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Demographic and Sociological Indicators of Privatisation of Marriage in the 19th Century in Flanders

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Abstract. Relying on the assumption that privatisation of family life intensified in the 19th century and that women were the pioneers in this process, we formulate nine hypotheses concerning indicators on family and marriage. The hypotheses are tested using data for three municipalities in Flanders (roughly the northern part of Belgium) covering the period 1800–1913, taken from about 17,000 marriage certificates. Special emphasis is on gender and social status distinctions. Most of the hypotheses, particularly those relating to first marriage, are confirmed. The various developments point to an underlying process which we refer to here as the privatisation of marriage, which can be explained by the changed social position and gender identity of women. The hypothesis put forward is that 19th-century economic and political marginalisation encouraged women to develop their dyadic power in primary relationships. Marrying young and creating an identity around expressive family and motherhood tasks was, for many women, a reaction to and a remedy for their public exclusion and economic subordination.

Key words: illegitimacy, marriage patterns, privatisation, remarriage, 19th century

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Résumé. Reprenant l'idée selon laquelle la privatisation de la vie familiale s'est intensifiée au 19e siècle et que les femmes ont été des pionnières dans ce processus, nous émettons 9 hypothèses sur les indicateurs du mariage et de la famille. Ces hypothèses sont confrontées aux données de 17000 certificats de mariage provenant de 3 communes des Flandres (partie nord de la Belgique) sur la période 1800–1913. Une attention particulière est portée aux facteurs de genre et aux facteurs sociaux. La plupart des hypothèses, et notamment celles relatives au premier mariage, sont confirmées. Les différentes évolutions peuvent être rapportées à un même processus sous-jacent, dénommée ici privatisation du mariage, qui peut s'expliquer par le changement de la situation sociale des femmes et par la montée d'une identité féminine. Ainsi la marginalisation économique et politique des femmes au 19e siècle les a encouragées à développer un double pouvoir dans les relations familiales. Un mariage précoce et la construction d'une identité à travers la

reconnaissance des tâches familiales et maternelles ont permis à beaucoup de femmes de réagir et de compenser leur exclusion de la sphère publique et leur dépendance économique.

Mots clés: illégitimité, privatisation, remariage, types de mariage, 19e siècle

1. Introduction

It is generally acknowledged that 19th-century private life in Western Europe was characterised by emotionalisation, domesticisation and privatisation. These developments had been underway for some time, but they broadened and deepened in all directions over the course of the 19th century (Ariès, 1962; Demos, 1970; Shorter, 1977; Stone, 1977; Hareven, 1978; Mitterauer and Sieder, 1983; Gillis, 1996). Within the family, this involved the partner system as well as the parent and sibling system. A great body of historical sociological and historical demographic research is available on the characteristics and background of this. These studies are mainly based on qualitative materials, such as diaries, sermons or advice books. The present study is an extension of these studies, and deals with the evolution of demographic and sociological characteristics of people entering into marriage during the 'long' 19th century (1800–1913) in Flanders.[1] Specifically, we examine the evolution of the following indicators: (1) first marriage intensity, (2) age at first marriage, (3) remarriage intensity, (4) the interval between being widowed and remarriage, (5) the number and proportion of witnessing family members, (6) the number and proportion of witnessing family members in the male or female line, (7) the proportion of first-married women working outside the home, (8) the proportion of illegitimate births and, (9) the proportion of children legitimised by marriage.[2]

The development of each of these indicators is determined by various social and cultural factors. However, rather than looking any further into this aspect, our intention is to present an overall picture of the indicators together: if all different types of demographic and sociological features of marriage and the marriage ceremony point in the same direction, this can indicate an underlying social process. In our opinion, this process might be characterised as the privatisation of marriage. For some indicators, e.g., the proportion of witnessing family members, this characterisation is rather 'evident', for other indicators, e.g., the marriage intensity, it is not. But *together* and *combined*, the indicators might give an accurate picture of an overall, macro-social development. Our starting point is that during the 19th century, marriage and family life underwent a more or less progressing privatisation. More and more formerly public activities became 'domesticized' and in interpersonal relations between partners, parents and children, emotions became crucial (Perrot, 1990). Apparently more and more people wanted to be actively involved in this process. An additional assumption is that romanticisation was furthered primarily by women (Dentith, 1998: 128–155; Caine and Sluga, 2000: 32–54; Davidoff and Hall, 1987: 319). As will become clearer below, our basic

hypothesis is partly confirmed, but it must also be qualified: there are some tentative indicators that the privatisation trend seems to be restricted to first marriages (for remarriages there are some unexpected, although interesting conclusions), it seems to accelerate in the second half of the 19th century, and the decade around 1850 appears to be a crucial turning point.

2. Hypotheses

According to Gillis (1996) the decades around 1850 were a symbolic turning point. It was the time when highly-valued quality time became increasingly equated with intimate family time. In order to fulfil the new expectations, an entire range of marriage and family symbols were created, expanded and imitated en masse from the mid-19th century onwards. Bastard children, abandoned children, step-families, cohabitation and barbarian ways were thrown on the dung heap of society. By contrast, their middle-class counterparts were actively working their way to the foreground: anyone wanting to celebrate religious rites, buy children's clothes, organise birthday parties or spend Christmas in a family group, simply had to marry. Families were or became museums of family portraits and family albums, timeless places where the past was constantly commemorated. The family was no longer a place where people shared instrumental tasks and anonymous rooms; it was no longer a household, but an environment in which the shared past and joint future were realised. Physical proximity was not the only crucial aspect, but intense instinctive involvement was also important. The family became the ultimate supplier of quality time. All kinds of rituals were intended to stimulate family stability, a sense of belonging, affection and continuity. This was chiefly the woman's role and one reserved for Sundays. Sunday was not a day of rest for women, but a day for "labours of love" (Gillis, 1996: 13–14). Increasingly strict requirements were imposed on this invisible labour and, by 1900, housework had become a full-time job. It was a job involving increasingly more daily tasks taking longer to perform, precisely at a time when the public discussion was one of reducing the hours worked outside the home (by men)!

Based on this general trend, nine hypotheses on long-term developments are formulated: (1) first marriage intensity will increase, (2) age at first marriage will fall, (3) remarriage intensity will increase, (4) the interval between widowing and remarriage will increase, (5) the number and proportion of family members acting as witnesses to marriage will increase, (6) the number and proportion of witnessing family members from the bride's side will increase relatively more than from the bridegroom's side, (7) the proportion of women in first marriages working outside the home will fall, (8) the proportion of illegitimate births will fall and, (9) the proportion of marriages with at least one legitimised child will increase.

People married and remarried during the (second half of the) 19th century more and earlier and this behaviour was played out within a legally guaranteed and socially highly esteemed family context. The 'new' domesticity was translated not

only into the husband/wife system, but also into the mother/daughter relationship. According to Roberts (1973), in the second half of the 19th century a 'mum' culture developed, not only in middle-class enclaves, but also in working-class districts. This culture refers to the close contacts between and the mutual involvement of mothers and their married daughters. The latter often settled in the immediate vicinity of the parental home. This house became the centre and the network of mutual neighbourly help, of intimate social intercourse and a little secret language – in brief, of a congenial family culture. This had consequences for (the perception of) marriage and the marriage ceremony.

The more or less 'autonomous' process of privatisation, and related developments such as emotionalisation and domesticisation, are a central guide for our study, but not the only one. These processes can also be the result of civil and religious disciplinary activities. This was incidentally prominent in the 19th century, particularly the second half (Art, 1992). This had consequences for the frequency of marriage during Lent and Advent, two periods during which marriage was forbidden by the Church, subject to dispensation (Lesthaeghe, 1989; Matthijs and Van de Putte, 2001). Nonetheless, romance and emotion were not immediately the first areas to receive attention from the Church: passion and affection were not the most important ingredients of a good marriage. Rather, the 'ideal family' was based more on domesticity then on emotional ties, more on marital love than on romantic love (Cloet and Storme, 1991: 19–21).

Another characteristic of the 19th century was economic modernisation. A carefully qualified transition took place at this time from a small-scale, traditional agricultural society to a centralised, mechanised and large-scale industrial economy, flanked and supported by an expansive service sector. This was all pushed and pulled by the mutual reinforcement of scientific knowledge and technical skill. Some see this movement as the driving force behind all kinds of socio-demographic and cultural changes, including at the level of the structure, the organisation and the functions of the family, as well as of marriage and the marriage ceremony.[3] At first sight, this seems obvious but, upon closer inspection, additional explanation is needed. After all, central features of industrialisation, such as rationalisation and instrumentalisation cannot simply be logically linked to privatisation: on the contrary, these processes can be better designated as the private reaction to economic modernisation. 'Cultural' and 'economic' processes influence each other reciprocally. For this reason, the degree and direction of privatisation will differ depending on socio-economic status: to an unskilled factory worker, the song of emotion and romance sounds different than to small-scale farmers or a large industrialist. This is also translated into highly specific events: the interval between widowing and remarriage is different for low-status groups than for high-status groups. This interval not only measures emotionalisation but also, for example, economic needs. Since all the elements of the nine hypotheses are status-sensitive, this social-status dimension is incorporated into our study where necessary and in so far as is possible.

3. The Study

3.1. SOURCES

We examine the evolution of the nine stated indicators in three different regions for the period 1800–1913. The study areas are Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek, three municipalities in Flanders – roughly the northern half of Belgium – with different socio-economic structures and different cultural climates. All the data for these municipalities were coded from almost 17,000 marriage certificates.[4] In Leuven and in Aalst, a sample was taken of one out of three certificates; in Bierbeek all certificates were coded. This resulted in 9,330 certificates for Leuven, 7,510 (80%) of which relate to a first marriage – i.e., a marriage between a man and a woman neither of whom had previously been married. In Aalst, 5,496 certificates were coded, 83% of which were first marriages. In Bierbeek this figure was 2,129, 85% of which related to first marriages. Besides information from the marriage certificates, for some calculations (e.g., the marriage and remarriage intensity) also census data were necessary.

3.2. STUDY AREAS

Leuven is located in the present-day province of Vlaams-Brabant, in central Belgium, approximately 30 km east of Brussels. At the beginning of the 19th century, Leuven was economically in decline.[5] All social groups were suffering in one way or another under French occupation. During the Dutch period (1814–1830) recovery took place. Leuven was one of the first Belgian cities to have reliable rail connections. This simplified the supply of raw materials to the Leuven foodstuffs industry. In the second half of the 19th century, several trading activities pumped fresh blood into Leuven's economy. However, Leuven never became an industrial city. Trade and services remained the driving forces behind the economy. By the mid-19th century, 45% of the workforce were employed in (small) trading companies, the transport sector and services. Growth in the services sector was supported by the expansion of the university, the city administration, the military barracks, schools, courts, prisons and hospitals. Around 1800, Leuven had approximately 20,000 inhabitants; by around 1900 this number had grown to over 42,000 people. This doubling over a 100-year period is insignificant when compared to other medium-sized Belgian cities. Only between 1875 and 1890 did the population of Leuven grow relatively rapidly – from 34,400 to 40,700 inhabitants.

The second study area is Aalst.[6] This town is located in the south-east of the province of Oost-Vlaanderen, and approximately the same distance (25 km) from Brussels and from Ghent. The sandy loamy soil there is very fertile, which makes farming profitable. Flax provided the raw material for the widespread cottage industry in the first half of the 19th century. At the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, the textiles, foodstuffs and cotton-processing industries in particular expanded. As elsewhere, the reconstruction was supported by the Dutch

regime. In 19th-century Aalst, textiles played a major role. The population of Aalst Grew more quickly during the 19th century than that of Leuven. Around 1800 Aalst had almost 11,000 inhabitants, rising to a little over 35,000 by 1910. This growth was under pinned by the attraction of the textile industry. Its employees were often underskilled women. However, not only did Aalst have more immigrants than Leuven, but its natural growth was also higher, particularly after 1880.

The third study community, Bierbeek, was a small country community.[7] The community lies just less than 10 km south-east of Leuven. Around 1750, Bierbeek had fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, 2,700 around 1850 and 3,700 by around 1910. Geographically, Bierbeek is on the border between the loamy ground of Brabant, the Hageland and western Haspengouw. This border roughly coincides with the soil science border between sand/loam and loam. The agricultural land is generally suited to arable farming. In the 19th century, the vast majority of the population was employed in farming.

3.3. DIVISION OF OCCUPATIONS BY REGION

In order to gain an idea of the socio-economic profile of those marrying and, therefore, to a certain extent of the study regions, the occupations of those marrying were coded and classified.[8] Following consultation and based on contact with the sources and on theoretical considerations, we developed our own occupation classification model (Matthijs, 2001: 68–73). A rough distinction is made between occupations based chiefly on education and training (mainly occupations in the services sector), and occupations based chiefly on capital and economic activities (chiefly occupations in trade and industry). Within these, a hierarchy can be created from low, through middle, to high. Farmers and the ‘no occupation’ group are not included in this model.

Tables 1 and 2 divide up the occupations of first-marriage bridegrooms and brides along the dual dividing line of capital/education and high/middle/low.[9] The totals show us that in Leuven a relatively high proportion – approximately 10% – of bridegrooms had a high class position, either based on training and education or on capital. In Aalst and Bierbeek, these figures were much lower. Bierbeek had a great many farmers. In Bierbeek, on average over the entire century among first-marrying men, 43% were farmers; in Leuven and Aalst these figures were 2% and 10%. Relatively speaking, the low and middle economic occupations were over-represented in Aalst. This is in line with expectations (see study areas). It must be stressed that – with the exception of the last decades of the 19th century – the differences between Leuven and Aalst were fairly small. Among brides, the differences were somewhat larger, which is related to the fact that much of the industrial employment in Aalst revolved around textile processing, which was primarily a female occupation. During the last decades of the 19th century, the proportion of the low capital occupations rose slightly in Aalst.

Table 1. Social status of bridegrooms (Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek, 1800–1913, first marriages)

	1800–1809	1810–1819	1820–1829	1830–1839	1840–1849	1850–1859	1860–1869	1870–1879	1880–1889	1890–1899	1900–1913	Total
Leuven												
High cultural (*)	6.9	4.6	3.5	5.4	3.9	5.4	4.9	6.2	6.5	7.2	5.8	5.6
High economic (**)	4.5	4.8	3.1	5.7	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.6	4.5	3.5	6.3	4.4
Middle cultural	4.3	5.0	4.1	6.1	4.4	8.0	6.0	7.2	8.6	8.4	10.9	7.4
Middle economic	22.9	22.3	16.1	13.5	14.7	13.0	14.3	16.5	11.0	19.7	18.8	16.6
Low economic	59.4	60.3	70.7	65.3	70.1	64.8	66.0	60.9	64.9	59.3	55.9	62.4
Farmers	1.9	3.1	1.0	2.4	3.0	3.5	1.3	1.4	1.2	0.2	0.9	1.6
No occupation	0.0	0.0	1.4	1.7	0.5	1.8	4.2	4.2	3.2	1.8	1.4	2.0
N = 100%	419	418	485	541	571	551	638	721	752	895	1,488	7,479
Aalst												
High cultural	2.6	2.6	1.4	1.0	1.5	0.3	0.8	2.7	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.7
High economic	5.3	5.7	1.1	1.7	1.5	2.9	2.2	3.0	3.2	2.9	3.4	3.0
Middle cultural	4.0	1.8	2.1	3.1	1.1	3.7	5.0	4.1	4.2	5.0	6.9	4.4
Middle economic	24.2	18.8	16.0	25.3	18.6	15.0	14.4	17.3	20.8	17.3	16.3	18.0
Low economic	33.5	53.7	63.1	55.5	68.3	66.1	62.2	62.3	63.1	67.1	62.3	
Farmers	30.4	17.5	15.0	11.6	10.2	8.7	10.3	8.2	7.0	7.9	3.6	9.5
No occupation	0.0	0.0	1.4	1.7	0.8	1.1	1.1	2.5	0.8	1.9	0.9	1.2
N = 100%	227	229	287	292	264	379	360	365	475	618	1,043	4,539
Bierbeek												
High cultural	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
High economic	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0	0.8	0.0	1.2	0.6	0.6	1.0	0.9	0.6
Middle cultural	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	1.2	0.0	1.8	2.5	1.0	2.3	1.2
Middle economic	3.3	8.5	10.4	5.0	6.6	7.0	4.1	7.1	6.8	8.1	8.0	7.0
Low economic	74.4	63.2	55.7	58.3	51.2	52.3	43.5	41.1	39.3	40.6	37.5	47.4
Farmers	21.1	28.3	33.0	36.0	39.7	39.5	50.6	47.0	49.7	48.2	51.0	43.1
No occupation	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.8	1.2	1.0	0.3	0.5
N = 100%	90	106	115	139	121	172	170	168	163	197	349	1,790

*Cultural: class division based on schooling, education and training.
**Economic: class division based on capital.
Source: marriage certificates for Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek; own calculations.

Table 2. Social status of brides (Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek, 1800–1913, first marriages)

	1800–1809	1810–1819	1820–1829	1830–1839	1840–1849	1850–1859	1860–1869	1870–1879	1880–1889	1890–1899	1900–1913	Total
Leuven												
High cultural (*)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
High economic (**)	0.0	0.5	0.9	1.8	2.9	3.1	0.7	1.5	1.1	0.8	0.7	1.3
Middle cultural	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.9	0.5	0.6	0.4
Middle economic	24.5	17.9	8.1	21.9	22.6	17.6	13.2	13.6	9.4	10.4	12.1	14.2
Low economic	74.2	77.4	77.0	65.1	66.0	64.2	63.6	51.7	59.4	57.2	43.0	59.0
Farmers' wives	1.3	2.1	0.2	0.4	1.1	0.9	0.7	0.7	0.4	0.0	0.1	0.5
No occupation	0.0	1.3	13.6	10.7	7.0	14.0	20.8	29.3	28.2	30.3	43.3	24.0
Housewife	0.0	0.	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.0	1.1	2.5	0.5	0.8	0.2	0.6
N = 100%	155	385	457	544	558	550	616	720	752	891	1,493	7,121
Aalst												
High cultural	—	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
High economic	—	5.0	0.7	0.7	0.4	0.5	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.4
Middle cultural	—	0.0	0.4	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.4	0.7	0.2	0.3
Middle economic	—	10.9	14.6	17.2	22.1	14.0	10.3	14.9	12.0	8.9	7.9	12.0
Low economic	—	69.8	67.3	68.6	63.3	70.3	66.8	58.8	62.6	65.3	66.9	65.8
Farmers' wives	—	13.5	12.2	10.0	8.2	7.6	8.0	6.2	6.3	4.5	1.9	6.2
No occupation	—	0.8	4.9	3.1	5.2	6.8	14.7	19.5	18.3	20.5	22.8	15.2
Housewife	—	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.8	0.0	0.3	0.4	0.0	0.1	0.2
N = 100%	—	119	287	290	267	380	361	369	476	619	1,039	4,207
Bierbeek												
High cultural	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
High economic	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.1
Middle cultural	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Middle economic	0.0	2.4	0.9	0.7	29.2	0.0	1.2	0.6	0.0	0.5	0.3	2.6
Low economic	88.9	70.7	45.7	50.4	45.0	31.5	31.8	24.4	33.7	25.9	14.6	32.0
Farmers' wives	11.1	24.4	47.4	45.3	21.7	20.0	53.5	41.1	56.4	20.8	0.6	9.4
No occupation	0.0	0.0	6.0	2.2	3.3	47.9	13.5	32.7	8.6	52.3	84.5	35.4
Housewife	0.0	2.4	0.0	1.4	0.8	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.4
N = 100%	18	41	116	139	120	165	170	168	163	197	349	1,646

*Cultural: class division based on schooling, education and training.
**Economic: class division based on capital.
Source: marriage certificates for Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek; own calculations.

Table 3. Coale's marriage index I_m (Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek, 19th century census years and 1910)

	1846	1856	1866	1880	1890	1900	1910
Leuven	0.3508	0.3510	0.3568	0.4006	0.3913	0.4119	0.4479
Aalst	0.3661	0.3940	0.4188	0.4281	0.4403	0.4739	0.5005
Bierbeek	0.3763	0.3682	0.3962	0.4543	0.4398	0.4654	0.4966

Source: census figures for the years stated and statistics from registers of births, marriages and deaths, own calculations.

4. Results

4.1. FIRST MARRIAGE INTENSITY

Table 3 shows the Coale nuptiality index I_m for the three study areas.[10] Roughly, I_m figures around 0.800 point to 'many' and 'early', figures around 0.300 point to 'few' and 'late' marriages. Until the mid-19th century, nuptiality scores were low, which points to a restrictive 'Malthusian' marriage pattern.[11] This pattern had two basic characteristics: first marriage age was high (27–29 for men, 24–26 for women) and a large proportion remained unmarried (10–15% of marriageable people). According to Hajnal, this pattern – which he saw as emerging somewhere around the period 1400–1650 – had its roots in the traditional farming economy of the time: marriage aspirations had to be postponed until a person could take responsibility for a household. Particularly for the children of farmers and craftsmen – i.e., for most of the population – this meant waiting to marry until the father gave up his profession or died.[12] This pattern persisted in Flanders through the first half of the 19th century, the period when the first wave of industrialisation was nonetheless engulfing some areas (Lebrun et al., 1979). This is an indication that economic development was not the only and perhaps not even the most important driving force behind the long-term evolution in first marriage intensity. This has to be put into perspective because rapid industrial growth was not taking place in any of the three study areas. From the mid-19th century onwards – the time when the economy picked up again following the crisis years of 1840–50 – the situation changed: the I_m indices rose systematically in every region, although regional differences were evident. The Leuven indices were smaller than those for Aalst or Bierbeek. Overall, however, the proportion of married (between 15 and 50) increased. Thus, this measure of the 'stock' of married women confirms our first hypothesis, although in itself this is not a direct indication of domesticisation and emotionalisation, but an indirect indication of the rapid diffusion of marriage as a highly valued social institution.

Table 4 shows the same, but from another angle, viz. the first marriage rates (the number of those marrying per 1,000 previously unmarried people by age and sex) for Leuven and Aalst. In Bierbeek, the number of observation units is too

Table 4. First marriage rates (per 1,000 unmarried) of men and women (Leuven and Aalst, 19th century census years and 1910)

	Leuven							Aalst						
	1846	1856	1866	1880	1890	1900	1910	1846	1856	1866	1880	1890	1900	1910
Men														
20–29	41	37	74	81	82	100	93	21	40	70	99	107	151	126
30–39	82	93	143	90	74	72	74	57	64	97	67	85	114	95
40–49	70	67	75	67	35	29	26	41	59	66	40	41	36	33
50–59	45	37	37	18	21	30	17	19	26	8	8	13	29	14
60–69	13	26	37	41	30	15	6	16	0	9	0	17	0	0
Total	50	50	83	76	72	83	77	30	44	68	76	86	118	101
Women														
20–29	52	51	78	81	89	107	95	56	72	88	103	96	139	122
30–39	63	63	72	60	47	46	52	42	78	78	36	61	63	65
40–49	23	17	30	32	13	8	15	26	31	12	22	9	20	12
50–59	12	9	0	5	5	7	4	0	6	0	0	5	5	5
60–69	0	4	0	0	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	44	43	59	57	57	67	60	42	58	61	65	68	91	83

Source: marriage certificates for Leuven and Aalst, and statistics from population registers.

limited for this calculation. This information fits in more closely with our research intention than I_m because we are dealing here only with first marriages, while I_m also includes remarriages (roughly one fifth of the total). In the mid-19th century the first marriage rates of men and women aged 30–39 were actually higher than those of people aged 20–29! Initially, even the first marriage rates of 40–49-year-old men were higher than those of 20–29-year-olds. This changed dramatically over the course of the second half of the 19th century. The first marriage rate in the youngest age group (20–29 years old) increased considerably in the second half of the 19th century.[13] This is an indication of the erosion of the Malthusian marriage pattern. This confirms our first hypothesis. One explanation of this might be that during the third quarter of the 19th century the economy expanded rapidly. Material obstacles to marriage declined in importance, although not everybody profited equally from this phenomenon. Unskilled industrial workers, for example, found life very difficult, as they had during the previous decades – their standard of living barely improved, if at all (Scholliers, 1996). It is not possible to tell from the available data whether this prevented an increase in their first marriage rates. This will, however, be possible for the evolution in first marriage age by social status (see below). Nonetheless, some indications exist that first marriage intensity increased in all social groups. After all and globally speaking, the increase in first marriage rates was fairly significant and this was perhaps only possible because marriage behaviour was evolving in the same direction in all social groups. In other words, the general increase would not have been possible if only the marriage rates of the economically successful groups increased. Another element to support this argument is that the first marriage rate for young people in Aalst increased more

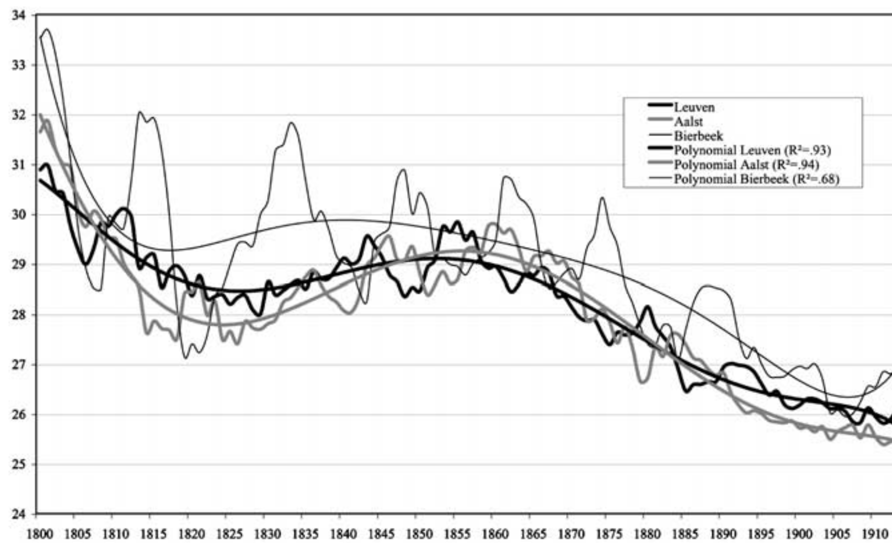

Figure 1. First marriage age of bridegrooms (Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek, 1800–1913).

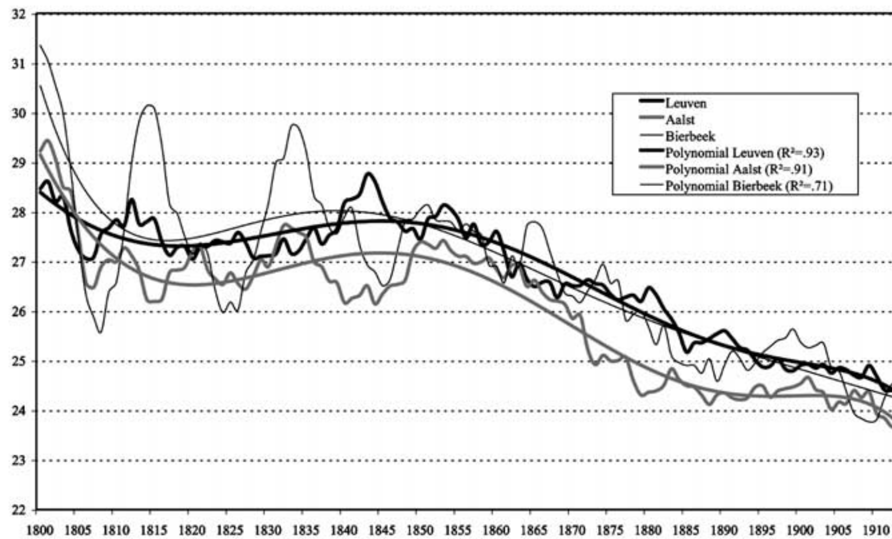

Figure 2. First marriage age of brides (Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek, 1800–1913).

than it did in Leuven, although this was precisely the region where factory workers were present in large quantities.

4.2. FIRST MARRIAGE AGE

Figures 1 and 2 show the evolution of average age at first marriage in Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek for the period 1800–1913.[14] As well as the annual observations, the

sixth degree polynomials are also shown: these provide a visual synthesis of the long-term trend.[15] In the further description and in the sociological interpretation, the emphasis is on these trends and less on short-term fluctuations, which are incidentally not insignificant.[16]

At the beginning of the 19th century, the average age at first marriage for men was 30 to 32, for women 28 to 30. This confirms, from an age perspective, that the marriage pattern at the time was restrictive. These results are along the same line as those of different studies in Flanders (Vandenbroeke, 1976). Over the course of the first two decades of the 19th century, age at first marriage fell by approximately two years, both for bridegrooms and for brides, and in each region. This decline was more intense and lasted longer for men than for women which, certainly at the beginning of the century, was linked to attempts by young men to escape French (war) demands by marrying. It is striking that Belgian independence (1830) – undoubtedly a politically turbulent period – had no visible effect on the evolution in first marriage intensity or age. This has also been established for other demographic indicators (Hofstee, 1981). In the second quarter of the 19th century – a period of economic decline in Flanders – age at first marriage rose in each region, although without reaching the level of the beginning of the century. This increase was relatively weak and short-lived and was quickly followed by a 'definitive' decline in age at first marriage. By 'definitive' we mean a consistent, long-term decline without reverting to the previous high levels. The beginning of this decline can be placed somewhere between 1840 and 1860, therefore around the same time as the beginning of the increase in the marriage index I_m (Table 3) and 20–25 years before the start of the decline in fertility. The second hypothesis is therefore also confirmed and, again, the mid-19th century seems to be a turning point.

The first marriage age of bridegrooms in Bierbeek is higher for almost the entire period than for those in Leuven and Aalst. One obvious explanation is the large number of farmers in Bierbeek, a group which usually has a higher first marriage age than other occupational groups (see e.g., Van Poppel, 1992). The level and evolution of first marriage age of bridegrooms in Leuven and Aalst do run parallel, in spite of the substantial economic differences between the two towns. A different picture emerges for brides. The fluctuations in first marriage age among brides are generally smaller than among bridegrooms. The evolution in first marriage age of brides follows approximately the same pattern throughout the 19th century in Leuven and Bierbeek, but in Aalst the first marriage age is lower, which could be related to the large number of female textile workers. The late decline in first marriage age in Aalst is striking. This is unexpected, given the large proportion of poorly skilled and unskilled (female) workers. It could mean that industrialisation in Aalst did not have a decisive effect on the evolution of first marriage age. If industrialisation and proletarianisation facilitated the decline in age at first marriage, this decline should have taken place first in Aalst and last in Bierbeek – but it did not!

As well as the differences – which are related to local circumstances – striking similarities certainly exist between the three regions. This is sociologically and demographically interesting, since the regions studied differ significantly from one another in terms of the timing and intensity (of the reception) of modernisation, proto-industrialisation, proletarianisation and development of the services sector. This can indicate that an underlying process was at work here which encountered only little resistance from territorial and economic factors.

In general the decline in first marriage age started earlier for brides than for grooms. Apparently women played a pioneering role in the 19th century decline in marriage age. In a sense, this produces additional evidence for the existence of an underlying process of domesticisation and emotionalisation. Apparently, the changed social position and gender identity of women, together with the fact that they were pushed back into the private sector, played a key role in the decline in first marriage age. This hypothesis is more or less at odds with hypotheses which associate the 19th-century evolution of first marriage age with the consequences of the 19th-century (economic) developments on the social position of men. Although, in his semi-economic model, Hajnal concentrates on the evolution of the first marriage age of women, in his explanation little is said about the contribution of the woman. When Hajnal speaks of economic needs, he is referring to male needs. Our Flemish data raise critical questions about this, and even suggest that women in particular played a crucial role in bringing about (a process of change which led to) the decline in first marriage age.

In discussing first marriage rates (see previous point) and the evolution of first marriage age, the importance of insight into differences in socio-economic status has emerged. For this reason, the evolution in the first marriage age of bridegrooms and brides has been reconstructed by socio-economic status.[17] The macro-image which emerged earlier, i.e., a decline in first marriage age during the first two decades of the 19th century, followed by a slight increase for two to three decades, then a 'definitive' decline until the end of the study period, is roughly speaking also apparent for the various status groups. The fluctuations are more intense among bridegrooms than brides. Overall, the highest status groups have the highest average first marriage age, the middle groups marry somewhat younger and the lowest socio-economic groups even younger still. This does not indicate the existence of a young proletarian marriage pattern: until 1865, the average age at first marriage of low-status bridegrooms was almost never under 28. For almost the entire study period, farmers had the highest first marriage age. This could explain why the first marriage age in Bierbeek (see Figure 1) was higher than in Leuven or Aalst. A similar pattern emerges for brides, at least from approximately 1870 onwards. This explains why the first marriage age of brides in Aalst was lower than those in Leuven and Bierbeek (see Figure 2). Brides in Aalst included a relatively large number of unskilled or poorly educated textile workers, who married fairly young.

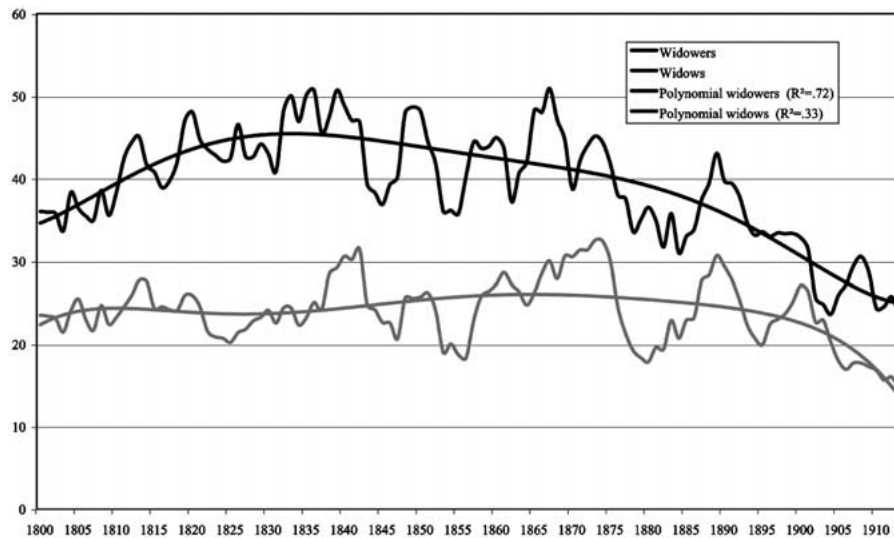

Figure 3. Remarriage intensity of widowed people (Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek, 1800–1913).

4.3. REMARRIAGE INTENSITY

In the light of increased domesticisation and of the greater zest for marriage, we can expect remarriage intensity to increase over the course of the second half of the 19th century. However, this is not self-evident because marriage and remarriage differ significantly from one another in terms of characteristics, functions, expectations and intentions. What is true for the first marriage market is not necessarily true for the remarriage market, and vice versa. It is possible that in some respects the two 'markets' operate independently. It is even possible that as marriage became more highly regarded over the course of the 19th century (see previous point), remarriage was regarded less highly.

The remarriage intensity is the ratio of the number of widowers (widows) remarrying in year x compared to the average number of new widowers (widows) in year x and in the six preceding years.[18] The number of men (women) widowed in year x equals the number of married women (men) deceased in that year. This information is given in the (civil) death certificates and these have been kept in Belgium since the middle of 1796.[19] Our calculation does not include migration, which could cause an error unless inflow and outflow balance each other out. Formally, the remarriage intensity of widowers $\mathrm{Ri}_{m(x)}$ (or $\mathrm{Ri}_{f(x)}$ for widows) in year x is calculated as follows:

$$\mathrm{Ri}_{m(x)} = \mathrm{N}_{\text{widowers who remarry } (x)} / ((\mathrm{N}_{\text{deaths of married women } (x)} + \ldots + \mathrm{N}_{\text{deaths of married women } (x-6)}) / 7)$$

Figure 3 shows the evolution of the remarriage intensity for bridegrooms and brides in the three regions together.[20] At the beginning of the 19th century, one

in three widowers and one in four widows remarried. From 1840 onwards, the remarriage intensity of widowers declined. Initially, the decline was gradual but, towards the end of the century, it accelerated. These findings contradict our hypothesis: over the course of (the second half of) the 19th century, the remarriage intensity did not increase but *declined*, particularly among widowers. Since the first marriage intensity increased in the same period (see above), the proportion of those remarrying fell sharply, specifically from one in five around 1800 to one in ten by around 1900.

Broadly speaking, the three study areas demonstrate a parallel pattern from approximately 1830 onwards, in terms of the evolution in remarriage intensity.[21] The cultural and socio-demographic differences between Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek, which were fairly wide, appear to play only a subordinate role in this case. This was also observed for the evolution in first marriage rate and first marriage age. Nonetheless, regional differences can be seen.

Among widows, the decline of the remarriage intensity began a few decades later: it only became noticeable by the end of the 19th century and did not accelerate until the beginning of the 20th century. The difference in remarriage intensity of widowers and widows therefore gradually shrank. Until around 1890, the remarriage intensity of widowers in Leuven was always higher than in Aalst or Bierbeek. These latter two communities show a comparable pattern between 1815 and 1885. Among widows, the figures for Leuven and Aalst run parallel, and those for Bierbeek are usually the lowest. The remarriage intensity was therefore lower in the countryside (Bierbeek) than in the towns, which could mean that farmers (and servants and day labourers) remarried less often than other occupational groups. This raises critical questions about the hypothesis which associates the 19th-century decline in remarriage intensity with the changed socio-economic structures, particularly the erosion of the traditional farming society, the reduction in the farming population and the growth of industrialisation and the services sector (Cabourdin, 1981: 282; Bellettini, 1981). Various authors are fairly quick to assume that the pressure to remarry was so high in farming societies because farmers' households had to continue functioning even after a death, which meant that vacant family positions had to be filled quickly. This would mean that the remarriage intensity should be highest in Bierbeek and lowest in Leuven and the decline in this intensity would start the latest in Bierbeek. This was definitely not the case. Our study results suggest, on the contrary, that the remarriage market in urbanised areas was more open. Apparently, widowed people found it easier to find a new marriage partner in such areas. Perhaps less restrictive marriage control was exercised in the urban culture.[22]

Various factors explain the decline in remarriage intensity: falling mortality, the demographically less favourable remarriage market and remarriage-unfriendly economic and cultural changes.[23] An argument in favour of our privatisation hypothesis might be found in the long-term evolution of age-specific remarriage rates. These rates are indeed age-sensitive: the older a person is, the lower

the remarriage rate.[24] The remarriage rates of widows remained fairly stable throughout the 19th century for all age groups. In Leuven, for example, the age-specific remarriage rate for the 20–29 old widows was 200 in 1846, 222 in 1880 and again 200 in 1900. The corresponding rate for the age group 50–59 was respectively 4, 8 and 11. Among widowers, remarriage rates declined in period 1846–1900 in the three youngest age groups, among older widowers they remained fairly stable. In Leuven, the age-specific remarriage rate for the 20–29-old widowers was 333 in 1846, 83 in 1880 and 0 in 1900. The decline in remarriage intensity for widowers was therefore confined to the younger age groups. In a sense, this is an indication that emotional considerations became more important in the concrete planning of life. Maybe that from the middle of the 19th century onwards, the deceased partner was more romanticised and idealised, which caused a kind of remarriage blockage. The new family discourse, the idealisation of close relationships and the enthusiastic emotionalisation of all internal family subsystems were so central to social contacts and they became so highly valued in public opinion that a watered-down version, in the form of a remarriage and a reconstituted family, was held in low esteem and sometimes even disdained.

4.4. INTERVAL BETWEEN WIDOWING AND REMARRIAGE

Another way of measuring the emotional bond between the former partners is the interval between being widowed and remarrying. In the Early Modern Period, people remarried 'quickly' – in specific terms, this means within one year of being widowed – which would point to a significant affective distance between the partners (Ariès, 1981; Segalen, 1981; Shorter, 1977; Van Poppel, 1992).[25] The death of a partner was apparently quickly processed and he/she was quickly replaced. Seen against the emotionalisation process, we can expect the interval between widowing and remarrying to increase over the course of the 19th century. The deceased partner remained emotionally and symbolically 'present' in the family for a longer period, which resulted in a kind of emotional blockade, leading to the postponement or even abandonment of a new marriage (see previous point).

Figure 4 shows the waiting time (in months) between the time of widowing and of remarriage in the period 1800–1913 for the three study areas together.[26] Among widowers, the average interval was 2.5 to 3 years, among widows one year longer (for comparisons, see Ihinger-Tallman and Pasley, 1987: 28; Cabourdin, 1978: 316; Charbonneau, 1970: 82; Bideau, 1980: 38; Van Poppel, 1992: 375; Segalen, 1981: 68; Lundh, 2002: 424–425). This male-female difference has to do with the fact that the social regulations regarding marriage, mourning and the mourning period were less far-reaching for widowers than for widows (Van Poppel, 1992: 307; Lundh, 2002: 433). There is also a legal aspect: in order to prevent *confusio sanguinis* (offspring confusion), the widow had to wait three hundred days before she could remarry.[27]

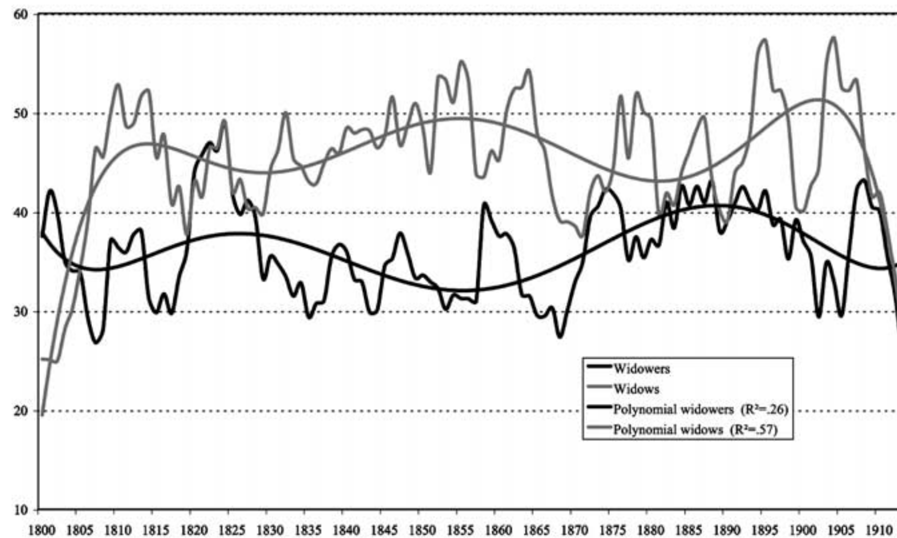

Figure 4. Interval (in months) between the time of widowing and remarriage (Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek, 1800–1913).

What is more important to our hypothesis is that the interval between widowing and remarriage changed only slightly over the course of the 19th century. If the first and last decades of the period under observation are removed from the analysis – which is defensible – a slight increase in that interval is observed, more for widowers than for widows (a lower-degree polynomial makes this much more clear). Note that this observation runs parallel to the one in the previous section on remarriage intensity. We also examined whether (the evolution of) that interval differed per type of remarriage, but this was not the case.[28] The results therefore only partly confirm the expectation that the interval between widowing and remarriage would increase over the course of the 19th century.

4.5. NUMBER AND PROPORTION OF WITNESSING FAMILY MEMBERS

As is the case today, the marriage ceremony in the 19th century involved witnesses. These witnesses were there to control and verify the proceedings. Those marrying were free to choose the witnesses, but some formal rules did apply. Except during the French Period, when both men and women could act as witnesses, during the 19th century only men could be witnesses. The entire study group contained only thirteen female witnesses; they were rejected from the analysis. The 19th-century rules also stipulated that there must be four witnesses, two from 1908 onwards. The relationship of each of them to the bride or bridegroom, as well as other details, is registered on the marriage certificate. This is now further examined as an element of privatisation or, more accurately, of 'familiarisation' of the marriage ceremony.[29]

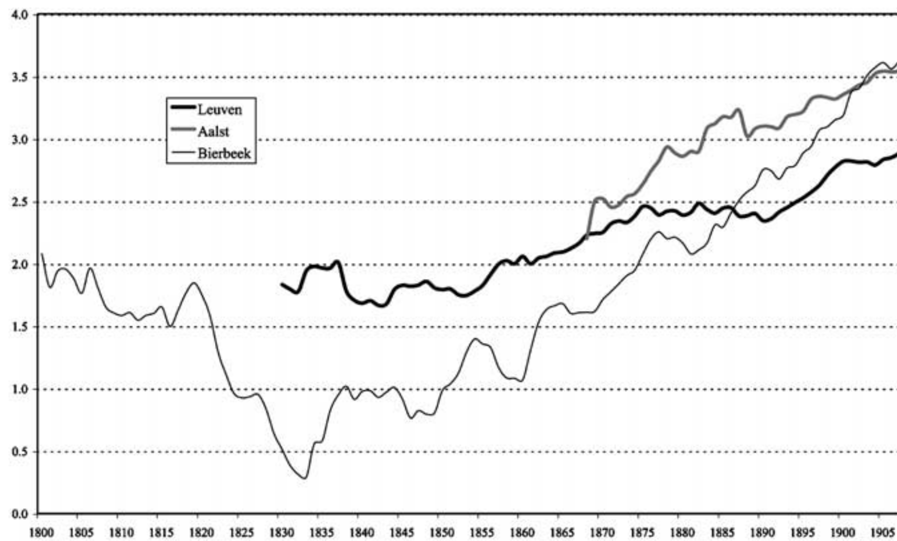

Figure 5. Average number of family members among witnesses (Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek, 1800–1913) (maximum = 4).

The starting point is the hypothesis that mobilising family members as witnesses is an indication of privatisation of family life: the higher that proportion (relative to all witnesses), the stronger the privatisation. This is clearly confirmed by our study; the proportion of witnessing family members increased in each study area over the course of the 19th century (Figure 5). By the mid-19th century, one or two of the witnesses were relatives of the bride or groom; by the end of the 19th century, this was three out of four. From approximately 1900 onwards, the witnesses were almost always family members. This is a strong indication of the increasing importance of family ties. The marriage ceremony increasingly became a matter for the partners and their families and less for the anonymous environment. In a manner of speaking, the marriage ceremony became 'familial' and this can be interpreted as an aspect of privatisation. Important to note is that, here too, the period around 1850 is a turning point.

Figure 6 examines whether the four (two after 1908) witnesses were relatives of the marriage partners, for each witness separately. This analysis is confined to Leuven because of the restricted number of observations for Aalst and Bierbeek. A clear pattern emerges: the proportion of witnesses who are family of one of the marriage partners is higher for the first witness than for the second, higher for the second than for the third and higher for the third than for the fourth. The order in which the witnesses were officially registered was not random. Non-family members were not involved until the group of potential family member signatories had been exhausted and this was carried right through to the order of the signatures on the marriage certificate. This observation also strongly points in the direction of privatisation of marriage in the second part of the 19th century.

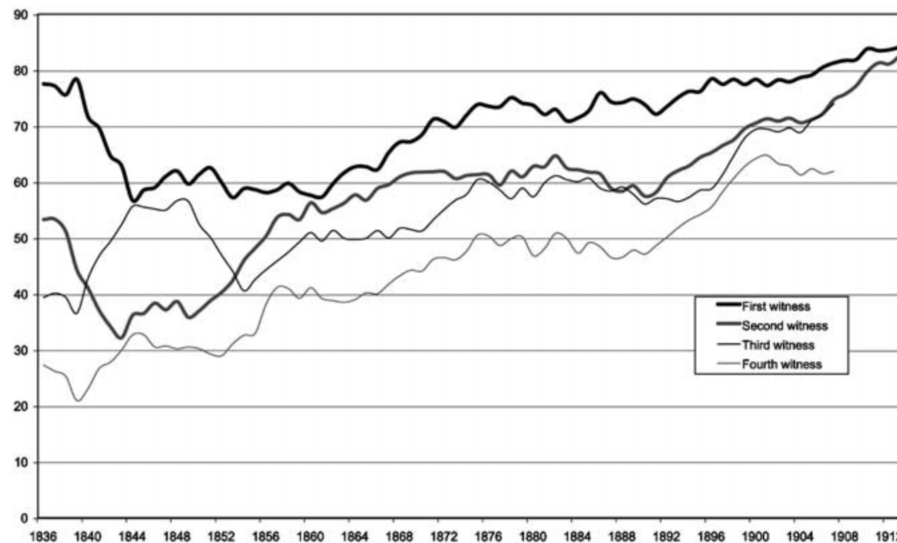

Figure 6. Percentage of witnesses with family tie, per witness (Leuven, 1865–1913).

4.6. MALE OR FEMALE RELATIONSHIP OF THE WITNESSES

In detailing our hypotheses, we take as our basis the additional hypothesis that the history of privatisation took place principally, but not exclusively, via women and was, in this sense, *gendered*. Following on from this, the previous point (proportion of witnessing family members) can be specified, i.e., that in choosing witnesses, stronger and increasing preference was given to the bride's family (the 'female' line) than to the groom's family (the 'male' line). Specifically, we expect the proportion of witnessing family members from the bride's side to increase over the course of the 19th century. This is not obvious because of the possible reaction from the groom's 'female' side, i.e., his mother. Bridegrooms – certainly younger bridegrooms – usually have a living mother who interferes with the marriage aspirations of her offspring. However, it seems plausible that the negotiating position and the micro-social power to control the marriage ceremony of the groom's mother is usually less than that of the bride's mother because, in the latter case, no 'disruptive' male link is present.

The results are presented in Figure 7.[30] Around 1840–1850, the division was approximately equal: one in three witnesses was related to the bride, one in three to the bridegroom and the remaining third was not related. In the course of the 19th century, the proportion of the 'no relation' group gradually diminishes. This is completely in line with our basic hypothesis. Abstracting from this last group, the proportion of witnesses related to the bride and the groom remains approximately equal throughout the entire 19th century, i.e., 50%. The loss of the proportion of the 'unrelated' group is equally compensated by an increase in the group of related witnesses on both the bride's and the bridegroom's side. This contradicts

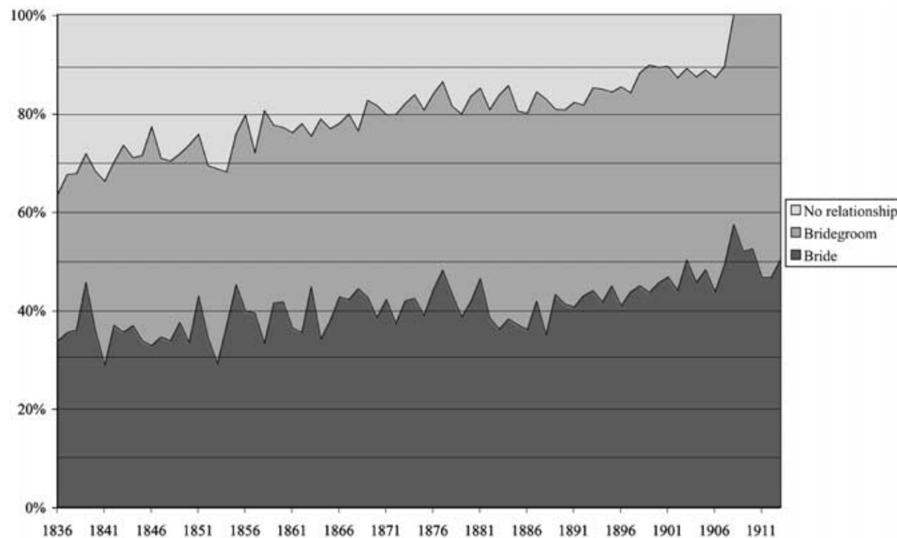

Figure 7. Family ties of witnesses on the 'female' or 'male' side (Leuven, all witnesses 1865–1913).

our hypothesis. Apart from the aforementioned restraint – the bridegroom's mother also interferes in the marriage ceremony – another, purely pragmatic explanation is also possible: achieving a fair balance in terms of number of related witnesses in the 'male' and 'female' line prevents conflicts within and primarily between families. The new marriage cannot be encumbered with disputes between families from the outset. As to witnesses, this presupposes a fair exchange.

4.7. EMPLOYMENT OUTSIDE THE HOME OF WOMEN IN FIRST MARRIAGES

Data concerning the evolution in the level of activity in the 19th century usually come from the censuses (see e.g., Pott-Buter, 1993), but this evolution can also be checked fairly reliably from marriage certificates, although it relates, of course, only to people getting married. This is now empirically checked, but a methodological problem arises: some women stopped working when they married while others did not wish to see their work status registered on the marriage certificate (Van Poppel, 1992; Matthijs, 2001). That some stopped working when they married says a great deal about domesticisation. The material advantage (in the form of an additional income) of continuing to work did apparently not counterbalance the (expected) disadvantages. These disadvantages were mainly cultural, which is where the tension emerges between income and status. In our study period, the meritocratic society was in full swing, but that path was clearly male. The wife's income did generate increased financial clout, but apparently not additional status. Perhaps this was even interpreted in precisely the opposite way: the fact that a married woman had to go to work indicated that the husband had a low income and

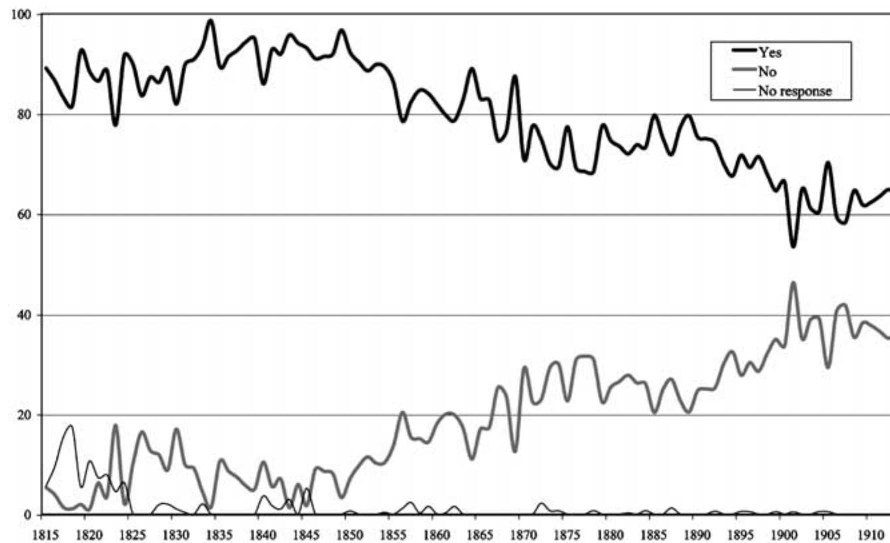

Figure 8. Proportion of first marrying women employed outside the home (total group, 1815–1913).

'therefore' a low family status. By not going out to work, the wife was indicating that she did not have to work – whether or not this was true. In this way, the wife could make enough time to take part in the 'new' 19th-century bourgeois (female) culture of the middle classes and to shaping the cult of motherhood.

The analysis is confined to period after 1815 because, before that date, major fluctuations were seen in the stated numbers of women working outside the home. This was related to registration errors and administrative oversights, perhaps even to the deliberate withholding of information. Here, employment outside the home is measured by whether or not an occupation is explicitly stated on the marriage certificate. Figure 8 shows that the proportion of (marrying) women working outside the home fell systematically over the course of the 19th century, especially in the second half. Between 1815 and 1860, over 80% of marrying women had an occupation; subsequently this figure fell to 60%. As already indicated, this was not only a real reduction, it was also related to the fact that increasing numbers of women did not wish to register the fact that they worked outside the home. It must be stressed that the stated percentages significantly overestimate the general employment of women outside the home. Our research group consists mainly of young, unmarried and childless women. Their employment outside the home is, of course, substantially higher than that of the older, married women with dependent children.

The reduction in employment outside the home supports the domesticisation hypothesis. Whether this was a genuine development or a shift in registration is in a sense of little relevance: both processes point to the fact that work outside the home was increasingly regarded as male and instrumental, domestic labour as female

and expressive (Perrot, 1990). The contrast between male, public work outside the home and female, private domestic labour became clearer. The man/husband/father was responsible for income and status, while the woman/wife/mother took care of the household and the children.

4.8. PROPORTION OF ILLEGITIMATE BIRTHS

In various Western European countries, including Belgium, the proportion of illegitimate children rose considerably between 1750 and 1850. According to Shorter (1977), this was a result of female emancipation and primarily the female struggle for (sexual) liberation from oppressive male power structures. Increased industrial employment provided the necessary leverage. The 'new woman' was more individualist and more independent, she rebelled against parental authority, opposed traditions and sought sexual gratification. Her 'old' rural values were eroded and replaced by a libertarian and proletarian sub-culture full of romanticism and eroticism. The result was an increase in the number and proportion of illegitimate children. Much opposition was voiced against this attitude (Tilly et al., 1976: 463–469; Anderson, 1980: 56; Damsma, 1993: 178–184). To begin with, it is not easy to check whether the shift in the perception of sexuality and sexual behaviour took place earlier among women employed in industry than among other women. The data required to check this do not exist. This is also the case for the motives of young girls going to work in factories: the emancipatory effect of this is hard to see. On the contrary: this work was hard, monotonous and underpaid. Moreover, only a small minority of women worked there, while the vast majority remained employed within the home, on the farm and in the classic cottage industry circuit. Those who did still work in factories did not do so out of rebellion, but to increase the family's income. Their reasons were utilitarian, not emancipatory; family interest took pride of place, not their own benefit. Many women were at that time in a structural poverty trap: they had no property of their own, no money, no permanent job, no family network, no circle of friends. In order to escape from loneliness and mind-numbing factory labour, they looked for a partner. Pregnancy helped put this partner under pressure to marry. This devious intent was sometimes successful, but not always: many men simply left their pregnant partners high and dry because they, too, had no money and suffered appalling (working) conditions. In a nutshell, the fact that many women at the time had illegitimate children was the result of a calculated risk which often did not pay off. This was the result of two conflicting breeding grounds: despair resulting from economic problems and hope that marriage would offer a way out.

Over the course of the second half of the 19th century, the proportion of illegitimate births declined. Living conditions improved considerably for many: men earned more and women were not pushed so much into working outside the home. The number of servants and poor migrants fell – two groups which had been highly vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy (Tilly et al., 1976: 475). Young couples now

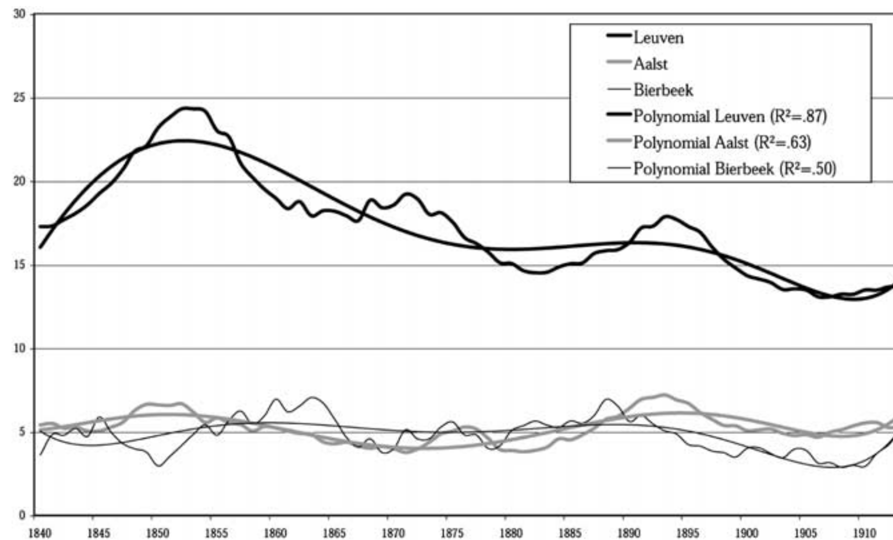

Figure 9. Proportion of illegitimate births (Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek, 1840–1913).

found it economically easier to marry 'in time'. In this sense, economic growth put the brakes on illegitimacy. Nonetheless, the effect of this economic factor should not be overestimated: for various groups, purchasing power and consumption pattern around 1900 did not differ greatly from those of 1800 (Scholliers, 1981, 1985, 1992). The decline in the proportion of illegitimate children can also be explained culturally. Over the course of the 19th century, a very child-friendly environment developed (Cunningham, 1997). Moral newspeak stipulated on all fronts that children should be born within marriage and should grow up in a 'normal family'. An unmarried woman with children had to marry (quickly) so that the children would immediately be legitimised. As a consequence of these new values and of the associated social control, it was now no longer possible to separate motherhood from marriage (Tilly and Scott, 1978; Gillis, 1985). This is an additional indication that all kinds of aspects of domesticisation were spreading in all directions. In the above paragraphs, the partner system took pride of place, now it is the parental system.

Figure 9 shows the evolution (from 1840 onwards) in the proportion of illegitimate children (relative to all births) in Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek. In Leuven, the proportion of illegitimate births decreased substantially. Fairly large regional differences prevail. This also emerges in the measurement of extramarital fertility using the Coale-index I_h (Table 5). On this scale, Leuven scores up to four times higher than Aalst or Bierbeek. In the mid-19th century, one in four to one in five births in Leuven were illegitimate, but this figure fell from 1850 onwards.[31] This proportion was lower and more stable in Aalst and Bierbeek, fluctuating around 5% throughout the period of observation, leaving little room for a decline. The high illegitimacy score for Leuven is related, among other things, to the presence

Table 5. Coale's extra-marital fertility I_h index (Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek, 19th century census years and 1910)

	1846	1856	1866	1880	1890	1900	1910
Leuven	0.0947	0.1091	0.0889	0.0859	0.0823	0.0620	0.0455
Aalst	0.0247	0.0236	0.0221	0.0204	0.0419	0.0415	0.0378
Bierbeek	0.0128	0.0060	0.0446	0.0222	0.0472	0.0260	0.0254

Source: census figures for the years stated and statistics from registers of births, marriages and deaths, own calculations.

of army barracks and the large number of university students. However, these were also present in the second half of the 19th century and the illegitimacy ratio still declined considerably in that period. This indicates that, in the second half of the 19th century, people succeeded in culturally incorporating groups which had previously operated more or less outside the regular marriage pattern and to impose upon them new standards relating to sexuality, homeliness, marriage and family formation. However, in addition to this intensive and extensive social control (e.g., by the state and church authorities), it is just as plausible that these groups were themselves now sufficiently sensitive and receptive to the new values and standards and that they followed the prescribed route without external pressure. Conforming to the expectations of the dominant, highly esteemed marriage system and family pattern was, at the end of the day, the driving force behind social promotion.

4.9. CHILDREN LEGITIMISED BY MARRIAGE

The evolution in illegitimacy and the link with domesticisation can be empirically demonstrated from a different angle of approach, i.e. through the evolution in the proportion of marriages in which at least one child is legitimised (Figure 10).[32] On average in Leuven during the period 1810–1913, at least one child was legitimised in one out of five marriages, in Aalst and Bierbeek this figure was one in ten. At the beginning of the 19th century, this proportion was lower in every region than by the end of the century. This confirms and reinforces the basic hypothesis that more parents wanted to see their children growing up in the conventional family circuit. Apparently, the 'false start' to a relationship – in the form of an illegitimate child – could and should quickly be corrected by marrying. The fact that this proportion declined again at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries can be explained in part by the sharp decline in illegitimacy at that time (see Table 5 and Figure 9). Illegitimacy had indeed now become fairly rare – in Belgium as a whole, the proportion of illegitimate births was only 6% by around 1910.

Taken together, Figures 9 and 10 suggest that the proportion of children legitimised by a marriage, per year of birth, increased over the course of the 19th century. In order to check this, a legitimacy index was developed, which is the ratio of the number of children legitimised by marriage in a given year to all the children born

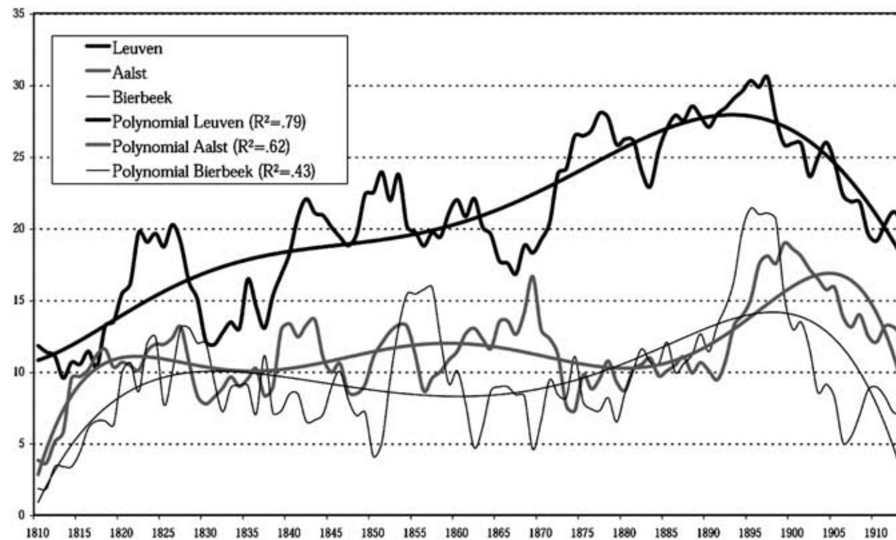

Figure 10. Proportion of marriages with at least one legitimised child (Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek, 1810–1913).

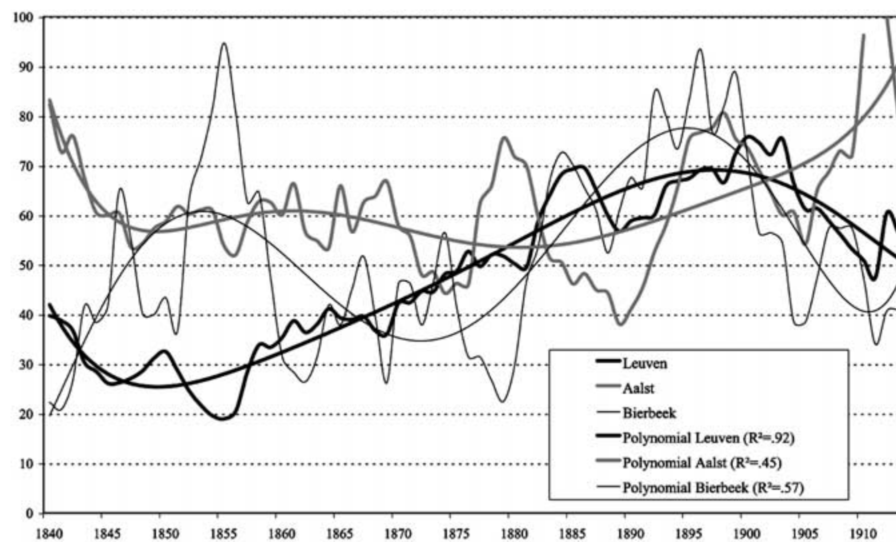

Figure 11. Legitimacy index (Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek, 1840–1913).

illegitimately in that year.[33] Figure 11 confirms that, by the end of the 19th century, most illegitimately born children were legitimised by marriage; in the first half of the 19th century this figure was only half. This confirms the stated hypothesis. Apart from the cultural pressure to allow children to grow up in a 'normal' family, a demographic factor was also at work here, i.e., the decline in infant mortality. Initially, the likelihood of illegitimate children dying was fairly high, particularly

Table 6. Proportion of marriages with at least one legitimised child by socio-economic status of the bride and bridegroom (total group, 1810–1913)

	Brides		Bridegrooms	
	%	Number of marriages	%	Number of marriages
Upper classes				
Large land owners	1.0	296	3.1	196
Occupations with high cultural capital	0.0	12	3.9	1,526
Senior occupations in trade and industry	9.5	222	7.7	1,437
Middle and lower classes				
Shop owners, small entrepreneurs	15.9	4,089	15.7	7,006
Occupations with average cultural capital	2.1	145	10.8	2.559
Small land owners	6.5	1,747	5.4	496
Farmers	6.1	1,714	9.2	2,724
Poorly educated, not employed in a factory				
Non-factory workers	24.4	9,516	22.3	12,648
Domestic staff	14.2	8,601	16.2	2.967
Economic craftsmen	30.8	1,014	16.8	2,027
Poorly educated factory workers	21.5	3,217	20.5	6,095
Unskilled	33.9	3,074	29.6	3,281
Others				
No occupation	12.7	8,872	11.1	738
Housewives	29.3	382	—	—

Source: marriage certificates for Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek; own calculations.

when very young. This situation improved by the end of the 19th century: more children were living longer and, as a result, their probability of being legitimised increased.

There are indications that illegitimate fertility among lower social groups was higher than among the medium and higher groups (Van Bavel, 1998). With the usual reservations, the evolution in the proportion of marriages with at least one legitimised child by socio-economic status can be regarded as an approximate measure of the evolution in the difference in illegitimacy between these groups. We expect that the proportion of marriages with at least one legitimised child will be higher in the lower social groups. Over the entire 19th century on average and the three study areas together, at least one child was legitimised by 34% of unskilled workers getting married; this figure was lower for the middle and certainly the higher social groups (Table 6).

5. Conclusion and Discussion

At the beginning of this study, we formulated nine hypotheses concerning the 19th-century (mainly the second part) development of certain indicators in family and marriage. The basis for these hypotheses was the assumption that domesticisation and privatisation were intensifying at the time, that women were the pioneers in this process and that this was then translated into renewal (or reinforcement) of all kinds of aspects of the content and form of marriage, the marriage ceremony and the family. The main results can be summarised roughly as follows: (1) first marriage intensity increased; (2) age at first marriage fell; (3) remarriage intensity declined; (4) the interval between widowing and remarriage increased slightly; (5) the number and proportion of witnessing family members increased; (6) the number and proportion of family members did not increase more on the female side than on the male side; (7) the proportion of women working outside the home fell; (8) the proportion of illegitimate births declined; (9) the proportion of marriages involving at least one legitimised child increased.

Most of these hypotheses, particularly those relating to the first marriage, witnesses, working outside the home and illegitimacy, are confirmed. It must be stressed, however, that each of these developments is the result of the complex interplay between various social and cultural factors. It was not the intention of this study to disentangle these patterns. The intention was to demonstrate empirically that various macro-sociological and demographic indicators point in the same direction. This suggests an underlying process which we refer to here as domesticisation and privatisation of marriage.

There are some indications that, from the mid-19th century onwards in Flanders – as elsewhere in Western Europe – (first) marriages were the object of much social enthusiasm. The probability of first marriage increased and first marriage age declined. Within less than one generation – roughly the generations from 1800–25 and 1825–50 – the Malthusian marriage pattern of ‘few’ and ‘late’ marriages imploded. The decline in first marriage age began earlier among women than among men, which is an intriguing social puzzle. After all, men benefited first and most from the new economic possibilities and we can therefore expect them to marry earlier – they were the ones with fewer material obstacles to marriage. Apparently, these new opportunities were not enough to take men over the marriage threshold more quickly. On the other hand, at first sight women had no reason at all to marry earlier and with greater intensity. In the 19th century, their legal competence was, after all, limited. With very few exceptions, a married woman could not act legally, unless she had her husband’s consent. He controlled her marital property, he could ‘punish’ her and was ‘responsible’ for her, in the same way as for their under-age children. An unmarried (or widowed) woman could, however, act legally in her own name and do business. Which led to the key question: why did women desire precisely that which pushed them into a legally subordinate position?

Another striking and consistent pattern emerges, which is that the decline in age at first marriage occurred among all social groups, i.e., both among 'new' groups such as the middle classes and the poorly-qualified industrial workers and among 'old' groups such as farmers. Here too, however, socially significant differences in terms of start and pace are evident: first marriage age fell first and fairly slowly among the lower social groups; the middle and higher groups followed later but, once started, the decline was rapid. Age at first marriage was higher on average among the highest-status groups than among the middle groups and higher among the middle groups than among the lower social classes. This is also a challenging paradox, since the higher groups were apparently not using their material opportunities and status to marry early. In other respects, the low-status groups certainly did not marry early; in no way can we speak of an early, 'proletarian' marriage pattern. The low-status groups probably saw marriage as a means of social emancipation; a form of imitation of highly esteemed (private) behaviour which was typical of the middle and high-status groups, i.e., groups which pulled and pushed the domestication project. Marrying early was a means of anticipatory socialisation with the intention of gaining access to the world and the private role behaviour of the higher-status groups. Once again, however, it appears that the groups which postponed the decline for the longest made a rapid start on catching up. The result of this movement was that by the end of the 19th century, the ages at first marriage of both men and women and of all socio-economic groups were moving increasingly closer to one another. One possible sociological consequence was that, from then on, marriage maybe became a less relevant social distinction mechanism.

The proportion of remarriages declined from 20–25% in the first half of the 19th century to 10–15% by the end of the century. This proportion remained the highest throughout the study period in urbanised Leuven, it was slightly lower in Aalst – where a substantial agricultural minority still lived at the beginning of the 19th century – and was the lowest in Bierbeek, a markedly rural region. The interval between the time of widowing and of remarriage changed little over the course of the 19th century. Among widowers, this was an average of 2.5 to 3 years, one year longer for widows, and this differed little among the three study regions. Contrary to expectations, the remarriage intensity – the proportion of widowed people remarrying – declined over the course of the second half of the 19th century. Around 1830–'40, almost half of widowers remarried and one in five to one in four of widows. By the beginning of the 20th century, one quarter of widowers remarried and one in seven of widows. This is entirely contrary to the expectations, since it was assumed that the social enthusiasm for marriage would also spill over into remarriage rates.

Other indicators also point in a direction which can be interpreted as expressions of domesticisation in the course of the second half of the 19th century. The number and proportion of family members acting as witnesses increased, the numbers of marrying women working outside the home declined and the proportion of illegitimate children fell. Furthermore, it appeared that, towards the end of the 19th

century, the majority of children born illegitimately were being legitimised by marriage, while this proportion was only half in the first half of the 19th century.

In brief, various demographic and social indicators show that domesticisation subtly shaped 19th century private life. This took place by people marrying more and earlier, by the development of a 'female' marriage discourse, by the promotion of marriage and family rituals, by not going out to work and by doing everything possible to ensure that children were born into a conventional marriage and brought up within a family. All these aspects were institutionally rooted in marriage and the family – two legally safeguarded and socially highly esteemed institutions. If 'the marriage' was not always and everywhere of the quantitatively dominant type, it was a qualitatively highly esteemed model. For this reason it was 'imitated' on a large scale and, for this reason also, we can talk, somewhat exaggeratedly, of a mimetic appetite for marriage. This explains why the age at first marriage declined first among the lower social groups: more than for the other social groups, marriage was for them a vehicle for social promotion. In other respects, this was only possible because the prevailing economic and social developments permitted it: more people were now becoming economically independent (from their parents) at an earlier age and could therefore marry younger. However, this explanation is not enough. This can be seen from the fact that the timing of the 19th-century economic cycles and of indicators such as the evolution in first marriage intensity and first marriage age did not run parallel. The differences between the three socio-economically very diverse regions and between the status groups are also not in line with expectations.

Of course, to interpret 19th-century socio-demographic and family sociology developments, the social and economic processes of the time must be taken into the equation. Specifically, this includes the expansion of liberalism, the process of state-creation, the development of the 'nation state', the growth of democratisation, industrialisation and the service sector, and the spreading of professionalisation. These were all macro-developments with major micro-social consequences. All of this turned the conventional mechanisms of status struggle and competition upside down. From then on, education, profession and income played a major role. This new status struggle was to a large extent 'public' and 'economic' and, in this sense, 'male'. Despite the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, liberalisation, economic expansion – in other words, despite 'favourable' social and cultural limit conditions (or precisely because of them?) – women were increasingly kept out or pushed out of public life, where 'new' status could be acquired. In a manner of speaking, women were banished to the private living environment. The social position and gender identity of women changed substantially: over the course of the 19th century they were increasingly pushed out of public life and banished to the private living environment. In response to this exclusion and subordination, women developed a separate, 'female' status scale within their private world, which revolved around a 'good' marriage, a 'clean' home, a 'closed' family, 'expressive' contacts and a permanently available mother. From then on, women had to look

for social appreciation and individual recognition within these environments. The division of tasks became even more gender-specific than it already was (Duby and Perrot, 1993). The notion of 'outside the home' became symbolically associated with husband, work, money, prestige, public – and future. The notion of inside the home was associated with wife, leisure time, private, children, emotion, warmth – and past. In the male mind, this produced an unusual paradox: more so than women, they lived in two worlds – one within the house and one outside the house. Their families and their homes were associated with home-coming and cosiness. The new citizen was therefore confronted with a sharp contradiction: on the one hand, he had all kinds of public roles and responsibilities; on the other hand he felt himself strongly attracted to the new homeliness. This schizophrenic phenomenon, for men, has received and is still receiving little attention, historically speaking.

The 'new' marital and family life could only develop in the dynamic 19th-century economic setting. The emotionalisation of interpersonal intercourse, the domesticisation and development of affective partner relationships were only possible because the economy permitted them. The hypothesis put forward here is that 19th-century structural, economic and political marginalisation encouraged women to develop their dyadic power in primary relationships. Marrying young and creating an identity around expressive family and motherhood tasks was, for (many?) women, a reaction to and a remedy for their public exclusion and economic subordination. This process distanced men and women from one another, but it also produced – paradoxically enough – social and individual pacification between the sexes. Marrying and being able to create a family independently defused the gender problem which industrialisation reinforced. This problem was translated in specific terms as deprivation, perhaps even as discrimination, but it was precisely this which gave women the ammunition to write a new social history.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

[1] This study forms part of a wider historical study of the demographic and sociological characteristics of three Flemish communities – Leuven, Aalst and Bierbeek. For a description, see Matthijs (2001).

[2] The list of nine indicators is, of course, not exhaustive. E.g., another important indicator is the age homogamy of people marrying for the first time (Van de Putte and Matthijs, 2001).

[3] People develop permanent economic adjustment strategies; to this end, they exchange and deal in material and symbolic goods and services. For a thorough summary of these strategies, see Kok (1994: 108–116) and Seccombe (1992: 166–199). Seccombe contends that the economic changes in general and the labour market shifts in particular played (and play) a central role in the permanent adjustment of family and population characteristics. Birdsall (1983) also sees a direct link between the economy and demographic parameters. For example, proto-industrialisation led to a higher marriage intensity and marriage fertility and to a lower first marriage age. The conclusion reached by

Schofield (1983: 279) that the evolution in the number of marriages in the past and the development of the wage level points to the same thing.

[4] The marriage certificate establishes the marriage in law. As well as information about the date and place of the marriage ceremony, it contains all kinds of information about the marriage partners themselves, their parents and the witnesses. The registration of births, marriages and deaths began in Belgium on 17 June 1796. For many different reasons, some of the observations from the beginning of our study period may be unreliable. During the Dutch Period (1815–1830) the registration system was perfected. The Civil Code (Article 109) of the independent Belgium, which was grafted on to the Napoleonic Code (1804), continued the existing registration practices. With the exception of a few adjustments, little changed in the content of the marriage certificates during the 19th century. Comparability was, however, made more difficult at the beginning of the 19th century because the Republican calendar was in use during the period 1792–1805. This has been taken into account in the study.

[5] Historical aspects of 19th-century Leuven are discussed in Torfs (1899); Jonckheere (1960); Camerlinckx (1960); Magits (1974); Stadsbestuur Leuven (1975); Brepoels et al. (1985); Van Croonenborch (1988); Peeters (1992); Van Ermen (1997) and Matthijs et al. (1997).

[6] Historical aspects of 19th-century Aalst are discussed in Courteaux and Van Lul (1956); Van Rossem (1965); Van Melkebeke (1977); Willems (1984); Praet (1986); Poddevijn et al. (1991); De Hauwere (undated).

[7] For more information on Bierbeek, see Bovin et al. (1985); Vliebergh and Ulens (1914).

[8] The marriage certificates almost always state the occupation of the bridegroom, that of the bride much less frequently (Matthijs, 2001). Some officials evidently did not think the work of certain women was important enough to ask about it, let alone state it. Furthermore, for all kinds of reasons, some marrying women withheld their occupations from the attention of the officials and thus from the eyes of society. Others stopped working when they married. The description ‘housewife’ occurs only rarely; apparently this was not seen as an occupation in the strict sense of the word. One other problem is the description ‘no occupation’. This can refer to a high social level (people who were so rich that they neither had to nor wanted to work and also wanted to be registered as such), as well as to unemployed people looking for work, non-job-seeking housewives or homeworkers who did not state their job as an occupation (lace workers, for example). The status of people marrying, particularly of brides, is not only determined by their own education, occupation and income, but also by that of their parents, particularly the father. His occupation is, however, (usually) only registered on the certificates if he was still alive at the time of the marriage ceremony. In our study, this was true in one out of two cases. Nonetheless, the social weight of the father does not expire when he dies. The extent to which prospective brides attached importance to their own occupation (or status) or to that of their fathers depends on the value attached to those occupations. The higher their own occupation and the lower that of the father, the more the woman will make of her own occupation on the marriage market. However, if the father has a highly-regarded occupation, she will make more of her background on the marriage market. Additional measurement problems are posed by the fact that a person’s social status at the time of the marriage ceremony is determined by both his own and his parents’ position. For the ways in which these problems were resolved, see Matthijs (2001: 68–80).

[9] These tables contain some anomalies which almost certainly have to do with administrative procedures and official registration practices.

[10] For more information about the backgrounds to, calculation method and interpretation of the Coale indices, see Coale and Watkins (1986, appendix B).

[11] See Hajnal (1965) for a description of the characteristics, causes and consequences of the Malthusian marriage pattern. Hajnal’s basic proposition has never been thoroughly negated. Both aspects – marriage intensity and first marriage age – are often empirically linked: marriages are either early and many or late and few but, in fact, all combinations are possible. See Watkins (1984), Stone (1977), Dixon (1978), Lehning (1983, 1988).

[12] That restricting marriage was a response to a shortage of land and to limited economic possibilities seems obvious but must nonetheless be qualified: examples exist of early and almost universal marriage in regions where and at times when, in view of the economic problems, more reticence would be expected (Alter, 1991). Examples also exist of few, late marriages at times, in places or in groups where virtually no economic restrictions existed: the rich bourgeoisie, for example, did not use their wealth to marry off their children quickly.
[13] At the beginning of the 20th century, another reversal seems to be noticeable. However, we do not examine this further.
[14] The average first marriage ages can, for various reasons, present a misleading picture of actual evolution. The number of marriages by age is, after all, not only dependent on the age-specific marriage rate, but also on the available numbers of marriageable people by generation and by age. Differences between groups regarding first marriage age thus can point to genuine differences, as well as to differences in the age structure of the population. In the same way, differences in average marriage ages by social level can be a result of actual differences, as well as of the unequal age structure of the marriageable people per occupational group.
[15] In addition to the polynomial, the R^2 values are also shown. These values illustrate the extent to which the actual curve deviates from the trend line, i.e., from the polynomial. The R^2 values vary between 0 and 100%, where 100% refers to a perfect match. Particularly at the extremes, the direction and intensity of the polynomial can be misleading and, for this reason, these have to be interpreted with caution.
[16] For a thorough analysis of the evolution of the age at first marriage in the three study areas, see Matthijs (2002).
[17] These figures are not reproduced here; see Matthijs (2001: 190–196).
[18] The choice of a seven-year period is pragmatic: remarriage usually takes place within this period. The calculation method described does have disadvantages, but nonetheless provides a close approximation of remarriage behaviour. One difficulty is that no account is taken of the timing of remarriage; a decline in remarriage intensity can be linked either to deferment or to abandonment and, if wide fluctuations occur, the measure used could become inaccurate. For other calculation methods, see for example Van Poppel (1992); Bideau (1980); Beex (1982).
[19] The coding of the death certificates for complete years is possible from 1797 onwards; for this reason, the remarriage intensity can be calculated from 1803 onwards. For the three previous years, extrapolation was required. In addition to this methodological problem a substantive problem also exists: many people from the surrounding countryside died in the hospitals of Leuven and Aalst. They did not therefore die where they legally lived. This was a rare occurrence in Bierbeek. In order to correct for this, these deaths were counted and deducted from the original number. Specifically, the legal place of residence of the deceased was checked for every tenth year. The figures for the intermediate years were estimated by interpolation. A second problem is that widowed people are geographically mobile – even at an advanced age. The measurements are distorted because some people return to their village of birth after being widowed – women more so than men – while others move to the town to start a new social life, which can also mean looking for a new partner (Van Poppel, 1995: 431).
[20] For a thorough analysis of the methods of calculation of the remarriage intensity, see Matthijs (2003).
[21] For more information and comparisons, see Matthijs (2001: 207–210).
[22] The fact that agricultural regions were more closed in terms of nuptiality was perhaps related to the fact that farmers were under significant pressure to marry within their own class and perhaps this pressure was stronger in second marriages than in first marriages. It is also possible that agricultural regions differed from non-agricultural regions in terms of household composition in the sense that cohabitation and living with parents was more common in the countryside. After all, cohabitants can fully or partially take over the family functions of deceased family members, which reduces the emotional and economic pressure to remarry. Inheritance questions can also play a role: Bierbeek

had a great many larger and smaller owner-farmers and their inheritance could in some cases have played a part in curbing remarriage aspirations.

[23] What is known as crisis mortality – i.e., mortality as a consequence of ‘economic stress’, epidemics and wars – fell over the course of the 19th century as a result of better medical knowledge and prevention, better nutrition and the development of social provisions such as the supply of clean water and the efficient disposal of contaminated water (Burnett, 1991: 59; Schofield and Reher, 1991: 1). Since life expectancy was rising, marriages were dissolved later and since remarriage rates decline as age increases (see below), this resulted in a lower remarriage intensity (Charbonneau, 1970: 81; Ihinger-Tallman and Pasley, 1987: 28; Van Poppel, 1995: 280; Dyrvik, 1981: 305; Knodel and Lynch, 1985: 39). Generally speaking, this proposition has to be put into perspective because the decline in mortality was not linear, but differed with age (see e.g., Vallin, 1991: 54). It is difficult to say whether another demographic factor, the late 19th-century decline in fertility, also played a role in the decline in remarriage intensity. According to most research, the remarriage rate is smaller if (several) children are involved, but children can sometimes also be an incentive to remarry. This depends partly on their age and gender (Van Poppel, 1992: 326–327). Older children can help with the household and provide an additional income, which lessens the pressure to remarry (Knodel and Lynch, 1985: 53). If only young children are involved, things are more difficult: from the point of view of the parent, this ‘burden’ can be a worthwhile reason for remarrying, while this is precisely the reverse for any new partner and, for this reason, he/she is not inclined to remarry (Grigg, 1977: 194). Changes on the (local) marriage market also play a part in the evolution of remarriage intensity (Knodel and Lynch, 1985: 58). Over the course of the second half of the 19th century, the first marriage intensity increased (see above) and, as a result, the supply of marriageable people declined, which squeezed the probability of remarriage. The emigration of young adults for economic reasons played a comparable role; one example is the exodus of young farmers from Bierbeek to the urban industries and services. This disrupted the already precarious balance on the local marriage market. The remarriage intensity also declined as a result of the 19th century changes in the (economic) production system (Van Poppel, 1992: 405). Together with the development of the industrial capitalist production method, the quantitative and qualitative importance of family production and of proto-industry declined, while employment in industry and in the services sector rose (Karush, 1977). This had consequences for internal family functioning: the family evolved from a production unit into a consumer unit, which led to a shift in (the importance of some) family functions (Parsons, 1954). A consumer unit is less sensitive to vacant positions and can more easily continue functioning ‘incomplete’ than a production unit.

[24] These figures are not given here. See Matthijs (2003).

[25] The following quotation by Burguière (1981: 41) illustrates this very nicely: “Lorsqu’un mari perd sa femme (. . .) ou une femme son mari, le survivant donne de même un repas. Pendant que le corps est là gisant, les convives rient, boivent, et chantent et font des arrangements pour marier, de nouveau, l’hôte qui les traite. Le veuf ou la veuve donne des raisons d’acceptation ou de refus du personnage qu’on lui propose: mais les amis ne se séparent guère que le marché soit conclu.” (When a husband loses his wife (. . .) or a wife her husband, the surviving partner organises a meal. While the body is lying there, the guests laugh, drink and sing and make arrangements for the remarriage of the host who is feeding them. The widower or widow gives reasons for accepting or refusing the person suggested; but the friends barely part until the deal is done.)

[26] The waiting time differed little between the three study regions. Specifically, remarriage took place a little more quickly in Bierbeek than in Leuven or Aalst. It is difficult to say whether this is related to the pressure on farmers to remarry quickly, but this is unlikely. The figures by region are not reproduced here; they are available upon request from the author. See Matthijs (2001).

[27] Bideau (1980: 40) observed that these regulations about waiting to remarry were by no means respected at all times.

[28] Leaving separated people aside, three remarriage types exist: a widow with an unmarried man, a widower with an unmarried woman and a widower with a widow. For concrete information and figures, see Matthijs (2003).
[29] Information about the relationship of the witnesses to the marriage partners is available throughout the study period for Bierbeek, from 1830 onwards for Leuven and from 1865 onwards for Aalst.
[30] The results are shown from 1835 onwards because they are not reliable until this date.
[31] By way of comparison: in the mid-19th century, the proportion of illegitimate births in Belgium was 8–10%, in the Province of Brabant 15–20%, in Brussels 30–35%.
[32] The civil status of the parents – or more accurately of the mother – determines whether a child is legitimate or not. In the 19th century, this status had major social and legal consequences. Children born of a married mother were, of course, legitimate. If the mother was not married, three possibilities existed. Firstly, the child could remain illegitimate for the rest of its life, a person with no legal father. Secondly, the father could acknowledge the child, without marrying the mother. In that case, the child was acknowledged, but not legitimised. In acknowledging the child, the natural father was making it known that he was the father of the child – no more, no less. Thirdly, it was possible to acknowledge and immediately legitimise the child by marrying. Legitimisation went further than acknowledgement both in fact and in law. A legitimised child had the same rights as a legitimate child. Acknowledged illegitimate children, by contrast, were excluded from certain rights, for example concerning inheritance and public assistance.
[33] The number of illegitimate births is known from birth certificates, the number of children legitimised by marriage from marriage certificates. Some distortion caused by migration is possible.

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