Family Ties in Western Europe: Persistent Contrasts

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In the Western world it is not difficult to identify areas where families and family ties are relatively “strong” and others where they are relatively “weak.” There are regions where traditionally the family group has had priority over the individual, and others where the individual and individual values have had priority over everything else. The strength and resilience of family loyalties, allegiances, and authority can be seen most clearly within the coresidential domestic group and among persons from the same conjugal family, although they extend to the larger kin group as well. These differences may well have characterized the European family for centuries, and there are few indications that convergence is occurring today. The way in which the relationship between the family group and its members manifests itself has implications for the way society itself functions. Politicians and public planners would do well to consider the nature of existing family systems when designing certain social policies.

The geography of these strong and weak family systems does not appear to follow the classic division of Europe into stem-family and nuclear-family regions. The dividing line, in some ways, is actually much simpler, with the center and north of Europe (Scandinavia, the British Isles, the Low Countries, much of Germany and Austria), together with North American society, being characterized by relatively weak family links, and the Mediterranean region by strong family ties.1 The specific boundaries of different family systems are often not crystal clear, and subregional differences abound. For example, in some respects Ireland does not fit well into northern European family patterns, northern and southern France often appear to walk divergent paths, and the southern fringes of Spain, Italy, or Portugal often show characteristics distinct from the northern parts of those same countries. Within individual societies, there is also much room for heterogeneity affecting families and family life. This multiplicity of forms
and behavior, however, does not negate the existence of more general regularities affecting large areas of Europe.

For the most part, our analysis does not include the Europe lying to the east of John Hajnal’s St. Petersburg–Trieste line that set apart fundamentally different marriage regimes, demographic structures, and family systems on the European continent (Hajnal 1965, 1982). In those regions, forms of familial organization are sufficiently different to warrant their own specific study. While limiting the context of our analysis, this focus enables us to keep comparisons fairly straightforward. Contextualizing present familial behavior patterns in the light of historical experience, however, can and should be attempted when examining family systems in eastern Europe or, for that matter, in any other society.

In this essay, then, we emphasize the general over the specific; the big picture set out in bold strokes prevails over attention to detail. In so doing, we portray basic contexts of comparison and underscore the key issues involved as clearly as possible. This entails a certain inevitable reductionism understating the heterogeneity of the European experience within and across societies, as well as over time. In the future, additional reflection and work should fill in many of the gaps in our argument.

Family systems in historical perspective

Vestiges of the divisions just outlined can be seen clearly in many aspects of family life. Among the most important are those centered on the moment of transition when young members of the family group set up households of their own or in the way in which the family organizes support for its most vulnerable members. In northern Europe and in the United States, young adults normally abandon their parental households when they have acquired a degree of maturity so as to start out their adult lives on their own, lives that are occupied by their studies or by efforts to establish economic independence from their parents. Their jobs, even if often unstable or only seasonal, might also enable them to save for their own marriages, although nowadays this sense of saving is much less important than their effort to settle into an independent life. Often these initial forays into the adult world are made while sharing housing with friends and colleagues who are at a similar stage of their own lives. Later, often years later, these young people marry and once again start a new household, albeit this time with the intention of founding a family within the context of a stable relationship with another person.

In societies of Mediterranean Europe, the process of leaving the parental household is quite different. In these societies, the definitive departure of young people tends to coincide more or less closely with their marriage and finding a stable job. The years between adolescent maturity (ages
18–20 years) and marriage are spent largely within the parental household. If a person gets a job during this period, he or she normally continues to live at home, a strategy that enables the young adult to save for his or her own marriage. Generally marriage does not even enter the picture unless it is accompanied by the corresponding emancipation from the parental home and the formation of a new household. This entire process is aptly crystallized in the traditional Spanish aphorism *casada casa quiere*—“the bride (or groom) demands a home.” In this way, in Spain and in many other southern European countries, a stable job, access to adequate housing, leaving the parental household, and marriage tend to be closely intertwined events. In fact, an excellent indicator of the labor market and unquestionably the best one for the rate of family formation in southern Europe would be the incidence of first marriages among young adults.3

In both contexts there are, of course, many exceptions. In England, the Netherlands, and the United States, for example, young adults often remain at home past 20 years of age, while in Spain and Portugal some people leave home before marriage and others continue to live with their parents after marriage, at least for awhile. In fact, temporary coresidence of parents and married children, and even prolonged periods of economic help, have never been infrequent, either in the past or today.4 Nevertheless, these moments of help were always considered as exceptional by everyone. These exceptions only underlie the great differences between northern and southern Europe on this point.

These divergent practices appear to have deep historical roots. From at least the latter part of the Middle Ages until the second half of the nineteenth century or the early years of this century, it was common in rural England for young adults to leave their parental households to work as agricultural servants in other households for a prolonged period.5 Servants might go to households of higher social and economic standing, although servant exchange among households of the same social status was widespread. In other words, it was common for a farmer to send his son out as an agricultural servant on a farm, say, in the neighboring village, while he took other young servants into his own household as agricultural laborers. This practice appears to have affected the majority of young adults in rural England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Peter Laslett has pointed out that approximately half of all young people of both sexes between 15 and 24 years of age were servants.6 According to Ann Kussmaul (1981: 12–13), in a large sample of English communities between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, about 60 percent of all farmers had servants, and these represented about half the supply of nonfamily labor in rural areas and accounted for 10–12 percent of the total population. The extent of this practice implies that the great majority of young adults in England left their parental households more or less permanently between
15 and 19 years of age. There is also ample evidence of the importance of servants in other northern European societies, where numerous studies suggest that between 9 and 17 percent of the total population were servants.7

In Spain and other southern European societies, on the other hand, even though there were servants in both rural and urban settings, since the Middle Ages it appears to have been for the most part a job that took young people into households of higher social standing and affected only a small part of the young population in rural areas.8 The census of Florida-blanca (1787) in Spain suggests that a relatively small fraction of the population were servants, despite the fact that the data include servants in urban areas where they were frequently more numerous than in the countryside. According to this census, servants made up 22.5 percent of the nonfamily supply of labor and 2.7 percent of the total population.9 Despite substantial regional variation, everywhere in ancien régime Spain percentages of servants are far below those found in northern Europe. Much the same appears to hold in the rural areas of Portugal, Italy, and perhaps in Greece as well,10 although in cities the importance of domestic servants was usually far greater.11

The data taken from numerous local studies before the mid-nineteenth century are corroborated by the first round of modern European censuses. According to the manuscript returns of the 1851 census in England, servants represented 7.1 percent of the total rural population and 3.2 percent of the urban population (Wall 1983: 498). If lodgers are included in England, these percentages increase to 12.1 percent in rural areas and 14.3 percent in urban areas. In Belgium in 1890, 11.5 percent of the total population were servants in either rural or urban areas (13.7 percent men, 9.6 percent women). In Sweden according to the 1860 census, servants represented 10.4 percent of the total population. In France in 1872, servants represented 6.5 percent of the population (5.2 percent men, 7.6 percent women). The figures for southern Europe are in sharp contrast. In Spain according to the 1860 census, 1.3 percent of all men and 1.5 percent of women were servants, and in the 1887 census these figures stood at 1.0 and 3.6 percent respectively. In Italy according to the 1861 census, servants represented 2.2 percent of the entire population (1.5 percent of men and 2.9 percent of women).12

These data suggest that, despite notable local variations, servants were generally between two and four times more numerous in northern European societies than they were in Mediterranean regions. In the northern part of the continent between 30 and 55 percent of all young persons 15–24 years of age were servants, as opposed to southern Europe where the range was between 5 and 20 percent. This means that, on the whole, probably between 50 and 80 percent of young people spent some of their young lives as servants before marriage in weak-family areas of Europe, as op-
posed to 15–30 percent in strong-family areas of the south. In one part of Europe spending a number of years as a live-in servant was the lot of the vast majority of young people, while in another part it was not.

Service had important implications for nuptiality as it was, at least in part, the key to the fairly late marriage age characteristic of the European marriage pattern so aptly described by Hajnal (1965). A close perusal of Tables 2 and 3 contained in his article (pp. 102–103), based on late-nineteenth-century census data, reveals that southern Europe did not fully fit the European marriage pattern of late and low levels of nuptiality, although it was fairly far removed from patterns holding in eastern Europe. In Mediterranean Europe, where servants were far less prevalent than in the central and northern parts of the continent, nuptiality tended to be somewhat earlier as well. A wealth of research in historical demography attests to the depth of these differences. While the frequency and duration of entering into service were not the sole determinants of marriage patterns, they were not negligible factors.

Despite slightly earlier ages at marriage in Mediterranean Europe, the importance of service as a life cycle activity meant that children ended up leaving home far later in Spain or Italy than they did in England or Denmark. For the most part, peasant families in southern Europe with small and medium-sized farms tended to prefer family labor to nonfamily labor, quite unlike in other parts of the continent. In such areas as the southern parts of Spain, Portugal, or Italy, where farm size made the exclusive use of family labor impractical, there was an abundant supply of day laborers who did not coreside with the farmer and his family.

For most people in southern Europe, then, the permanent departure of young adults from home came only with marriage, as opposed to the practice in England or Holland where marriage took place after several years away from home and only after young adults had often accumulated substantial savings. In the parts of Spain where conjugal families prevailed (the center, south, and parts of the north), evidence of this practice is abundant, and in diverse historical contexts the percentage of young males heading households in different age groups has been shown to be practically the same as the percentage of married males and the percentage of household heads. Before marriage, leaving the parental home was a temporary or a seasonal phenomenon for most young adults. While young girls might go as servants to nearby towns and young men often participated in seasonal migration centered on the harvest or with transhumant livestock, the parental home continued to be the base for most people until marriage. Even in stem-family areas of the Iberian Peninsula the situation was similar. For the chosen heir, of course, marriage led to continued coresidence with his parents, but for his siblings leaving home took place only at marriage; those siblings who did not emigrate or enter the clergy typically stayed
at home until their marriage. If marriage proved impossible for some reason, grown children were normally entitled to stay at the family home as long as they wanted or needed. In the few areas of western Europe where the joint family prevailed, the entire system of household formation was quite different, with little or no relationship between marriage and headship.\textsuperscript{19}

In England, on the other hand, departure from the parental household took place long before marriage, either as a rural servant or, especially more recently with the decline of agricultural service, as a boarder or lodger in the households of others.\textsuperscript{20} In a recent study, Colin Pooley and Jean Turnbull (1997: 398) have estimated that in England between 1850 and 1930, men set up their own households between 2.5 and five years before their marriage, and women did so between one and two years before. This situation contrasts to that in Spain, where leaving home before marriage was not only less frequent than in England but also seldom meant that the ties to the parental household were completely severed. One of the implications of these differences was that in northern Europe the need to cope with periods of economic difficulty fell squarely on the shoulders of these young adults, as opposed to the south where economic hardship was shared more equally by the entire family group. The protective function of the family in Spain was far greater than it was in England.

There is little evidence that these differences between regions of Europe have been erased in recent years. In Spain, for example, the substantial increase since 1977 in the age at which children leave their parental households has been strictly paralleled by the increase in the age at marriage, with both indicators situated today at extremely high levels. In the United States, England, Denmark, and the Netherlands, on the contrary, leaving home long before marriage has tended to be normative behavior.\textsuperscript{21} Everywhere, times of economic bounty have tended to bring about younger ages at marriage and earlier emancipation, albeit leaving home was never as early in Spain as it was in England. In other words, despite fluctuations over time and often regional variability (especially within Spain) in the age at leaving home, areas of strong and of weak family systems tended to occupy distinct vital spheres.

Patterns of family solidarity

In southern Europe the family takes on many other roles that are largely foreign to its tasks in northern latitudes. Perhaps the most important is the organization of solidarity for the needy and vulnerable in society. The starting point for our discussion of this issue is to consider that vulnerability to personal hardship in historic Europe was sharply constrained by prevailing demographic conditions, especially mortality. Apart from the type of hard-
ship imposed initially and directly by economic factors, it is likely that the incidence of vulnerability in southern Europe always tended to be somewhat higher than in northern Europe because substantially higher levels of adult mortality in the south led to greater numbers of lone-parent households and to earlier breakups of the marriages of couples in and past the reproductive age. In other words, the “nuclear hardship hypothesis” so aptly described by Peter Laslett would always be more pertinent in high-mortality regimes than in low-mortality ones. Over the past 30 or 40 years, these structural differences caused by mortality have all but disappeared in western European populations.

Traditionally in Mediterranean societies, much of the aid given to vulnerable members of society came from the family or from individual charity, while in northern societies this was largely accomplished through public and private institutions. The classic example of the institutionalization of solidarity in northern Europe was the English Poor Laws, through which the collectivity came to the aid of the needy and the poor. In Mediterranean Europe the family was essential for the wellbeing of its more vulnerable members, while elsewhere it was much less so.

Historically the situation of the elderly is a good example of these differences. Before the development of modern pension systems, everywhere a large part of the responsibility for the wellbeing of the elderly fell directly on the family and was based mostly on coresidence with offspring. Despite these similarities, however, the intervention of the family on this count was much more important in strong-family societies than in societies where weak-family systems prevailed. In Mediterranean Europe, the care of the elderly fell almost exclusively on the family, whether it was carried out by means of coresidence, the circulation of the elderly among the households of their offspring, or the spatial proximity between the homes of the elderly and those of their children: all of these alternatives entailed transfers of goods and services from the families of the offspring toward their elderly parents. In England, on the other hand, the situation was quite different. For one thing, a smaller proportion of the elderly appears to have coresided with their children. A structural characteristic of English society, epitomized in the Poor Laws, was that the ultimate responsibility for the wellbeing of the elderly fell to the collectivity. In Spain there were no Poor Laws and only in such cases as extreme poverty or grave mental or physical illness could people count on institutional support, often organized by the Church. For the vast majority of cases, the family alone took responsibility for the material and personal wellbeing of its elderly.

These differences still exist today. Everywhere, of course, the weight of institutional support has grown with the modernization of society and the increasing longevity of the population, yet divergent patterns of support remain visible. In Spain according to the 1991 census, for example,
approximately 44 percent of the population older than 60 years of age lived with one of their children. In Nordic countries and in the United States, where coresidence with offspring encompasses slightly more than 10 percent of the elderly population, the wellbeing of the elderly is based on residential autonomy or on private or public nursing homes, which are normally paid for by public funds, by insurance policies, or directly from the savings of the elderly themselves. In Spain the elderly generally do not have sufficient savings to handle this sort of expense, due in part to their having supported their children for a far greater period of their lives. Despite proportions of the population in older ages comparable to those in England and the United States, in southern Europe the number of publicly or privately funded nursing homes for the elderly is very small compared with other societies. Recent increases everywhere in the demand for this type of residence notwithstanding, there is no indication of a reduction of these divergent residential patterns in contemporary societies. Substantial differences in the importance of institutionalized populations also appear in historical data, with far higher levels found in northern Europe. In France during the second half of the eighteenth century, the resources available to formal charitable institutions were far from enough to meet the needs of the poor, be they elderly or not. The situation in much of the rest of Catholic Europe was not unlike the one in France. Where, then, were the poor and the needy in southern Europe, who clearly must have been as numerous or more so than in the northern part of the continent? The role of the family in day-to-day poor relief in southern Europe provides the key to answering this question.

Different attitudes regarding aging and the elderly appear to be rooted in the collective culture of western Europe. Proof of this is given by the results of a recent survey within the European Union regarding the preferences of the population with respect to the residential patterns of the elderly who are no longer able to live on their own. In Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece an average of 74 percent of those surveyed stated that coresidence with children was the preferred option, as opposed to respondents in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Great Britain, and the Netherlands, where only 25 percent gave the same answer. The regionalization of these attitudes is not uniform, as shown by the fact that in Scandinavian countries support for coresidence with children is substantially lower than in the United Kingdom; and in some ways the situation of Ireland is more similar to that of Italy than it is to England. Despite this heterogeneity, these data show that the different ways of confronting old age within society exist both in practice and in popular opinion.

It is instructive to observe that these differences seem to have little to do with the classical types of familial organization existing in Europe, where there were areas of conjugal or nuclear families based on patterns of divis-
ible succession and inheritance (central and southern Italy, Spain and Portugal, central and northern France, a large part of England, etc.), together with areas based on the stem family, where designated heirs inherited the bulk of family property on the condition they would continue to coreside with their parents after marriage (much of central Europe and Scandinavia, Scotland, part of the Low Countries, much of northern Spain and Portugal, and the mountainous regions of the Pyrenees, the Alps, and the Massif-Central). Indeed the strong families we have encountered were not confined to areas characterized by stem families, much as weak-family systems were not restricted to conjugal-family regions.30

Historically the strength of familial ties appears to have conditioned the way in which succession was carried out in stem-family regions. In Catalonia and the Basque Country of Spain, stem-family areas par excellence, the obligation to coreside en una mesa y compañía (“at one table and in the company of”) with the parents was normally stipulated quite simply in the marriage contract (capitulaciones matrimoniales). In much of central and northern Europe, veritable retirement contracts between parents and their children were drawn up listing in great detail the rights and obligations of children and parents.31 These contracts, which originally did not necessarily even involve kin, were designed to safeguard the wellbeing of the elder generation and to facilitate the emergence of inheritance inter vivos (Gaunt 1983: 251–258). The history of these contracts was frequently fraught with the intergenerational strife they were designed to minimize.32 Contracts such as these are simply unimaginable in a southern European context. In other words, succession itself within stem-family systems appears to have been conditioned by the strength of familial loyalties and solidarities holding in any given region of Europe.

In Spain outside of the stem-family regions, parents also facilitated a type of inheritance inter vivos for their children, but these arrangements were invariably informal and seldom contained terms stipulating how intergenerational support mechanisms were to be implemented (Reher 1997: 48–56).33 Of course, family strife has existed in every culture. What is instructive in this comparison is that formal and informal retirement arrangements in Spain, and likely throughout southern Europe, had little to say regarding the everyday dealings between parents and their children, as opposed to northern Europe where the key to an amicable arrangement was that it was thorough to the minutest details. In Mediterranean Europe these arrangements were made within the context of a culture where strong family ties were an essential component and intergenerational relationships were strictly and normatively controlled, as opposed to Germanic Europe where this cultural component was far weaker.

Each of these family systems has ended up generating justifications that are coherent with its own premises. In weak-family areas, the value
attributed to the individual and to individualism tends to predominate. Young adults leave home, encouraged by their parents, so as to acquire the experiences they need to handle life as autonomous individuals. Leaving home at an early age is considered an important part of their education. Where the strong family flourishes, the familial group more than the individual tends to predominate in the socialization of the young. In these contexts, the family is seen as defending its members against the difficulties imposed by social and economic realities. A child receives support and protection until he or she leaves home for good, normally for marriage, and even later.

Faced with the transition to old age, in one context individuals attempt to prolong their physical independence as long as possible and, when this is no longer feasible, to conserve a measure of economic independence that will enable them to enter a nursing home or afford some other solution. They would never give serious consideration to going to live with their children; nor would it enter the minds of their children to have their elderly parents at home with them. This attitude is so widely held in the United States, for example, that the elderly who do live with their children probably tend to come from strong-family ethnic backgrounds. In sharp contrast to this pattern, in areas of strong families, maintaining independence as a matter of principle would seem like nonsense, and this only happens when, for one reason or another, there is no family. In Spain it has always been said that the only truly poor person is one who has no family. Furthermore, the solidarity between the older and the younger generation never breaks down: it is a social obligation expected by individuals and by their families. The elderly who do not maintain regular contact with their children are a small minority of the population, much as are the aged in weak-family societies who receive regular weekly or daily visits from their children. In both situations there is intergenerational reciprocity, although it is understood quite differently. These are distinct modes of behavior, applied in each context with a maximum of good will.

Uncertain but distant origins

The social, economic, and even demographic circumstances normally used to explain the origins of these diverse ways of family life are not convincing, even though their geography is fairly clear: the Mediterranean region has strong families, while the northern part of the continent is characterized by weak families. In between, countries like France and, to a lesser extent, Germany do not fit easily into either system, and constitute a good indication that our portrayal simplifies a heterogeneous European experience. The differences we have pointed out are visible as early as we have empirical data to test for their existence (the seventeenth century, more or less), although it seems likely, as we have hinted, that they were in place long before.
The basic geography of our family forms suggests that their origin is related to Roman and Germanic–Nordic Europe, and may well have been forged at least initially during the later Roman Empire and the early Middle Ages. In a thought-provoking book on the family and marriage in Europe, Jack Goody (1983) traces the roots of the Western family tradition back to the fourth century. Before that, in the ancient world on both sides of the Mediterranean and in the Near East, there were certain common characteristics of familial organization among which he emphasizes the existence of patrilineal clans, the ability of both men and women to inherit property, and, perhaps more important, the facts that most marriages were strictly endogamous, the kin group had great importance while the conjugal family did not, and in social and cultural terms women had relatively little importance.36 This “Oriental” family system was replaced during the late Roman Empire by an “Occidental” structure in which the basic cell of social organization became the conjugal pair, and norms for marriage outside the kin group were strictly enforced. Goody avers that this change, which led to a fundamental weakening in the ties of the kin group in favor of the primacy of conjugal marriage, began during the late Empire, gradually became a structural characteristic of the entire Christian world over the next millennium, and eventually formed the basis for a family system in the West that gave rise, among other things, to its characteristic marriage pattern (Hajnal 1965).37

Here we suggest that the implantation of this Western family structure in Europe was not uniform. In the northern part of the continent, Christianized forms of familial organization ended up meshing gradually with existing Germanic legal and social traditions based, among other things, on the importance of the tribe, the individual, and the visible social position of women.38 In southern Europe the influence of the Germanic tribes was much more superficial and short-lived. Besides, from the early eighth century on, a series of Muslim incursions occurred, strongest in Spain and Portugal and in the Balkan Peninsula but also present in southern Italy, which tended to bring back Oriental family structures, so central to Islamic societies, that are based on the overriding importance of kin ties. At least in the Iberian Peninsula, repeated Berber invasions during the Middle Ages ended up emphasizing this presence. Even where the Muslim occupation was short-lived, the geographical proximity of Oriental family systems in North Africa could not help but influence the development of the family in southern Europe. What arose in those areas was a family system that in all likelihood was hybrid in nature, with a basic Western structure but also with certain Oriental trappings centered on the importance of kin ties and extended family loyalties.39

The Reformation, with its emphasis on the individual and self-reliance, on the value of work, on a this-worldly asceticism, and on predestination, represented a sharp contrast to Catholicism, based on authority,
the other-worldly, and spirituality. These contrasts had fundamental implications for family life and for the economic and social organization of European society. For Protestant reformers, marriage ceased being a sacrament and became a civil contract governed by matrimonial tribunals, and many of the traditional Catholic constraints on marriage (e.g., the forbidding of consanguineous marriages to the seventh degree) were either relaxed or repealed. More important, perhaps, the home itself became a place of self-fulfillment and of sharing. Most notably in Calvinism, an emphasis was placed on marriage, not so much as a context for reproduction, but rather as a partnership in the garden of the Lord, in the rearing of children in the faith, and the advancement of God’s Kingdom. In so doing, the Reformation had laid the grounds for marriage as a partnership, so essential for northern European marriage systems and for the full development of the potential of individuals in this world, all in sharp contrast to the Catholic world where parental authority and family loyalties tended to be far more hierarchically structured. By implication, the Reformation ended up enhancing women’s position in society as opposed to the Europe of the Counter-Reformation where, despite luminous figures like St. Teresa of Avila and others, the position of women seems to have undergone comparatively little change before the eighteenth century or even later.

These fundamentally different attitudes toward life and religion settled on a continent where divergences in family systems had already been developing for over 1000 years. We can argue that the progress of the Reformation was itself facilitated and influenced by the differing attitudes toward the individual and family life existing in Europe during the medieval and early-modern periods. It is unquestionable, however, that the Reformation tended to deepen and solidify the age-old north–south contrasts in Europe. It is of interest that in Catholic countries of northern Europe, forms of familial organization tend to diverge at least partially from the prevailing patterns. Ireland is an excellent example of this: a decidedly Catholic country in northern Europe whose forms of familial organization often fit quite poorly with our north–south comparisons.

The effects of the Industrial Revolution were felt first and most profoundly in northern Europe, and this can be interpreted both as cause and as consequence of its prevailing family system. Hajnal (1982: 476–481) has discussed this process from one vantage point, arguing that family and marriage patterns contributed to the low-pressure demographic regimes existing there and ultimately to the flowering of northern European economic growth after the second half of the eighteenth century. The Industrial Revolution, based on an ethic in which the economic rationality and creativity of individuals was paramount, reinforced an individual-oriented family system in the industrializing areas well before this same process began to take effect in most of southern Europe. Thus, at least in its origin, the
entire process of economic modernization would seem to have reinforced
the prevailing family differences in Europe.

Regardless of their historical origins, attitudes toward the family and
the individual make up the cultural tapestry of societies, and thus they are
models that are learned at very young ages and that societies—individuals,
families, institutions—help perpetuate. Learning these behavior patterns is
the cornerstone of the socialization of children. They are attitudes shared
by the society as a whole. Perhaps because of this, they have been so resis-
tant to the otherwise corrosive effects of economic, political, social, and
demographic modernization. Even though the changes of this past century
have tended to make cultures and mentalities more uniform, they have
done little to erase the historic profiles of family systems in Europe.

We have described family systems in which either the individual takes
precedence over the family group or the individual develops his personal-
ity and even his freedom within the family group. The systems we have
described are by no means the only ones possible, although they are the
most widespread in western Europe. Had we wanted to enlarge our per-
spective on this point, it would have been necessary to consider the type of
family found, for example, in eastern Europe or in areas of the Muslim
world and Asia, especially China, where the weight of the extended kin
group is far greater than it is in southern Europe. At this level, our strong
family from Mediterranean Europe in reality lies somewhere between the
individualism characteristic of northern Europe and North America and
the strict allegiances and corporatism generated within enlarged family lin-
eages and clans that characterize large regions of Asia.45

Some implications of family systems for society

Family systems are neither good nor bad, but they are not neutral either.
They do much to characterize the societies that possess them. Many of the
differences distinguishing European societies are derived directly or indi-
rectly from the nature of their prevailing family systems. The Church and
the state have been aware of this for centuries, and here we are not saying
anything surprising. It might prove instructive, however, to point out some
of these differences existing in the West at the end of the twentieth cen-
tury, because doing so may enable us to rediscover the importance of the
family, an institution apparently given up for dead by many students of
contemporary society.

Societies with strong families tend to have greater social cohesion.
The low incidence of divorce and extramarital pregnancy in them is a good
example of this. Strong-family societies are usually more conservative than
weak-family ones in social—though not necessarily in political—terms. In
other words, the social control of behavior tends to be more effective in
strong-family societies. The majority of the social indicators related directly or indirectly to the family seem to indicate this. Some people have attempted to explain these social differences in terms of religious attitudes or by the stage at which each society finds itself on its particular road to modernization. They can be more easily explained, however, by the nature of the family systems prevailing in particular societies. The problem of the homeless is a prototypical example of the lack of social cohesion in contemporary society. It is often surprising to note that the incidence of homelessness is much greater in the United States, for example, than it is in Italy, Spain, or Portugal, despite the greater economic dynamism, higher living standards, and lower levels of unemployment in the United States. In all probability, families in Mediterranean Europe have absorbed a part of this mass of uprooted people who in northern Europe and the United States have had to fend for themselves, either on the public dole or with private charity.

The subject of unemployment is intriguing on this count. An apparent contradiction in Spain, for example, is that it has very high levels of unemployment, yet people seem to live modestly well and the external indicators of social distress are fairly muted, at least in comparison with countries where unemployment is far lower. In Spain, the essential mechanisms of familial solidarity stipulate that the family group protect its members from the vagaries of economic and employment cycles, and thus the social implications of unemployment tend to be hidden, at least in part, within the family. If a country like the United States, for example, had similar levels of unemployment, uprootedness would have been widespread and the social and political consequences enormous. In Spain, comparatively little social disruption has taken place, largely because of the role of the family.

Another eloquent example of how southern European families actively intervene to ensure the wellbeing of their own members can be seen in lone-parent households. Due to divorce and teenage pregnancies, everywhere in recent years the number of these types of households has been on the rise, although there continue to be important and now familiar north–south differences in levels. Two recent studies of this phenomenon in Spain have brought to light a significant “grandmother effect,” whereby high percentages of single mothers end up coresiding with their own mothers (the grandmother). In 1991 nearly 30 percent of all lone mothers (independent of their marital status) with children under age 18 coresided with their own mothers, as did slightly less than half of all mothers with children under six. Interviews have confirmed that even when there was no coresidence, grandmothers often lived nearby and were essential in helping the mothers care for their children and secure a job to support their families. By contrast, in Britain between 1991 and 1993 only 9 percent of all lone mothers and 16 percent of never-married mothers continued to
live with their parents (Kiernan, Land, and Lewis 1998: 133). In more general terms, the intervention of grandparents is not restricted to exceptional situations such as lone-parenthood, but is a structural characteristic of family life in Spain. The massive entry of women into the labor market in recent years in Spain has been largely facilitated by the willingness of grandparents to help care for the children when their parents are at work. Although the importance of the grandmother effect has been noted in diverse contexts, it would seem unlikely that this sort of straightforward familial solidarity has ever been as important in northern Europe or the United States as it is in the Mediterranean region.49

Loneliness is one of the most important social problems in weak-family societies. I refer to the loneliness of the individual who must confront the world and his own life without the safety net of familial support so characteristic of strong-family regions.50 Suicide, often an indirect consequence of loneliness, tends to be far higher in northern Europe and the United States than it is in southern Europe.51 The effects of loneliness are compensated in weak-family societies by a strong tradition of civic association, where people form groups, clubs, and societies for the most varied purposes. The number and variety of these associations in England or the United States would be unimaginable for a citizen of southern Europe. In weak-family societies the individual is able to combat loneliness by turning directly to civil society, itself largely the product of the needs and initiatives of its members, in contrast to strong-family societies where the family comes between the individual and civil society, meeting a large part of the needs stemming from loneliness.52

Weak-family societies, then, tend to be associational societies with a deep civil component, and strong-family ones tend to be more passive societies, at least in terms of the importance of individual initiatives within them. The sense of individual responsibility for collective norms and needs, so essential for the concept of democracy and civil society in the West, is often conspicuously absent from southern European societies, while in northern societies it is an integral part of the social fabric. In sum, the countries of northern Europe and of North America have well-developed civil societies that thrive on individual initiatives, but with a dark side shown by their lack of social cohesion and by the desperation and anguish so prevalent in them. They are tough societies, but they are also dynamic ones. Mediterranean societies are more pleasant, more comfortable, more conformist, more oriented toward the family group, and less dynamic.

The increasingly rapid process of population aging is one of the most important challenges confronting developed societies today. Meeting this challenge will not be the same in societies where strong-family systems prevail as in those with weak-family systems. Strong-family societies can and should count on the institution of the family when planning means of
support for the elderly. This support can be expected to begin when the health of the elderly is still good, and will be offered by means of coresidence or residential proximity with frequent personal contact. Once health begins to deteriorate, the family will continue to be essential both as a place for the elderly to live and as a source of company for them. This last aspect is difficult to measure empirically, although it makes up an important part of the wellbeing of the elderly. It is also likely that strong families will continue to be a source of income supplement for their needy elderly, much as they have been until now.

In weak-family areas, the care of the elderly will be based much more on individual savings, on residential autonomy, on retirement communities and nursing homes, and on the support of public institutions. The most common pattern of behavior will be for an elderly person to move directly from an autonomous residence to a nursing home, normally obviating the need for an intermediate stage of coresidence with a child, so frequent in southern Europe. Social and emotional support for the elderly will be offered by charitable institutions and volunteers, as well as by the families themselves, albeit on this point a large number of families will not be up to the task. Institutional care is much more costly and demanding for society than care based on the family. Yet in relative terms the level of savings among the elderly will tend to be greater in weak-family areas, enabling many elderly to contribute economically to the costs of their own care. Implicit in this same context is the fact that economic abuse of the elderly, a crime on the rise the world over, will always be more common where personal savings are greater and where there is less family influence on those savings. Family-based abuse, on the other hand, may well be more prevalent in strong-family societies, although here the active participation of the entire family in the welfare of the elderly will lessen the ability of certain individuals to manipulate elderly parents to their own ends.

Politicians, government officials, and public planners would do well to bear in mind the specific characteristics of family systems when designing social policies affecting the elderly, because the effectiveness and success of these policies will depend on how well-tuned they are to these characteristics. Everywhere, of course, promoting healthy living among the elderly as well as keeping pension systems afloat will have priority, although specific policies will work differently in different family systems. In strong-family areas, for example, the protection of the elderly should include support for the family in carrying out its traditional role of attending to the needs of the elderly. Where weak-family systems prevail, on the other hand, stimulating individual savings and the work of charitable groups as well as safeguarding the elderly from predators will all be essential. 53

It is evident that the nature of family systems and their loyalties do not fully explain these social differences, even though understanding them adequately is impossible without keeping in mind the importance of the
family. It is within the family that the way in which the individual relates to the family group and to society is first learned. This learning process is deep and lasting, and during the rest of our lives we end up implementing the behavioral norms we learned during our early years. They are norms that life itself ends up confirming all the time.

Present and future challenges to family systems

It would be incorrect to believe that familial forms are frozen in time. Throughout history the family has been changing, and it continues to do so today. Unquestionably one of the main destabilizing factors in the contemporary world is the new demographic regime that affects all of us. This demographic challenge has two principal characteristics. For one, there has been a substantial reduction in mortality, especially among adults and the elderly, thus leading to growing numbers of elderly persons who are spending increasing numbers of years in that stage of their lives. Although the scientific evidence is still inadequate on this issue, it is also possible that the elderly will end up spending an increasing proportion of their lives with precarious mental or physical health, thus making them still more vulnerable. The second characteristic is that in the past 20–30 years a drastic reduction in fertility has also occurred in most Western societies, with indicators currently at the lowest levels ever attained and with rapidly declining numbers of births. This demographic regime has produced extremely rapid aging, with the elderly occupying ever greater proportions of the total population.

Perhaps more pertinent for the subject at hand is the fact that everywhere families find themselves with ever fewer children and ever more elderly members. The demographic balance of the family group is now in rapid transformation. While differences do exist, in most developed societies the demographic context is basically the same. This reality is vital for the family, and its consequences will likely be far greater in strong-family areas than in those where the family tends to be weak. Where strong families prevail, the support children provide for their elderly parents is closely dependent on whether there are enough children to take care of their parents. Yet recent demographic change has altered this circumstance and it is now possible that the family group in southern Europe will end up having as many dependent as active members. In weak-family societies, this challenge will tend to be posed in terms of the society as a whole, and somewhat less so in terms of the family, mainly because the type of familial solidarity so characteristic elsewhere is much less decisive within society. As a result, strong-family systems appear to be much more vulnerable to the effects of demographic change than do weak-family systems.

We might wonder whether the differences described here will continue to characterize European societies or whether some sort of conver-
gence in family forms will occur. Louis Roussel (1992) has proposed a model for the future development of the family in western Europe. Roussel sees a process of convergence afoot on the continent that will eventually render the family similar in Germany and in France, in Sweden and in Spain. He feels that in the more "advanced" northern countries, the rates of change will slow, while they will remain high in the southern flank of Europe. The end result will be a truly "European" family for the first time. Roussel's idea is attractive, especially because it emphasizes the commonality of European experience.

Nevertheless, I cannot agree with this idea, mainly because its underpinnings appear to be antihistorical. At the very least they tend to minimize the depth of cultural and historical differences in Europe. Once again it is as though modern society had finally done away with the pernicious effects of history, launching us toward the adventure of the future. It is a type of neo-modernization discourse in which economic and social change torches all vestiges of cultural and historical difference. This seems hardly likely because these differences have characterized European societies for centuries, and it would not be prudent to write their death certificate too hastily.

It is unquestionable that in Europe certain external indicators of the family and of family forms are converging: the importance of solitary households is increasing, the weight of extended families is decreasing, fertility and nuptiality are declining, and the number of children born out of wedlock is rising. Additionally, parental authority has diminished, improvements in health and social welfare have led the elderly to maintain their independence much longer before going to the state or to the family for help, children and women have acquired far greater autonomy with respect to the familial group, and women have entered the labor market in great numbers. It is also true that the rate of change in much of southern Europe over the past 15–20 years has often been dramatic. These are all indisputable signs of the times that affect all Western societies.

But does this mean that European families are on the path to uniformity, much as Roussel seems to suggest? Perhaps not. For one thing, despite general moves in the same direction, most of these indicators show no decline in relative variability. Even with the great transformations in recent years, the rank order of European countries in most instances has remained unchanged. Perhaps more important, the family is an institution that is far more complex than we might suspect when using straightforward empirical indicators reflecting certain types of behavior bearing on the family. People's attitudes toward the family, the way they live family life, and the type of influence the family has over the lives of its members are essential to the meaning of the family; and there is no indication of convergence on this count.
My guess is that the outcome of these transformations will be a convergence in the external indicators of family life, but this convergence will not undermine the deep disparities that have always characterized the family in the different regions and cultures of Europe. The forces making up the contemporary world, common for the most part in all societies, are not the only factors shaping these societies, because societies' own historical trajectories, different in each case, will also contribute to the specific contours of the present and the future. This concept, known as "path dependency," refers to a simple but important reality. No matter how nearly universal the factors of modernization may be, once they enter into contact with different historical, cultural, geographical, or social realities, the end result will necessarily be different in each context. The confluence of factors of change and of structural realities, with different results every time, has occurred many times in the past, and there is no reason that the near future should be different. It is worth invoking this concept here because it underscores the fact that the realities of the present-day world cannot be adequately understood without bearing in mind both contemporary forces and historical traditions.

In the future, too, the Spanish family will be traditional and strong, the English family traditional and weak. Spaniards and Italians will continue to care for their elderly and vulnerable parents, just as grandparents take care of their children's offspring when they are at work. The English, the Americans, and the Swedes will continue to maintain their commitments to individualism and to residential autonomy. Spaniards will continue to remain at home until they get their first stable job, and Nordic adolescents will continue to seek their liberation from the family ties that bind them. Demographic change will have more severe effects in the south, making the state and personal savings play a greater role in the wellbeing of the elderly, although these will not replace the role of the family in a decisive fashion. The future promises to bring many changes, but weak-family and strong-family systems will continue to occupy clearly differentiated vital spheres. Appreciating the strength, flexibility, and resilience of the modern family continues to be essential for a viable understanding of society.

Notes

Over the past several months I have discussed the ideas in this article with many colleagues whose comments have informed my own thoughts on the issues raised here. A debt of gratitude is due to all of them. I also thank Dudley Baines, Anders Brännström, Juan Antonio Fernández Cordón, Patrick Galloway, Ana Silvia Volpi Scott, Richard Smith, and Frans van Poppel for having facilitated access to vital bibliographical and census data. An earlier and shorter version was given as the Plenary Address of the Twenty-ninth Annual Meeting of the Society for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies, St. Louis, April 1998.
1 Scandinavia includes Iceland but not Finland. Our definition of northern Europe for the purposes of this article is very similar to the one used by Hajnal (1982: 449) for Northwest Europe. The Mediterranean region refers here mainly to Portugal, Spain, and Italy, although at times in this text southern France and Greece are included as well.

2 Both John Hajnal (1965, 1982) and Jack Goody (1996a) have pointed to these two factors as defining traits of what has been called the Northwest European household formation system. These authors have concentrated more on comparing these patterns in historical contexts with eastern European or non-European populations than on detailing north–south differences within Europe. See, for example, Hajnal (1982: 450).

3 On this point see, for example, Reher (1998).

4 An example of such behavior was found in the town of Cuenca (Spain) during the nineteenth century, where more than half of all newlyweds lived for some time in either the bride’s or the groom’s family household. This type of co-residence, however, was always temporary. See Reher (1990: 213–215).

5 There are indications that the institution of agricultural service in England dates at least as far back as the 1377 Poll Tax, which indicated that one-third of all farmers had servants (Smith 1981).

6 These percentages varied widely by locality. For more on the importance of agricultural service as a life-cycle activity, see, for example, Laslett (1977a: 29–65; 1977b: 102–113) and Wall (1983a: 498).

7 For a sample of 21 English communities, Richard Wall estimated that, at 10–14 and 15–19 years of age, almost half of the people had already left their family homes and had entered agricultural service in other households or were lodgers in autonomous residences. See Wall (1987: 90–97; also 1978).

Mitterauer and Sieder (1977: 41) have estimated that on average between 7 and 15 percent of the population in preindustrial times were servants in northern Europe. For slightly higher estimates, see Burguière (1986: 42–47). Various estimates of servant populations in Europe can be found in Table 1 on page 228 of the present article.

The sharp difference between the importance of servants in the examples taken from northern and southern France suggests strongly divergent practices on this point.

8 In his comments on the study by Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber (1978), Richard Smith (1981) points out the relative absence of servants in Tuscany (only 0.2 percent) based on the Florentine Catasto, as opposed to the abundant presence of servants in England during the same period. For more on servants in the 1427 Catasto, see Klapisch (1972: 277–278).

9 Here we consider “nonfamily labor” to be the sum of servants (criados) plus day laborers (jornaleros). Ten years later, the census of Godoy (1797) showed that servants made up 1.7 percent of the population of Spain, and 17.8 percent of the nonfamily supply of labor.

10 Regional differences in southern Europe were considerable, as has come to light in several local studies, with northern regions showing higher proportions of servants than elsewhere (e.g., for Spain, see Reher, Pombo, and Nogueras 1993). Nevertheless, levels of servants were never as high as they were in England or in other parts of central and northern Europe. Estimates of southern European servant populations can be found in Table 2 on page 229 of the present article.

In Greece, studies suggest that agricultural service was relatively unimportant and that emancipation from parental households for most people came only with marriage. On this point, see Osswald (1990: 222–223) and Hionidou (1995: 93–95).

11 Everywhere in southern Europe cities had far higher levels of servants than rural areas. In the city of Parma in 1545, for example, 30.7 percent of all households had servants, as opposed to only 10.4 percent in the Contado. For data on Parma and on other sixteenth-century Italian cities, see Barbagli (1984: 216–233); see also Arru (1990). In the small town of Cuenca (Spain) in 1800, for example, servants made up 11 percent of the total population and 25.4 percent of households had servants, as opposed to rural areas where servants represented only between 3.6 and 5 percent of the total population during that period (Reher 1990: 205). According to the census of Florida Blanca (1787) servants represented 11.7 percent of the population of the city of Madrid, as op-
posed to only 2.7 percent of the population of Spain.

12 We have been unable to make use of censuses from other European countries because the occupational structure found in them makes identifying servants in rural areas problematic.

13 For the importance of service for late marriage age, see also Hajnal (1982: 470–476).

14 This can also be seen vividly in the map of \( I_m \) (the index of female nuptiality) around 1870 based on the data compiled by the Princeton European Fertility Project (Coale and Watkins 1986). For a more general discussion of this issue, see R. Smith (1990: 171–178).

15 Hajnal (1965: 130–132) and other authors have asserted that later marriage was linked to higher standards of living.

16 In contrast to the 50 percent of the population aged 10 to 19 living away from home in England (Wall 1987), Reher (1988a: 167) found that in rural areas of Cuenca during the nineteenth century around 90 percent of people of the same age groups continued to reside in their parents’ households.

17 According to McIntosh (1984), for example, during the second half of the sixteenth century in Essex, where servants made up 20 percent of the total population, young adults left their familial homes as adolescents and spent between five and ten years as servants before setting up a home of their own.

18 On this point see, for example, Reher (1997: 82–86).

19 In western Europe, joint-family systems were found only in areas of central Italy and in parts of central France between the Franche-Comté and the Massif-Central (Burguìère 1997: 141–149; also 1986: 25–31). In joint-family systems the gap between proportions of ever-married men and proportions of household heads or married household heads would be much greater than in stem-family systems. The classic example of this can be found in Tuscany after the Black Death (1427–30), where the highest proportions of ever-married men are reached around 40 years of age, while peak levels of headship are reached much later in life. The situation of medieval Tuscany, with a prevalence of joint-family households and late male age at marriage together with very young female age at marriage, is exceptional in Europe. See Hajnal (1982: 464–465) and Klapisch and Demonet (1972).

20 The prevalence of boarders might be significant in northern Europe and in American society. This is pertinent to our argument when the lodgers were young, as they often were (Wall 1983b: 392–393). Numerous studies covering England suggest that lodgers represented between 4.9 and 5.8 percent of the population of rural England between 1650 and 1821 (Wall 1983a: 498) Their presence in industrial areas was always greater than in the countryside. In the 1851 census of England, lodgers made up 11.2 percent of the urban population, in contrast to 5.0 percent in rural areas (ibid.). See also Anderson (1972: 234), Glasco (1977), Modell and Hareven (1977), and Blumin (1977). Under exceptional economic circumstances, lodgers might also be a significant group in nineteenth-century Spain. An example of this is San Salvador del Valle, a mining settlement near Bilbao in northern Spain, where lodgers made up between 25 and 30 percent of the total population between 1887 and 1900. See Pérez-Fuentes (1993: 171).

21 This divergent behavior pattern can be seen in the following data:

Percent of men and women aged 25–29 still living with parents in European countries, 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCES: Fernández Cordón (1997: Table 1.2); Eurostat Labor Force Surveys.

22 During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, life expectancy at birth in southern European countries was between 25 and 30 years, in contrast to northern Europe where it varied between about 33 and 40 years. For more on the nuclear hardship hypothesis, see Laslett (1988). For estimates on the incidence of vulnerability over the life course in a preindustrial Spanish population, see Reher (1997: 107–116).
23 For a discussion of systems of support for the elderly during past times, within the context of a basic Northwest Europe–non-European comparison, see Hajnal (1982: 477–478) and Goody (1996a: 9–13).

24 For more on the circulation of the elderly among the households of their children, often called ir por meses in Spain, see Reher (1988a: 227–230). An example of family groups maintaining patterns of residential proximity, even in urban areas and over several generations, can be found in the case of the Recuenco family in the town of Cuenca during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Reher 1990: 222–226).

Based on our still inadequate understanding of the coresidence patterns of the elderly, it appears that between 40 and 50 percent of the English elderly coresided with their children during the eighteenth century, in contrast to somewhat higher values in Spain at later dates. For the English data, see Laslett (1977: 204–205; 1989: 111–114) and Wall (1984, 1995). In the northern Spanish city of Bilbao between 1825 and 1935, approximately 70 percent of the ever-married elderly continued to live with their children (Pérez-Fuentes and Pareja 1997: 92–94). In rural areas of Coimbra (Portugal) in 1801, 78.7 percent of all elderly 65 and older coresided with kin (Mota 1988: 36).

25 On this point see Richard Smith (1984), who questions the idea that the elderly depended exclusively on the family and emphasizes the importance of the family on the collectivity, especially in England. According to Smith (p. 424), “From a very early period in English history, and in other Northwestern European areas, it seems that ‘risk devolution’ and poor relief have been centered on the community rather than on the family.” One of the reasons for this was that the needs of the elderly were greatest just when the households of their offspring were undergoing particularly difficult economic times due to the presence of young children at home (R. Smith 1984: 425; Anderson 1977: 56). For more on the role of the collectivity in the support of the widowed elderly, see J. Smith (1984), Laslett (1984: 385; 1988; 1989). James Smith (1984: 439) underscores the inability of households to generate additional income in order to maintain their economically inactive elderly, thus making the flow of income from outside the household essential. David Thomson (1984) has suggested that the benefits of social welfare going to the elderly British today are lower in relative terms than the pensions paid during the first half of the twentieth century, and much lower than the income transfers derived from the Poor Laws during the nineteenth century. Elsewhere Thomson (1991: 191) has gone so far as to affirm, “It is unEnglish behaviour to expect children to support their parents.” In a recent paper, Pat Thane (1998) has argued that in both the recent and more distant past of England, the family has played a complementary role to that of the community in supporting the elderly. For a partially divergent point of view on this issue, see Kertzer (1995: 369–378).

26 This percentage varies by age, with fairly high levels for persons aged 60–69 due to families with children still at home (45–50 percent), somewhat lower levels for persons aged 70–79 (33–35 percent), and then much higher levels for persons over 80 years of age (>50 percent).

27 The data in the following table, containing summary statistics of the importance of institutional living arrangements for the elderly around 1990 in Europe, show this pattern quite clearly:

**Elderly persons living in institutions circa 1990, as a percent of different age groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65+</td>
<td>85+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-- = not available.


On this subject, see also De Jong-Gierveld and van Solinge (1995).

28 Wall (1984: 487) has found that around 5 percent of the population above
age 60 lived in institutions in several English communities during the eighteenth century. In Spain, according to both the census of Floridablanca (1787) and that of Godoy (1797), somewhat less than 1.4 percent of the population above 50 resided in institutions. This last percentage is based on the supposition that all physically ill, mentally deranged, or indigent people residing in hospitals or charitable institutions (Casas de Misericordia) were above 50 years of age. The Spanish data include major towns such as Madrid, Barcelona, and Seville, where the weight of institutions was far greater than in the rest of the country. In other words, our estimation procedure tends to overestimate the number of the institutionalized elderly present in these censuses, and thus the comparison with English figures tends to understate the differences.

In France the system of poor relief was similar to that found in much of Mediterranean Europe and was based on private almsgiving and donations, and on institutions erected in the spirit of the Counter-Reformation. Olwen Hufton has estimated that the total resources available to these charitable institutions would not have been enough in any one year to buy a single pound of bread for each hungry person. See Hufton (1974: 131–133, 176). It is also interesting, however, that in 1791 the degree of institutional help was considerably greater in northern France than in the southern part of the country (Hufton 1974: 175).

29 The results of this survey are reported in van Nimwegan and Moors (1997).

30 For more on the geography of these family forms, see Todd (1990). For an attempt to rethink the implications for people’s lives of these classic family systems existing in Europe, see Kertzer (1989; 1995: 375–378).

31 These agreements might stipulate, for example, whether or not the parents could sit next to the fireplace, what they could eat, or other seemingly minute aspects of daily life. The use of these agreements was widespread and had existed since the Middle Ages in areas of Europe where Germanic law had prevailed (Scandinavia, Germany, Austria, England, Bohemia, Moravia, and Finland) (Mitterauer and Sieder 1977: 163–167; Gaunt 1983: 249–255). For examples of this type of contract between father and son, see Ehmer (1998) and Gaunt (1983: 278–279).

32 In 1772 the agricultural reformer and traveler Anders Bachaeus reported from one central Swedish parish that the young went about calling the retired “the old devils” and demanding, “What is their purpose in living?” (cited in Gaunt 1983: 258–268, esp. 259).

33 In Cuenca and probably in much of central and southern Spain, only about 10–20 percent of property owners even bothered to draw up a will (Reher 1988a: 207–211).

34 For more on this subject, see Macfarlane (1978).

35 In historical contexts differential behavior patterns regarding the family have appeared in different ethnic groups. In her study of the family and the elderly in New York State during the 1920s, for example, Weiler (1986: 91) found that: “The immigrants from eastern and southern Europe stressed the value of children as insurance in old age, whereas Americans and west Europeans valued individualism and independence between generations.” See also Chudacoff and Hareven (1979). Regarding more-general aspects of familial organization, cultural contrasts have appeared in studies such as those of Carroll (1988) and Glasco (1977).

36 For a more-complete portrayal of Western and Eastern social structures, see Goody (1983: 6–33) and Guichard (1977: 19), whose ideas are the starting point for Goody’s essay.

37 Goody attributes the beginnings of this change to the Christianization of the late Empire and in particular to a policy of the Church designed to undermine the traditional clan and kin networks for its own material benefit (Goody 1983: 83–156). For more on this see R. Smith (1990: 169–171).

38 Goody affirms that the early Christian missionaries in northern Europe went to great lengths to change a number of the Germanic practices centering on strategies an individual might adopt in order to produce an heir that were more like those of earlier Mediterranean cultures (Goody 1983: 34–
47). Nevertheless, Tacitus (in his *Germania*) remarked on a number of aspects of Germanic social organization and behavior that suggest the existence of quite “Western” types of familial organization even in pre-Christian times, as well as an emphasis on the importance of independence and individuality. Tacitus suggests that marriage occurred later for men and women (chapter 19) and that it was viewed as a shared pact (“... she is thus warned by the very rites with which her marriage begins that she comes to share hard work and peril ...”) to be used in work, war, and reproduction (husbands brought gifts to the marriage that included tools, animals, and weapons, while the wives contributed a piece of armour) (ch. 18). There were injunctions against infanticide (ch. 19), and mothers practiced breast-feeding their infants (ch. 20). Girls and boys were educated in the same way (ch. 20), and people felt the need to live in widely scattered houses with plenty of space around them (ch. 16). Houses were set up “... according as spring-water, meadow, or grove appeals to each man” (ch. 16). Among the Germans, fraternal and paternal ties appear to have been weak. In some cases, for example, fathers even had the right to disavow or sell their own sons. Tacitus points to the existence of a matriarchal society (“Sisters’ children mean as much to their uncle as to their father: some tribes regard this blood-tie as even closer and more sacred than between son and father ...”) (ch. 20). For more on the Germanic family, see Cuvillier (1986: 293–331, esp. 296–298).

39 The extremely early female age at marriage in southern Europe (17–19 years of age) during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, together with a fairly low incidence of remarriage among women, would seem to have much in common with marriage patterns in northern Africa. Even much later during the eighteenth century, female age at marriage continued to be noticeably earlier in much of southern Europe than in the northern part of the continent. It is also noteworthy here that in the southern parts of Spain, Italy, and Portugal age at marriage throughout the preindustrial period was always much younger than in northern parts of those same countries. This suggests that even in southern Europe the degree of implantation of these family forms was heterogeneous. For Italy, see Da Molin (1990a: 91) and Delille (1985); for Spain and Portugal, see Rowland (1988: 110). See also R. Smith (1990: 173–176).

40 A number of these ideas about marriage, especially that it was not a sacrament and that it rested on mutual acceptance, were originally developed by the Cathars in twelfth-century France (Goody 1983: 158–161). For the influence of the Reformation on marriage and on attitudes toward family life, see Goody (1983: 164–182).

41 On this subject, see Bainton (1952: 255–261). Regarding the control of sexuality during this period, Goody maintains that “Eastern” or “Eurasian” patterns prevailed in southern Europe. These controls were based on pressures from a more extensive and more effective kin network as well as on an earlier age at marriage for women, all of which meant that such control was more intensely felt and more easily maintained (1983: 190–193). These controls were never as effective in Protestant Europe, where marriage was later and there was no southern heritage of strong families. On this subject, see also Lebrun (1986).

42 A good example of these differences can be found in the gap between literacy rates in northern and southern Europe. Even though both sexes showed higher literacy levels in the north, the north–south differences were far greater for women. As late as 1887 in Spain, 70 percent of adult women continued to be illiterate, and in certain areas of the country this figure was closer to 90 percent (Reher, Pombo, and Noguera 1993). Spanish and Italian women did not reach German or English female literacy levels of 1700 until after the start of the twentieth century, and Swedish levels of 1700 were not reached until the 1960s (Núñez 1997: 235–236).

43 While tackling this issue from the same perspective, Goody (1996a: esp. 13–17; 1996b: esp. 138–204) has always maintained a degree of skepticism as to the real advantages of the Northwest European family system for economic growth and modernization. He avers that perhaps they were more significant “in the shape that economic development took rather than development per se” (1996a: 17).
Here, the exaltation by Martin Luther of common occupations as a "calling" is essential because an individual's job became also his religious calling. In the words of Roland Bainton: "The term vocation was transferred by Luther from the cloister to the workshop." On this subject, see the classic essay of Max Weber (1948), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. See also Bainton (1952: 244-255, esp. 246).

For comparative East-West viewpoints, especially insofar as they affect subsequent economic development, rational thought processes, and family systems, see Goody (1996a, 1996b).

The indicators shown in Table 3 on page 229 of the present article are good examples of these differences. The case of Portugal, with a very high incidence of births outside marriage, has always been exceptional in southern Europe and it largely reflects the fact that for well over two centuries large-scale male emigration has left a society with far fewer men than women.

In 1990/91 lone-parent families represented 8.6 percent of all families with children under 18 years of age in Spain, in contrast to 11.9 percent in France, 15.7 percent in Germany, 16.8 percent in Canada, 18.1 percent in the Netherlands, 22.0 percent in Denmark, 22.3 percent in Sweden, and 23.5 percent in the United States (Fernández Cordón and Tobío Soler, Table 2, in press). See also Hantrais and Letablier (1996: 20).

See Fernández Cordón and Tobío Soler (in press) and Tobío Soler and Fernández Cordón (in press). When only never-married mothers are included, the percentage living with the grandmother rises to 60 and 69 percent respectively. It is instructive that in northern Spain, especially Catalonia and the Basque Country, the grandmother effect appears to be much weaker than in southern regions of the country.

According to a 1993 survey, over 35 percent of all persons older than age 65 regularly help their children and grandchildren. This help is often centered on child care. See Tobío Soler and Fernández Cordón (1996). An exception on this point is the role of grandmothers in African-American families in the United States, where they often represent the survival of the traditional African extended family within a context of the breakdown of the conjugal family. On this subject, see for example, Wilkinson (1984) and Timberlake and Chipingu (1992).

A proxy for loneliness in society is the proportion of single-person households. Here again the differences between northern and southern Europe are striking:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The following data regarding suicide in Europe bring this pattern out clearly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tradition of civil association is much stronger where government intervention is weak and relatively distant, as in the United States, than where it is ever-present, as in Nordic countries.

The responsibility of the state as opposed to that of the family in supporting the elderly is a frequently debated issue. For historic contexts see, for example, Kertzer (1995: 377–378).

For a perspective on this issue based on a microsimulation study of kinship networks in Spain, see Reher (1997: 258–268).

In a recent paper, Anton Kuijsten (1996) has made a strong case that family patterns in Europe show more signs of divergence than of convergence. For a review of the common demographic constraints affecting family life in Europe, see Bégeot and Fernández Cordon (1997).

### TABLE 1 Percent of servants in several northern and central European populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sample or place</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Percent servants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Sample of parishes</td>
<td>1787/1801</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>3 counties</td>
<td>1729</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>3 areas</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>9 Flemish villages</td>
<td>1814</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Large sample (19 listings; median value)</td>
<td>17th–19th centuries</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>4 localities</td>
<td>1622–1795</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Grossenmeer</td>
<td>1795</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Longuenesse (north)</td>
<td>1778</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2 southern villages</td>
<td>1644–97</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCES:** Denmark (Hajnal 1982: 456; Johansen 1975); Iceland (Statistical Bureau 1975); Norway (Drake 1969; Hajnal 1982: 485); Belgium (Wall 1983b: 387–393); Austria (Schmidtbauer 1983: 354–362, 375–378); Holland (van der Woude 1972: 314; Laslett 1977a: 34–35; also Schellekens 1991); Germany (Laslett 1977a: 34–35); France (Laslett 1977a: 34–35).
TABLE 2  Percent of servants in southern European populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Sample/place</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Percent servants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Kingdom of Naples (South)</td>
<td>Large multiregional sample</td>
<td>1610–1839</td>
<td>0.7–1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parma (Po River Valley)</td>
<td>Contado (rural areas)</td>
<td>1545</td>
<td>4.0–6.0a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pisa (Tuscany)</td>
<td>4 villages, several listings</td>
<td>1656–1740</td>
<td>9.5b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bologna</td>
<td>Adjacent rural areas</td>
<td>1853</td>
<td>5.0–7.0a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>Minho (northwest)</td>
<td>São Tiago de Ronfe (Guimarães) (33 listings, 5-year intervals)</td>
<td>1740–1900</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trás-os-Montes (northeast)</td>
<td>Regional rural sample (82 villages)</td>
<td>1796</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santarém (central)</td>
<td>Vila de Coruche, Salvaterra de Magos (2 villages)</td>
<td>1788, 1789</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coimbra (north central)</td>
<td>Regional rural sample (26 parishes)</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Valencia (east)</td>
<td>Meliana, Benimaclet (2 villages)</td>
<td>1753, 1788</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navarre (north)</td>
<td>Large regional sample</td>
<td>1786</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santander (north)</td>
<td>Subregional sample (Buelna)</td>
<td>1752</td>
<td>3.0–4.0a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galicia (northwest)</td>
<td>Large regional sample</td>
<td>1752</td>
<td>2.6–3.5a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basque Country (north)</td>
<td>San Salvador del Valle, Irún</td>
<td>1766, 1877</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuenca (center)</td>
<td>Large regional sample</td>
<td>1750–1850</td>
<td>3.6–5.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murcia-Alicante (southeast)</td>
<td>Orihuela (Santiago), 4 listings</td>
<td>1719–1829</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andalusia (south)</td>
<td>Entire region</td>
<td>1787</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aThe data from the following places have been inferred indirectly based on the percent of households with servants: Parma (10.4 percent of all households with servants; 10.5 percent of the population aged 15–24 listed as servants); rural areas surrounding Bologna (17.7 percent of households); and Santander (7.7 percent of households). For Galicia, estimates based on servants in different social and economic groups.

bThese are suburban parishes located only about 2–3 km. from Pisa. This may explain in part the high levels of servants that were found.


TABLE 3  Social indicators related to family behavior in European countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Divorces per 1,000 population, 1995</th>
<th>Nonmarried couples cohabitating, aged 30–44 (percent of total population in age group), 1993</th>
<th>Births outside marriage (percent of all live births), 1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


Jani-Le Bris, Hannelore. 1993. Cuidado familiar de las personas de edad avanzada en la Comunidad Europea. Luxembourg: Oficina de Publicaciones Oficiales de las Comunidades Europeas (Fundación europea para la mejora de las condiciones de vida y de trabajo).


