project. In our example, not only the important periods of transformation are delineated, some dominant theses in the contemporary debate on family strategies and labor markets are unsettled again: (1) a strict division between male productive and female reproductive labor is a historical aberration, only put into practice on a more or less massive scale in the first half of the twentieth century; (2) households that survive on the basis of one income are exceptions, also at the

height of the breadwinner ideology; (3) in relation to No. 2, the rise of the male wage is a less decisive factor in the expulsion of married women from the formal labor market than once thought; (4) the fixation on family size obscures the flexibility in household formation strategies. The nuclear family is not as static as once perceived; on the contrary, it has proven to be quite resilient. More research is needed on other forms of cohabitation which have played an important role in some periods of history (just as they can play a predominant role in the near future).

In the view of Jan De Vries, the contemporary process of transformation absorbs the last remaining substance of the household into the market economy, through which "the final frontier of capitalism" will finally be broken through (De Vries 1994, p. 265). This is a remarkable nonhistorical statement after the presentation of such a broad picture of societal changes. What seems true, though, is that we are entering a new phase, with new, or renewed family formation strategies. Instead of looking for historical ruptures, we need to carry out more comparative research into the recurrent periods of transition.

The interrelationship between household formation and labor markets stands out in this investigation. Statistical data sets are an indispensable tool in this research program. However, these "national" sets need to be adapted to cross-national, and even better, cross-regional comparisons. In spite of the many calls for comparative research projects, the first steps still have to be taken.³

Moreover, the concept of family strategies has to be made operational within the context of changing historical time. Otherwise we risk replacing one nonhistorical *passe-partout* (family economy) with another one (family strategies), which becomes nothing more than a tautology in which description equals explanation. It is only in pinning down the recurrent processes of societal restructuring that we can think of formulating a generalizing answer to the pivotal question in Tamara Hareven's *status questionis*: "Under what circumstances was the family more able to control its destiny and to affect the larger social processes, and under what circumstances did the family succumb to declining markets, changing modes of production, business cycles, and other external forces?" (Hareven 1991, p. 111).

NOTES

1. A household or family (synonyms in the present article) is defined as a coresidential income-pooling unit.

2. Source for Figure 2: Vanhaute 1997. Parameters: **Percent of potentially active population:** between fifteen and 65 years old. **Professionally active:** 1850—men and women in rural industries; 1900—female workers in agriculture; 1950—female workers in cottage industries and in agriculture; 1991—women workers in hidden sectors. **Labor participation in industry:** before 1900, it is impossible to draw a clear line between labor participation in agriculture and in rural industries, such as flax spinning and weaving. **Professionally nonactive:** officially unemployed, pensioners.

3. See e.g. the differences in female labor participation and in the application of the breadwinner model in different countries (Pott-Buter 1993, p. 21; Finkel 1996, pp. 67–81), and different regions (e.g. Horrel and Humphries 1995: Great Britain; Scholliers 1996: Ghent).

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