Margarida Durães, Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux,
Llorenç Ferrer & Jan Kok (Eds)

The Transmission of Well-Being

Gendered Marriage Strategies and Inheritance Systems in Europe (17th–20th Centuries)

Offprint

PETER LANG
Bern · Berlin · Bruxelles · Frankfurt am Main · New York · Oxford · Wien

ISBN 978-3-0343-0056-8

Hochfeldstrasse 32, CH-3012 Bern, Switzerland
info@peterlang.com, www.peterlang.com, www.peterlang.net

Female Headship, Household Position, and Gendered Well-Being in Peasant Societies

Evidence from the Territories of the Historical Kingdom of Poland (18th century)

Mikołaj SZOŁTYSEK

Measuring the quality of life[1] in preindustrial peasant societies – for either women or men – is a challenging task. Firstly, there may only be a dearth of precise information regarding gender differences in incomes and other aspects of standards of living, and well-being in general. Secondly, the usual speechlessness of historical peasants presents another obstacle: in most instances all we know about rural society comes from narrative or statistical descriptions drawn up by representatives of different social classes who looked at peasants' lives through the lens of their own presumptions, prejudices and all other aspects of their *habitus*.[2]

When it comes to the investigation of the quality of life in Eastern European peasant societies, however, another discouragement appears. From I. Wallerstein (Wallerstein 1974), F. Braudel (Braudel 1985), and R. Brenner (Brenner 1989), to East European historians such as I. Berend

1 There does not appear to be a single, generally accepted definition of quality of life (QOL) in the extensive literature generated on this subject over the past thirty years. Although there may be various ways of defining QOL ("well-being", and the "standard of living" are most often treated as its equivalents), the concept usually refers either to the degree of need satisfaction within the areas of physical, psychological, social, activity, material and structural needs, or to goal-achievement, or to social utility (Hørnquist 1989; Felce and Perry 1995; Cummins 2005). For the purpose of the present study it is enough for the quality of life to be meant as a descriptive term referring to people's emotional, social and physical well-being, and their ability to function in the ordinary tasks of living.

2 Obviously, many universal standards of measurement of well-being are contestable from the perspective of "cultural relativism" which is akin to anthropological thinking; see the discussion of that issue in Wilk 2005.

(Berend and Ránki 1982), J. Topolski (Topolski 1974a; 1974b) and W. Kula (Kula 1976), the early modern Eastern European social and economic environment has often been pictured as quite unfavourable for the existence of peasant families (Wyczański 1978; Cerman 2008). As early as the sixteenth century, Eastern Europe became the first periphery of the capitalist world-system, with its rural classes being increasingly subjected to exploitation by local landowners, who – in turn – became suppliers of grains and other primary products for western core territories. Eastern Europe retained its position as a region of traditional socioeconomic structures well into the early nineteenth century, while at the same time Eastern European societies – and this applies to both the landowning elite and the peasant strata – are supposed to have lacked capitalist principles of calculation by comparison to the more individualistic and rational cultures of Northwestern Europe.

In most historians' accounts of the European past, the peasant economy in Europe under the rules of the "second serfdom" was regarded as a sort of a completely separate world.[3] Not infrequently, the picture of the socioeconomic setting in Central and Eastern Europe is pervaded by references to a distinct and changeless peasant economic mentality that reified self-subsistence, retreated from the market, rejected cost calculations, and made decisions that were "irrational" or "uneconomic" from the point of view of profitability. In this sense, communalism, egalitarianism and traditionalism would be the prime characteristics of peasant societies east of the Elbe River (Ogilvie 2001, 430–434). In addition, semi-ethnographic accounts of eighteenth-century travelers, as well as reports of foreign bureaucrats and officials regarding standards of living in the historical Polish territories, can easily discourage one from taking an optimistic view of the chances for creating, or even sustaining, individual and social well-being in this area. Foreign travelers entering the historical Polish lands wrote not only about "arid sands and vast forests," but also of "a poor and enslaved population, dirty villages, and cottages little different from the savage hunts" (Wolff 1994, 19). Prussian bureaucrats and officials reiterated this

3 The term "second serfdom" is often used in the English-language literature as shorthand to refer to the massive growth in landlord powers over the rural population during the early modern period, essentially in Central and Eastern Europe. This institutional context refers to the institution of *Gutsherrschaft* (manorial lordship) or *system folwarczno-pańszczyźniany* (system of manorialism with compulsory labour) – as it has been called in the Polish historiography. See more in Cerman 1999; Hagen 1998; Melton 1998; Ogilvie 2001; Topolski 1974b.

"dark" picture by referring to the peasantry's inclination toward drunkenness and laziness, describing the miserable conditions of their premises, and pointing out peasants' supposedly inherent propensity towards dirtiness and exposure to the most dangerous and humiliating diseases (Łukasiewicz 1995, 56–74, 75–76).

Most of all, however, when it comes to peasants' social and economic activities and their family behaviour under the second serfdom, most of the research studies (including the Polish historiography) seem to offer ready-made answers. The majority of studies dealing with the above-mentioned issues have taken for granted that East and Central European peasant communities corresponded very well with the prime characteristics of serf dependence typical of that part of Europe during the early and late modern period – namely, juridical subjection; migration regulations; legal attachment to a particular social status; subjection to communal payments and duties (including the most harsh compulsory labour); limited right to private property; limited choice of occupation; and unprotected personal dignity (Mironov 1996, 323; Plakans 1975; Kula 1976; Woźniak 1987; Orzechowski 1959). In other words, peasants' choices and actions have usually been presented as severely constrained by landlords, who attempted to interfere in almost every aspect of their subjects' everyday lives: from marriage contracting, through residential arrangements, to the regulation of labour markets and dues. Consequently, one may say, in the world of Eastern European peasants, a substantive individual freedom to lead the life one had a reason to value was severely restricted (Sen 1999, 14).[4]

Such unfavourable conditions for the development of familial or individual well-being applied in particular to the female rural population. Although it has been suggested that the distinctive feature of the Polish inheritance pattern from the Middle Ages onwards was equality between brothers and sisters (Guzowski 2007), at the same time there were countervailing forces at work disempowering rural women during certain stages of their life-cycles. Firstly, although eligible to inherit immovable

4 For a more nuanced view on this topic see: Wyczański 1978; Woźniak 1987. Sosnowska (2004, pp. 276-282) gives a good summary of this still unresolved debate among Polish economic historians. More recent research offers somewhat different portrayal of the Eastern European setting in this regard, undermining a traditional image of rigid landlord structures and weak peasant property rights in this area (see Cerman 2008). Similarly, but from a different angle: Seppel 2004; Szołtysek & Rzemieniecki 2005.

property both from a father and from a deceased spouse, women's capabilities with regard to management and usufruct of real property could be quite constrained under the rules of the "second serfdom". This is illustrated by some of the landowners' regulations cited in W. Kula's well-known *Annales* article. Thus, for instance, one regulation stated that:

> Widows of deceased plowmen must remain in possession of all the deceased's property under surveillance of the members of the village council and also of two plowmen [...] who are guardians... It is ordered that the guardians ensure that the widow remarries within a year, and she must be warned that if during that period she does not remarry, then at the end of the year, counting from the day of her husband's death, everything will be sold at auction (Kula 1976, 195).

Another landlord regulation ordered that:

> Aged widows who can no longer marry as a consequence of their age must, at the very beginning of their widowhood, be removed from their farms, with the exception of those who have an adult son or daughter who is able to marry shortly after the father's death. In such a case, it is advised that the marriage be hastened; when it has been contracted, the entire family may remain on the farm (Kula 1976, 196).

So, could Eastern European peasants (and, more specifically, women in those peasant societies) have created a space for individual well-being under such material and institutional conditions? My essay attempts to offer a partial answer to this question. Here, the main characteristics of female-headed households and women's household position on the historical Polish territories will be suggested as offering the preliminary clue to understanding female options in serf society more generally.

What, then, are the implications of the analysis of historical household data for understanding human well-being? For most preindustrial populations it was the family and the household that most profoundly determined the living standards of family groups and individuals. Household systems, it is often assumed, not only determined who people would live with, who they would live for, and which networks of cooperation they would make use of; the household system, through these pathways, also influenced many fundamental aspects of social organization and behaviour, which in turn influenced demographic outcomes, health, and welfare (Das Gupta 1999; Green and Owens 2004). Households not only provided the basic context for production and consumption, but also engaged in complex tasks relating to social reproduction, as well as influencing power relationships (Wilk and Netting 1984; also Verdon 1998, 34–37). In addition,

households often influenced group strategies of resource management, migration, and ways of exploiting commercial opportunities (Arrizabalaga 2007). In other words: family or household organization extensively affected, shaped, and often determined the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. Consequently, understanding different household systems in terms of the ways in which they affected family and individual well-being remains an important research agenda.

When it comes to the measurement of women's opportunities, female headship (the incidence of households headed by women) is widely regarded as a key element of social structure. It can be interpreted as a positive indicator of the extent to which women were able and willing to manage an independent household. Thus, female headship can tell us a lot about options available to women generally (Wall 1981; Ogilvie and Edwards 2000, 966). This holds true especially for the period before the advent of modern statistical records, during which women's economic position was only rarely documented in a manner amenable to quantification.[5] In spite of that, this chapter will not focus exclusively on this single important measure of female well-being in past societies (even if that measure is inarguably a highly important one), and an attempt will also be made to broaden the perspective by taking into account wider issues of the female household position and its life-cycle changes.

However, the actual quality of life is even more multidimensional (e.g. Felce and Perry 1995; Sen 1999; Robeyns 2003), and thus, there will obviously be several other components of well-being lost sight of in this analysis. Approaching a more complete picture of the female life quality would require – at least from the historical-demographic perspective – elaborating on several additional issues, to name a few: women's exposure to excess mortality (McNay *et al* 2004; Alter *et al.* 2004), the availability of kin outside the household (Kertzer *et al.* 1992), characteristics of the marriage market, demographic constraints on the individual life-cycle (Laslett 1988), power relations within the family (Sabean 1990; Beck 2001; Seccombe 1990), and many others.[6] There are, however, inherent difficulties in pursuing such a holistic approach to historical communities

5 There is an extensive historical-demographic literature focused on different socio-structural aspects of women's position and opportunities in pre-industrial societies (Fauve-Chamoux 1983; 2002; Moring 2002; Wall 1981; 2002; Ochiai 2002).

6 Compare the recent review of existing "lists of functionings and capabilities" in Robeyns 2003.

– especially when investigation is being carried out in large numbers at an aggregated level, and that concerns particularly the research presented in this essay. Therefore, to infer the quality of life dimensions from demographic data on household status and life-course contexts often remains the only practical, even if not an ideal, solution.

The structure of this essay is as follows. First, a general overview of the research project on which it is based and the database that will be utilized is provided. In a second step, I focus on female headship rates and on selected characteristics of female-headed households. I then attempt to investigate several aspects of the female life course. Regarding all these issues, in the course of the demographic description I also attempt to infer their implications for well-being. Before the concluding remarks, the results of the preceded statistical-structural analysis are confronted with the insights into a micro-study of one of the communities from the larger quantitative sample.

Data and Sample

The data used in this essay come from a much larger project whose aim is to re-assess the geography of family forms in historic Europe. The original purpose of the project was to collect as much individual household-level data as possible, for parishes located on both sides of the transitional zone that was supposed to run through the historic Polish territories demarcating different family and household formation systems (Hajnal 1982; Mitterauer 1999; Kaser 2002; Laslett 1983). With the use of such historical sources, the aim was to investigate whether there was a borderline distinguishing Central European family patterns and marriage behaviours from those widely considered as "unique" to North-western Europe, and if so, to identify where exactly this frontier was located, what its distinguishing features were, and which factors were responsible for its existence (Szołtysek 2008).

The database developed for this purpose is one of the most extensive collections of household lists for a group of preindustrial European communities (*CEURFAMFORM Database*). At present, it contains entries for

almost 11,061 households from 84 parishes, which cover a total population of 62,732 people.[7] The majority of the parish household data comes either from the so-called *Libri Status Animarum* (the lists of parishioners created by priests for the purpose of church registration), or from their equivalent in the form of the Polish civil-military registration of inhabitants (1790–1792),[8] and dates from the period 1766–1799. All of these censuses precede the abolition of serfdom in the territories in question. The character of the censuses – the fact that they mostly do not contain any information related to economic status of the families, nor to the social living conditions of individuals they encompassed – posed, however, certain limits on the extent to which particular aspects of gendered well-being could have been directly analyzed.

The parishes selected for the present analysis formed a long belt extending from the western fringes of the historical Kingdom of Poland (regions 3 and 4, encompassing 35 parishes) towards the southern borders of the province of Great Poland (regions 1 and 2, encompassing 20 parishes) (Figure 1). From that area the data coverage extends southwest into the ethnically and religiously mixed territories of Prussian Silesia (region 8, encompassing 14 parishes), and well into the most north-western parts of the Lesser Poland province of the historical Polish Commonwealth (region 7, encompassing 13 parishes). Two additional parishes give a northern and north-eastern extension to the marked territories. The regional division was proposed mainly on the basis of administrative or geographical factors.

7 These numbers represent respectively 2.5 percent of total households and almost 3 percent of the population (noble families and clergy excluded) in the western provinces of Poland in 1789 (estimates based on the returns of the first Polish census from 1789; source: Gieysztorowa 1976, 114).

8 For less than a tenth of all households in the sample, the data were derived from different types of local tax records. All of these household lists registered groups of people as residential units (Hammel and Laslett 1974, 86–90), in clearly marked, separate blocks. The residential unit comprised not only the core family of the head, but also his immediate and more distant relatives, as well as coresident servants and "inmates" or "lodgers".

Figure 1 Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before 1772 and its administrative divisions into voivodships.

Notes: Map design: M. Szołtysek and J. Newman.
Reference is made to historic boundaries of the western part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before 1772 and its administrative divisions into voivodships.

Each region represents some kind of unit within the administrative structure of the Polish Republic or the Prussian Kingdom, be it a voivodship, a "land", or a district. Most of the parishes included in the database shared a common framework, as they were all located in the part of Europe where marriage and household formation were, at least from the normative point of view, under strict manorial control owing to the system of the second serfdom. However, some local and regional variations persisted.[9]

9 The inhabitants of two parishes in the north (region 5), and also a minority of peasant householders from regions 3 and 4, were free peasants paying money rents for their

Female Headship in the Family System of the Historical Polish Territories

There is no definite agreement as to what should be considered as the main constitutive components of a family system (Wall 1991, 623). In most accounts, however, a small set of inter-related variables such as household size, household composition, and household structure, are commonly treated as the primary, even if not the sole, indicators of the prevailing pattern of family and household organization in a given area (Laslett 1983; Czap 1983, 145). The family system on the territories I am concerned with was primarily based on housefuls *(dym)* that were mostly moderate in size (mean houseful size of 5.8 persons per unit)[10] and simple in structure. The distribution of household structures according to the canonical classification scheme (Hammel and Laslett 1974) demonstrates an overwhelming domination of nuclear households (77.7 percent of all households), with the proportion of complex family units not exceeding 9 percent of all units registered. Living in domestic groups containing more than 6 persons and at least two conjugal units was experienced by, respectively, one quarter and slightly above one tenth of the total population. Coresidence with non-nuclear-family kin in the household was a relatively rare phenomenon in the parishes investigated. On the other hand, high proportions of servants were discernible, with a clear life-cycle pattern in their age distribution. Although there was no absolute relationship between entry into marriage and entry into household headship among males in the localities studied, for most male progeny formation of family and attaining headship were not clearly separate events in the life-cycle (Szołtysek 2008). In terms both of household structure and of the incidence of servants, the Polish data discussed here appeared much more

long-term land tenures. A mixture of labour obligations *(corvées)* and money rents also prevailed in region 7. The eastern part of region 8 was essentially characterized by the system of manorialism with compulsory labour dues, while in the western part of it money rents prevailed again, and peasants combined small agriculture with proto-industrial activities. The latter played an important role also among the population of region 5 (Szołtysek 2008).

10 Mean size of residential group drops to 5.2 persons if coresiding non-related inmates are excluded from the calculations. The Polish census returns of 1789 reported a mean houseful size of 5.3 persons (Gieysztorowa 1976, 114).

akin to the northwest European family pattern and household formation rules, than had previously been expected (Hajnal 1982).[11]

Table 1. Regional distribution of female-headed households, historical Kingdom of Poland (18th century)

Region	No. of parishes	Households (N)	Female-headed households (N)	Female-headed households (%)
Region 1	11	1,568	48	3.1
Region 2	9	1,317	48	3.6
Region 3	9	846	39	4.6
Region 4	26	2,063	105	5.1
Region 5	2	545	59	10.8
Region 7	13	2,511	64	2.5
Region 8	14	2,211	100	4.5
All regions	84	11,061	463	4.2

Source: Szołtysek and Pasieka, *CEURFAMFORM Database*.
Note: In this and all following tabulations, female heads are represented by those who were widowed, or deserted by their husbands.

More importantly, the family system discussed here diverges significantly from household systems which are more prone to strengthen the agnatic core of the family and to develop patriarchal structures (Kaser 2002). These features of the prevailing family system created the general structural framework which conditioned women's opportunities and capabilities in the populations analyzed. The basic questions addressed in this essay can be initially approached by investigating the proportions of female-headed households, keeping in mind that the incidence of domestic units headed by women was a positive indicator of their economic and social position (Ogilvie and Edwards 2000, 964) (Table 1).

If we break down the whole sample into regions, it is clear that the most striking feature of the findings for these seven regions is that female headship was, on average, quite rare. What is more, if we exclude region 5 as departing from the rest of the sample in its socioeconomic structure, we are likely to end up with the conclusion that female headship did not vary significantly across the rest of the rural population. Although some indi-

11 Another crucial variable – proportions ever married – is discussed in the following paragraphs.

vidual parishes might have had female headship rates close to ten per cent or even higher,[12] the regional averages were always much lower, and at the same time, one out of ten parishes in the dataset contained no female heads at all.

These figures prompt us to ask two interrelated questions. First, do these low rates reflect a small number of long-lasting female-headed households, or alternatively a larger number of shorter duration? If a modelled functioning system of peasant serfdom communities is taken for granted (Kula 1976), the first alternative would have to be rejected. Actually, however, this reasoning cannot be demonstrated statistically as the data we have used so far is invariably cross-sectional. A scanty set of longitudinal evidence, restricted to the Prussian province of Silesia (region 8), is rather ambiguous. For the small Lower Silesian parish of Döberle (County of Oels), five female-headed households were detected in the 1747 listing (their existence could possibly have preceded that date) and then followed through the successive enumerations of 1749 and 1755.[13] Four of these women retained the headship at least until 1749 (one woman died before or during that year). In 1755, however, none of these women were heading their households anymore (two of them had to pass down the headship either to coresident relatives or to non-related persons; the other two presumably died, leaving their households to sons).

12 Standard deviation: 3.7 percent. The highest incidence of households headed by women was 24 percent (in the parish of Bronisław, region 4). Median value for the whole dataset equals 3.7 percent.

13 State Archive in Wrocław: Składnica Ewangelickich Ksiąg Metrykalnych we Wrocławiu, "Seelen Register Döberle Carlsburg, Jenckwitz und Gutwohn," sygn. 27, 29, 37 (microfilmed). Author's calculations.

Table 2. Proportions of female-headed households – the Polish rural sample in comparison with other data concerning urban Poland and rural Bohemia (18th century)

Region	Number of parishes	Total households (N)	Female-headed households (N)	Female-headed households (%)
Polish rural sample	84	11,061	463	4.2
Frýdlant estate (Bohemia), 1722	NA	NA	37	2.2
Liberec estate (Bohemia), 1722	NA	NA	27	4.4
Praszka town, 1791 (southern Poland)	1	161	NA	4.3
Radziejów town, 1792 (north-central Poland)	1	124	NA	13.7
Wieluń town, 1791 (western Poland)	1	261	NA	19.0
Kraków town, 1791 (southern Poland)	NA	1,159	NA	22.7
Warszawa town, 1791 (central Poland)	1	4,122	NA	24.8

Sources: for "Polish rural sample", Szołtysek and Pasieka, *CEURFAMFORM Database*; for two Bohemian estates, Ogilvie and Edwards 2000, 969; for Polish towns 1791–1792, Kuklo 1998, 97.
Notes: "NA" means data non available.

However, serial household listings for another Silesian locality (Bujakow parish, 1766–1803), embedded presumably in an institutional context not very different from the one discussed above, brought evidence of the system's flexibilities and, in particular, of a considerable degree of autonomy of peasant women regarding heading a household (Szołtysek 2007). The implications of this study for understanding female well-being in serf societies will be discussed further in subsequent sections.

More importantly, however, we are tempted to ask the second question – namely, what the figures presented in Table 1 actually tell us about the scale of female independence and autonomy. In isolation, such low percentages may seem 'normal' considering the functioning of rural communities under the rules of serfdom. In such a context, a farm not headed by a married couple was often considered unviable. It was mostly married couples and not solitary persons who were entitled to manage a farmstead and to perform duties for the landowners (Kula 1976, 195; Woźniak 1987,

108). Some comparisons may be helpful for a better understanding of the figures presented so far (Table 2).

When compared with the data for two eighteenth-century Bohemian serf estates, the Polish figures reveal very similar phenomena. It seems justified to assume that such low figures of female headship in Polish areas were rather typical of rural conditions in Eastern Central Europe, even if some departures from this overall pattern were discernible on some German, Austrian and Hungarian territories (see Ogilvie and Edwards 2000, 971). Even more illuminating is the comparison with the estimations made for some late-eighteenth-century Polish towns (Kuklo 1998). A huge discrepancy shows up between the rural conditions we analyze and between what is supposed to be an urban experience on the same territories and roughly under the same historical circumstances. If we exclude the rather exceptional case of the small town of Praszka, rural female headship rates were 3 to 6 times smaller in rural areas than in towns. We may summarize this part of the investigation by saying that in the preindustrial rural communities of historical Poland, female-headed households constituted only a marginal phenomenon in socioeconomic and family life. If we agree that a much higher incidence of households headed by women in the towns in Polish territories was caused by a weakened feudal regulation of these urban communities (e.g implying higher territorial and social mobility, as well as a more extended labour market than in the countryside),[14] then the strong manorial institutions of the second serfdom must be described as adversely affecting women's economic positions in rural areas, and consequently, reducing female well-being.[15]

14 Kuklo 1998, 65–69. However, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, women's juridical status remained handicapped in Polish towns as well, constraining female chances of economic success in financial and trade sectors (Bogucka 1990, 185).

15 This observation seems to be supported by slightly higher female headship rates in regions with higher incidence either of personally free peasants or a property usufruct based on money rents (regions 3, 4, and part of region 8).

Table 3. Number of males per 100 females of specified relationship to household head, historical Kingdom of Poland (18th century)

Region	No. of parishes	Lone household heads	Off-spring	Relatives	Servants	Other unrelated	Sex ratio
Region 1	9	113	111	67	140	65	106
Region 2	9	83	104	56	163	59	96
Region 3	7	51	105	80	164	50	98
Region 4	22	73	110	68	157	79	107
Region 5	2	54	104	65	119	56	100
Region 7	11	80	104	71	151	60	98
Region 8	5	79	108	59	134	61	99
Total	65	76	107	67	151	65	101

Sources: Szołtysek and Pasieka, *CEURFAMFORM Database*. Calculations based on data for 65 parishes (19 excluded as containing less reliable data).
Sex ratio: Number of males for 100 females in total.

In order to approach women's position within households more directly, sex ratios of particular categories of people within domestic groups such as lone household heads, offspring, relatives, servants and also coresiding inmates, have been tabulated (Table 3).

As might be expected, since women were generally younger than their spouses, and would generally outlive them, most of the lone household heads were women.[16] Although this tendency was a prevalent one, the data from region 1 provides exceptions to that rule, indicating a possible further deterioration of female autonomy there. When it comes to offspring, however, some regional data reveals sex ratios visibly above a hundred. There can be two possible explanations to that pattern: either it resulted from sex differentials in mortality, or it indicated females' earlier exit from the parental home. As we will see later, the second explanation seems more plausible, which means that, at least in part of the population under study, females were less desirable as members of the family labour force in farming and therefore had to leave the parental home earlier than their male siblings. This will evidently have had implications for their well-being.

16 In the category of lone household heads, all non-married household heads have been included, that is never-married as well as ever-married but widowed, males and females together.

Also already evident is that a majority of the young rural labour force recruited in the form of life-cycle servants were male, and the surplus of male servants shows up strongly across the whole sample.[17] It also emerges very clearly from Table 3 that the two most feminized household positions were those of non-nuclear-family relatives and unrelated inmates coresiding in households. Whether that is also an indication of females' less advantageous socioeconomic opportunities and a deterioration of their quality of life remains an open question. Whereas Hartmann has argued for the prime importance of female life-cycle service seen in terms of the historical development of female autonomy in Western Europe (Hartmann 2004, 40, 192), other scholars have been much less optimistic regarding the general well-being implications of the institution of domestic service (Laslett 2000 [1965]; Schulte 1984). The very exploitative character of service was also the *leitmotif* of the predominantly Marxist Polish economic historiography well into the 1980s (Leszczyński 1956; Baranowski 1986).

More recent approaches have revealed, however, a more nuanced picture of service in the historical Polish territories by pointing out its general resemblance to the north-western European model (Kopczyński 1995; Kamler 2005), as well as its positive life-cycle implications for household formation, at least for males.[18] When it comes to inmates (*komornicy* in Polish; *Hausleute*, *Kammerleute* or *Inwohnern* in German), on the other hand, the specialised literature on the Eastern Central European inmate population stresses a probable non-homogeneous character of this group.

17 The sixteenth-century inventories of villages in Lesser Poland also bring plentiful evidence of servants with a strong life-cycle profile (see Kamler 2005, 42–45).

18 In the previous micro-study of one Upper Silesian community it has been suggested that for disinherited male offspring the time spent in service or lodging (as inmates) in households of non-kin could have possibly played a role on a way towards the formation of a family (Szołtysek 2007, 33–34).

Table 4 : Summary characteristics of male-headed households, Polish rural sample

Region	Mean household size (inmates excl.)	Mean household size (inmates incl.)	Conjugal family units per household (mean)	Mean no.of offspring per hous.	% hous.with coresident kin	Mean no.of kin per hous.	% hous.with servants	Mean no.of servants per hous.	% hous.with inmates	Mean no.of inmates per hous.
REG 1	4.9	5.2	1.1	2.11	17.9	0.23	38.2	0.60	13.1	0.28
REG 2	5.6	6.4	1.1	2.70	21.6	0.24	38.1	0.64	30.4	0.79
REG 3	6.0	7.0	1.2	2.32	26.5	0.38	53.8	1.28	34.9	0.87
REG 4	5.5	6.4	1.2	2.30	17.7	0.22	48.4	0.99	32.8	0.99
REG 5	4.9	4.9	1.0	2.14	10.9	0.14	29.2	0.65	2.7	0.05
REG 7	5.4	6.2	1.1	2.24	23.2	0.35	33	0.73	25.6	0.70
REG 8	4.8	5.1	1.2	2.24	28.1	0.48	28.7	0.49	20.9	0.51
Altogether	5.3	5.9	1.1	2.30	22	0.32	39.2	0.77	24.4	0.65

Source : **Szołtysek & Pasieka**, *CEURFAMFORM Database* . Calculations for columns: (1-2, 4) based on the sample of 70 parishes (14 excluded as unreliable); (3, 5-6) based on all parishes; (7-8) based on data for 75 parishes (9 excluded as unreliable); (9-10) based on data for 81 parishes (3 excluded as unreliable).

***Conjugal family unit (CFU)** is defined as consisting of one of the following groups of people: married couple, married couple with child(ren), widowed or solitary person with child(ren).

Table 5: Summary characteristics of female-headed households, Polish rural sample

Region	Mean household size (inmates excl.)	Mean household size (inmates incl.)	Conjugal family units per household (mean)	Mean no.of offspring per hous.	% hous.with coresident kin	Mean no.of kin per hous.	% hous.with servants	Mean no.of servants per hous.	% hous.with inmates	Mean no.of inmates per hous.
REG 1	3.8	4.2	1.0	2.24	18.8	0.25	22.9	0.33	18.80	0.42
REG 2	3.5	4.3	0.9	2.15	6.3	0.08	20.8	0.29	33.30	0.79
REG 3	2.9	4.1	0.9	1.59	20.5	0.18	15.4	0.21	35.90	1.08
REG 4	3.9	4.9	1.1	2.25	11.4	0.07	30.5	0.59	30.50	0.94
REG 5	2.6	2.6	0.8	0.98	3.4	0.03	13.6	0.59	1.70	0.02
REG 7	3.9	4.3	1.1	2.38	18.8	0.20	14.0	0.28	19.30	0.39
REG 8	3.8	4.2	1.1	2.42	20.0	0.29	25.0	0.33	22.00	0.52
Altogether	3.6	4.2	1.0	2.05	14.4	0.16	21.5	0.41	23.00	0.60

Source : **Szoltysek & Pasieka**, *CEURFAMFORM Database* . Calculations for columns as in table 4.

The inmates might constitute the most socially inferior rural strata, but also those most prone to rely on the "economy of makeshifts" and on various proto-industrial activities (Ogilvie and Cerman 1995; on Poland: Obraniak 1968; Orzechowski 1956, 156; Szołtysek 2003, 36–239).[19] That living as an inmate in a household headed by non-relatives might not have automatically implied poverty, inferiority and severe capability deprivations is also suggested by the age profile of the adult female population of inmates (age 15 and above), 80.1 percent of which was in productive age at the time of census takings (age between 15 and 54). Such a picture is, however, somewhat altered by the fact that 55 percent of the adult women were either lone mothers with children or solitary persons with no relatives in the households they lived in.[20]

However, to reveal the gender dimension of the issues discussed, a comparison of male- and female-headed households must be pursued.[21] Their main characteristics are summarized in Tables 4 and 5.

First, not surprisingly, it appears that female-headed households were significantly smaller than male-headed ones (columns 1 and 2). This difference was larger than a single person on average, indicating that the crucial difference was not only due to the loss of a spouse. On the other hand, the difference between male- and female-headed households (on the regional level) in the mean number of coresiding offspring (column 4) does not seem to be critical. This means that having the same childbearing burden as households headed by married couples, female-headed households could have been less successful in acquiring the labour force necessary to sustain their economic well-being. In the first instance, this seems to be corroborated by the almost twice as small incidence of servants among female-headed households when compared to male-headed ones (column 7). In addition to that (column 8), female heads had significantly

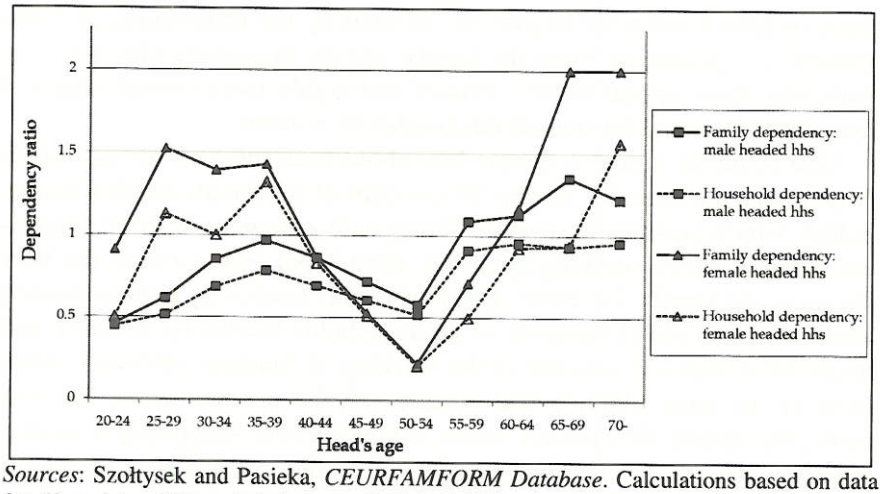
19 Apart from widows and widowers (and also some soldiers), this group comprised some village artisans and workers of the manor (both married and unmarried) who, having no access to landholdings nor possessing separate houses, rented parts of the peasant premises (usually a room) from the landowner in exchange for cash quitrent or some labour duties. No direct information on the social and economic living conditions of the inmate population investigated here, their household functions and work, was given in the censuses.

20 Both estimations based on data for 2,309 individuals from 62 parishes (22 parishes excluded as unreliable).

21 Inmate households are not included in the analysis, and are considered only as a part of main household units.

fewer servants on average (0.41 per one household compared to the male heads: 0.77). That seems to be an indication that female-headed households were less economically viable and therefore more exposed to threats to the well-being of their members.[22] Moreover, it appears that female heads could hardly compensate their labour needs by means of other household members. First, female-headed households had kin less frequently attached to them (14.4 percent compared to 22 percent), and they contained a significantly smaller number of coresiding relatives on average (0.2 per one household compared to 0.32).

Figure 2. Household and family dependency ratios* by age of household head: male- and female-headed households, Polish rural sample, historical Kingdom of Poland (18th century)



Sources: Szołtysek and Pasieka, *CEURFAMFORM Database*. Calculations based on data for 62 parishes (22 excluded as unreliable): 7,386 male-, and 351 female-headed households.

Notes: **Family dependency* is defined as the number of people in the family aged 0–13 and 55 and older ("consumers") to the number aged 14–54. *Household dependency* refers to the corresponding ratio for the household (that is, including servants, but not inmates).

22 However, since some of those female households could potentially get some income from other activities than farming, this does not automatically mean they were poorer than male ones.

Second, although there were almost no differences between male- and female-headed households in terms of the presence of inmates, we must presume that the latter category could hardly satisfy female heads' labour requirements. It is an established fact that in most cases, inmates, although inhabiting the same premises as the head's family, constituted separate production and consumption units (Orzechowski 1959).

A more insightful approach to these issues comes from the application of the concept of family and household dependency ratios (Dribe 2000, 71–79). Although, family and household dependency ratios were almost the same for male- and female-headed households at the aggregate level (respectively: 0.82 and 0.68 compared to 0.81 and 0.70), these measures had an important life-cycle character (Figure 2). While male-headed households were able to avoid the most unfavourable dependency situation for the larger part of their development, and were trapped in it only once their heads had passed the age of 55, female-headed households seem to have been more negatively affected by the proportions of "consumers" to "producers" over the family and the household life-cycles. In particular, there appear to have existed two highly inconvenient stages of family development for households headed by women.

One occurred before a female household head attained the age of 40 (which was the case for almost 30 per cent of all female-headed households), which presumably implied living with a large number of dependent children below working age. The second took place during the later stages of the family life-cycle with households headed by elderly women above 60 years old (15 percent of all households headed by women), and might have been the outcome of the working of "nuclear hardship", when most of the adult children had already left the parental home. In both cases, the family dependency ratios reached levels suggesting a serious possible threat to the family's standard of living. Surprisingly, however, female-headed households were relatively successful in offsetting unfavourable changes in family dependency comparing to male-headed ones. During both aforementioned stages of the life-cycle, the differences between family and household dependency ratios are clearly marked, accounting for a significant effect of substitution of family labour for hired servants. Still, more than the half of all female-headed households in Figure 2, those with heads aged 40–59 years, were able to keep household dependency at reasonably low levels, even compared to households headed by males. Interestingly, that happened almost exclusively through

the utilization of an excess supply of family labour. This inevitably tells us a great deal about women's efficiency in household-labour strategies.[23]

We can summarize by saying that there were several structural characteristics of female-headed households in historical Polish territories which could have actually made them less advantaged in satisfying their labour needs and possibly their well-being. These were a similar childbearing burden but smaller available labour power; a lower incidence of servants among female headed households; less frequent attachment of kin to households as well as a lower average number of kin. Again, this seems to corroborate the idea that there was a negative relationship between the quality of life and various characteristics of female-headed households under the rules of the "second serfdom". This picture, however, must be adjusted considering the relative efficiency of female-headed households in coping with unfavourable family dependency ratios. Female-headed households appear to have been quite capable of sustaining their subsistence level by using various labour strategies.

The subsistence level, however, was not the only thing female heads had to worry about. The well-being of households headed by women should be more properly viewed in terms of their labour capacity in relation to the amount of arable land they possessed and, most of all, with regard to the whole variety of feudal obligations imposed on the household unit. Village court rolls from early modern Poland provide accounts of cases of widows who were unable in the long run to render the required labour duties and pay the household's tax burden, and therefore decided to resign the headship and to sell off the land.[24] We may hypothesize, then, that although female-headed households could be quite effective in their struggle to survive (that is, in keeping the household's subsistence at a reasonable level), they were more vulnerable in their attempts to retain their social position within the structure of village society.

23 But does not neccessarily suggest an overall positive effect on female-headed households' well-being. See more in the following paragraph.

24 See, for example: Vetulani 1957 (entries no. 106, 182, 224, 234). That was, however, by no means exclusively the experience of female-headed households (see *ibid.*, entry no. 173).

Gendered Well-Being through Time: Life-Course Perspectives

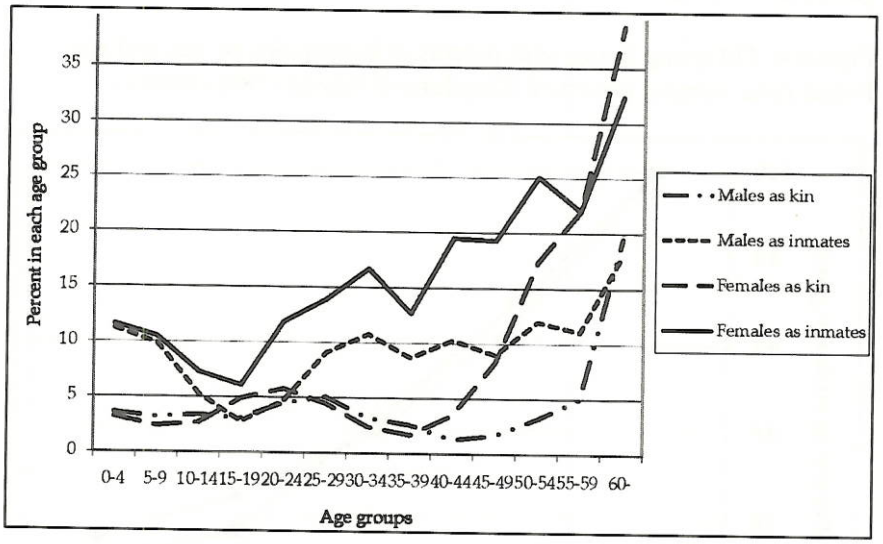
Well-being was not a constant attribute of individuals; rather, it was liable to change over the course of time. This could happen either because a family to which one belonged went through different phases of its developmental cycle (Chayanov 1966; Rowntree 2000 [1901]), or because the individual himself or herself passed through various "statuses" of the life-cycle (Hareven 1978). The almost exclusively cross-sectional character of the sample investigated here offers only very limited means of dealing with the development of the structure of domestic groups over the family life-cycle, not to mention with individuals' life transitions. However, a synthetic cohort approach, introduced to historical studies of family composition by Berkner (Berkner 1972) and subsequently popularized by a number of Cambridge-based scholars (Wall 1987) provides a possible, if partial, solution to these limitations. Equipped with this tool, we may ask how women's position in the household changed over the life-course, and we can hypothesize some general implications of these changes for their well-being.

In Figure 3, sex differentials in the person's household position are given according to the individual's relationship to the household head. They are, however, restricted to categories of coresident inmates and non-nuclear kin alone. The rationale behind this is the idea that changes in proportions for these two categories across the life-span say something crucial about the capability sets of alternatives which males and females enjoyed under the second serfdom.[25] This analysis is undertaken under the assumption that proportions for the first category mentioned above (inmates) may be indicative of a somewhat weakened social position for an individual, whereas membership changes in the second (non-nuclear kin) may define one's position with respect to the feasibility of family welfare (Laslett 1988; Oris and Ochiai 2002).[26]

25 "Capability set of alternatives" is defined as an individual's freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations (see Sen 1999, 74-75).

26 This seems to be in accordance with peasants' own perception of the status of "inmates" *(komornicy)*. At least on some occasions, peasants did their best not to have their immediate kin 'fall into maltreatement in the nooks of somebody else's houses' (see Płaza 1969, entry no. 708). Sometimes, living as an inmate (in *komorne*) was a

Figure 3. Sex differentials in the position in the household by relationship to household head, Polish rural sample, historical Kingdom of Poland (18th century)



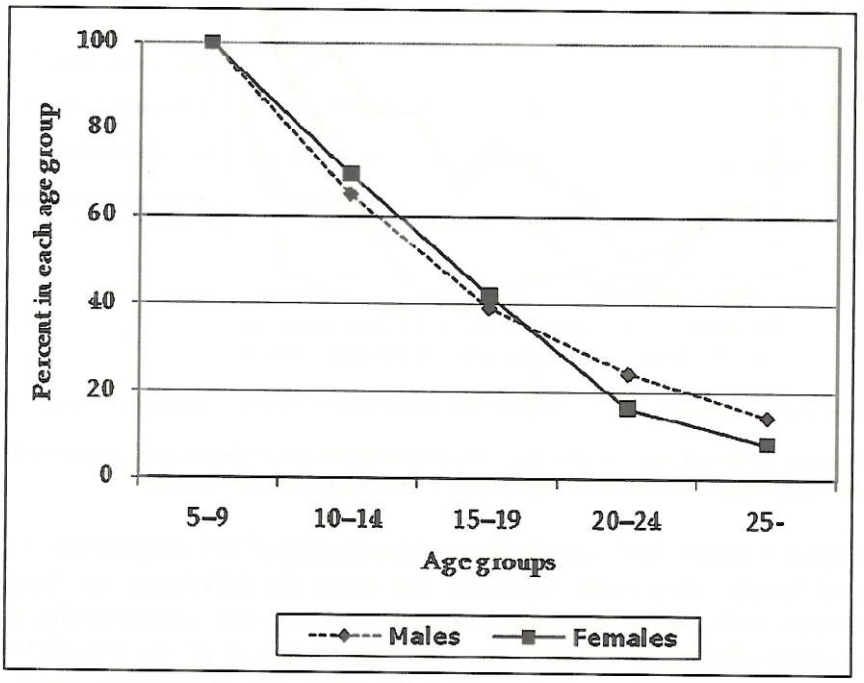
Sources: Szołtysek and Pasieka, *CEURFAMFORM Database*. Calculations based on data for 62 parishes (22 excluded as unreliable): 3,089 males, and 4,644 females.

Figure 3 reveals fairly clearly three critical points of difference in the male and female life-courses. Until the late teens the differences are hardly visible, with roughly the same proportions of men and women having the position of inmates and kin. Then, around the age of 20, the female life-course pattern starts to diverge from the male one. At the same age as a large proportion of men went into service (see next paragraph), a significant proportion of females aged 20–35 became inmates. This proportion had a tendency to increase steadily after the age of 39. In a way, this figure provides evidence of a world of unequal socioeconomic and institutional opportunities for the sexes. From the age of 40 onwards, another discrepancy between men and women appears, as it was mostly females who predominated among kin coresiding in the households of relatives

last resort for solitary women. Those not fortunate enough to afford it were sometimes exposed to the most humiliating living conditions (see Vetulani 1957, entry no. 214). However, one must keep in mind the remarks made above regarding the diverse characteristics of the inmate population.

during later stages of life. This feature may have certain implications for understanding the extent to which the "nuclear hardship" mechanism suggested by Peter Laslett operated in these communities (Laslett 1988).

Figure 4: Offspring living with parents in households by sex and age, Polish rural sample, historical Kingdom of Poland (18th century)



Sources: Szołtysek and Pasieka, *CEURFAMFORM Database*. Offspring of living-in inmates included. Calculations based on data for 54 parishes (30 excluded as less reliable): 7,057 males, and 6,506 females.

The timing of the departure of young adults from the parental home as well as the routes they took out of the home in the transition to adulthood are another two issues potentially informative about the framework within which individual well-being was determined. In a first step, a very simple measure of the speed of exit from the parental home is provided; by counting the number offspring aged 10–14, 15–19 and so on, relative to the number aged 5–9. Although this method can tell us nothing about the precise age of leaving the parental home and should obviously be adjusted

by making allowance for deaths occurring during the teens (Wall 1987, 91), it is helpful in discerning general patterns in the population.

As Figure 4 indicates, depletion of the offspring group occurred at almost the same pace for males and females until the late teens. During that part of the life-cycle the whole process was rather abrupt for male and female offspring alike, and there can be little doubt that adolescence was characterised by a large-scale movement away from parental home quite independently of gender. Again, at some point around the age of 20, male and female life-courses began to diverge, increasing the pace at which young women found themselves on the road to independence.

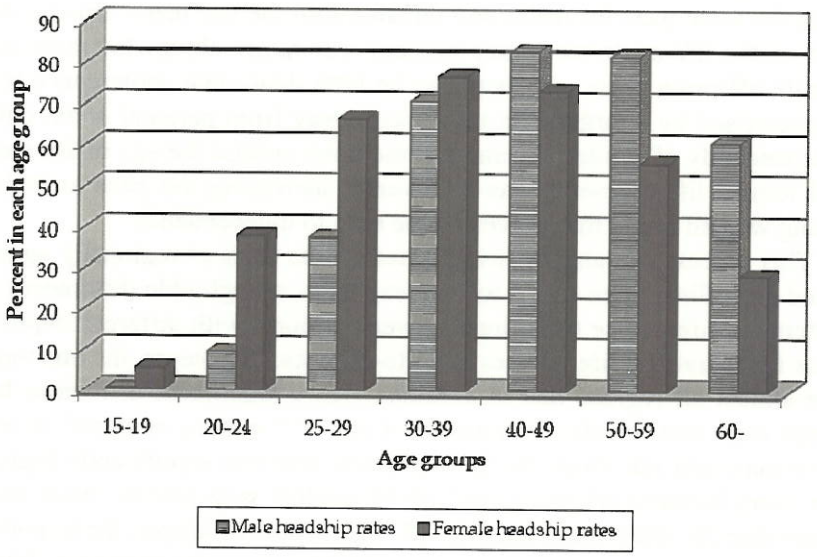
This process can also be investigated on the basis of regionally aggregated data. First, there seems to have existed non-negligible differences in patterns of life-course transitions between regions, with different implications for individual life-choices and life-chances.[27] However, the one thing that almost all regions had in common was a significant difference between male and female exit rates. In 4 out of 7 regions analyzed, it was the female exit rate from the parental home that was significantly higher. For every hundred offspring aged 10-14 resident with parents, there were fewer than 50 still present aged 15-19. This seems to support the hypothesis already advanced: as far as rural conditions from the historical Polish territories of the late serfdom period are concerned, it appears that daughters and not sons were the first to leave the parental home.[28]

What routes did males and females take out of home in the transition to adulthood? Obviously, many females left the parental home to exercise the responsibilities associated with the running of a husband's household. Women came to exercise these house holding responsibilities much earlier than men (Figure 5), and for approximately 5 percent of the female population it already took place within a few years after the age of puberty. During the life stages which, from the point of view of household formation, were most formative, that is 20–24 and 25–29, there were respectively four and almost two times more household heads among women than men.

27 Exit rates (number of offspring aged 15–19 as a percentage of number of offspring aged 10–14) ranged from 48.9 to 85.4 percent for males, and from 50 to 76.6 percent for females (source of calculations the same as in fig. 3). On the method, see Wall 1987, 90–91.

28 Regional differences in this regard may arise either from different inheritance patterns, or – more probably – from specifities of local ecotypes (Mitterauer 1992).

Figure 5. Headship rates by sex and age-group, Polish rural sample, historical Kingdom of Poland (18th century)



Sources: Szołtysek and Pasieka, *CEURFAMFORM Database*. Calculations based on data for 69 parishes (15 excluded as less reliable): 14,989 males, and 14,879 females.
Headship rates defined as percentage of population of each sex heading a household or married to household head.

To the extent that headship, defined in this way, does measure the achievement of adult status, women entered earlier into "full adulthood" than did men in all regions. Whether this can be taken as an indicator of women's early attainment of high levels of well-being, however, is disputable. Leaving apart many other issues, we may point out that early entry into headship position might have constrained female opportunities for pre-marital accumulation of goods, and therefore might have substantially weakened their bargaining power in gender relations within family after marriage (Hartman 2004).[29]

Other noteworthy points include trends in headship over the later stages of the life-cycle (Wall 1987). In this regard, a great discrepancy in

29 There is also a close connection between women's well-being and the adverse effects of high birth-rates (Sen 1999, p. 198). The populations investigated here were traditionally considered as following the pattern of "natural" – or unrestricted – fertility well into the beginning of the twentieth century. See Gieysztorowa 1976, p. 133.

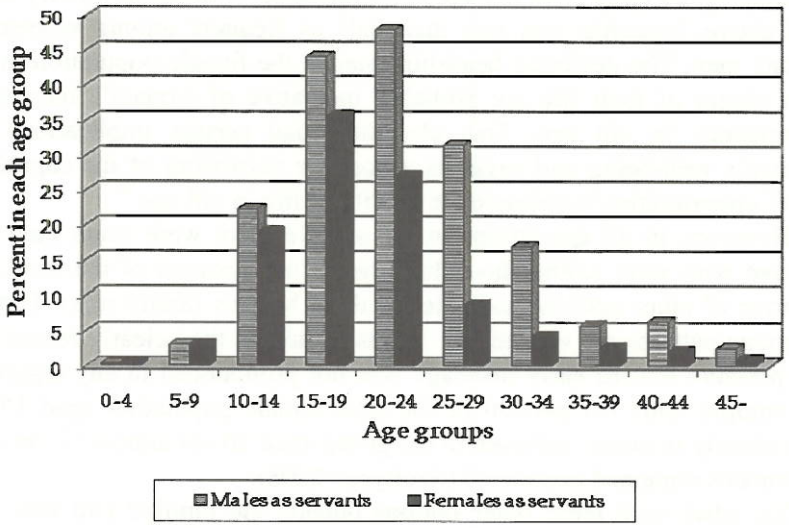
male and female living conditions shows up: while among males high headship rates were retained well into the 60s, female headship started to decline significantly from the age of 40 onwards. Among the elderly of 60 and above, headship was less than half as frequent among women as among men. The declining headship rates in the female population in the later stages of their life are probably indicative of women's increasing dependency in old age. This obviously had certain implications for women's well-being and suggests a possible narrowing of the capability set of opportunities to enhance the quality of life in old age.[30]

However, in all age-groups in the sample there were some men and women who were neither household heads nor spouses of the head, indicative of other options available for them besides family roles. Female marriage patterns are very telling in this regard, as they clearly reveal that the pressure toward early marriage was not pronounced in any region of the sample: only 6.7 percent of the total female population aged 15–19 was already married, and even in the group aged 20–24 almost 57 per cent of females remained unmarried (Szołtysek 2008).

So, what were these other options outside the family? Did men and women take advantage of them to the same extent? These questions lead us back inevitably to the issue of service. First, there is a clear life-cycle pattern in the age distribution of servants, among both the male and the female sub-population (Figure 6). This indicates that for men and women alike, being a servant was not a life-long condition, but rather a contractual, life-cycle experience. It started quite early in one's life course, for roughly one fifth of the male and female population between the ages of 10 and 14.

30 Declining headship rates among females would have inevitably worked in that direction unless the standard of living of women giving up headship was safeguarded by detailed retirement contracts. Village court rolls from southern Poland provide a wealth of material indicating quite extensive welfare provision for retiring household heads, including widows.

Figure 6. Proportions of servants by age and sex, Polish rural sample, historical Kingdom of Poland (18th century)

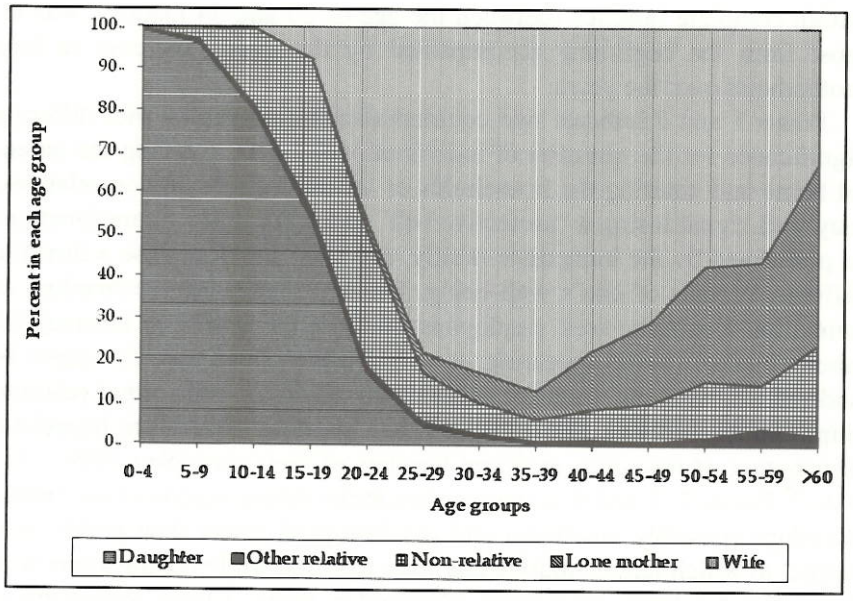


Sources: Szołtysek and Pasieka, *CEURFAMFORM Database*. Calculations based on data for 62 (22 excluded as less reliable): 23,484 males and 23,252 females.

For both sexes, the proportion of servants increased up to the late teens, but after that, they began to drop significantly for females. During the late 20s and early 30s, when a non-negligible proportion of males could still be found in service, there were only one-tenth to one-twentieth as many women active on the labour market. To some extent, this was probably compensated for by the proportions of women active as inmates, but this does not change the overall picture of rather constrained earning and labour capabilities for women outside the parental or conjugal family when compared to men.

A final exercise may shed some more light on the picture of women's residential and socioeconomic opportunities (Figure 7). In this case, all individuals listed in households were classified according to whether they were or were not members of a core family group, defined as including unmarried children resident with at least one parent, married couples, and lone parents.

Figure 7. Relationships within households, females, Polish rural sample, historical Kingdom of Poland (18th century)



Sources: Szołtysek and Pasieka, *CEURFAMFORM Database*. Calculations based on data for 68 parishes (16 excluded as less reliable): 22,623 females.

All persons who were not members of core families were classified according to whether they lived with relatives, with non-relatives only, or alone (the focus is on the female population only) (Figure 7).[31]

The most distinctive features of the pattern revealed can be briefly summarized as follows: (1) there was a very marked gradual departure of female offspring from the parental home – almost completed before the age of 25; (2) female coresidence with non-relatives occurred during almost all stages of the individual life course, but with a slightly higher prevalence during the late teens and early adulthood, and then again after completion of reproductive activity; (3) living with relatives in the absence of other close family ties was spread across a number of different stages of the female life-cycle, but was restricted to a minority of women

31 Contrary to the previous exercises, in this case the relatives have been identified not by their relationship to the household head but by their relationship with *any* household member (including inmates) in the absence of closer family ties (Wall 1998).

in particular age-groups; it slightly grew in importance among some elderly women; (4) a relatively short period of functioning in family roles within complete families (between the age of 25 and 54 mainly), was almost from the beginning accompanied by the steady increase in lone motherhood over the years.

Points 1 and 2 indicate two counterbalancing processes with differing significance for the question of individual well-being. Leaving the parental home and entering the households of others (very often non-relatives) may well signal losing a "protective belt" in the form of welfare functions as performed by the immediate family, and may therefore pose a threat to different aspects of one's well-being. On the other hand, the freedom of unmarried women to seek employment outside the family by entering the labour market (those appearing as non-relatives in Figure 7) cannot be understated, as it put young females at the centre of contractual relationships and transactions, and enhanced their position in the intra household distribution of resources in future families of their own (Sen 1999, 115–116).[32] Points 2, 3 and 4 in conjunction make strong argument for certain hardships (possibly emotional and psychological rather than purely economic) to which female individuals were exposed while coping alone with their everyday lives. As women advanced in years, a large proportion of them (at least 40 percent of those aged 50 and above) had neither spouses nor kin or children as sources of support in old age.[33] Generally speaking, what the structural patterns in Figure 7 may suggest is a clear life-cycle effect on female well-being.

32 However, some other scholars (Izydorczyk-Kamler and Wyczański 1990, 278–281) revealed the very competitive nature of a market for hired labour, in which female servants were usually less successful than male ones in meeting their goals when it came to the wages they received (on the basis of data for southwestern Poland, 1530–1636).

33 Because of a clear life-cycle pattern in the age distribution of servants discussed above, it is assumed that coresidence with non-relatives at later stages of one's life was almost exclusively related with possessing the status of an inmate *(komornik)*.

Gendered Well-Being through Time: the Results of a Micro-Study

As we reach the limits of socio-structural analysis based on a cross-sectional approach, I would like in this final section to come back to the issue of the benefits of analyzing female headship in a more dynamic way. The data presented in the following paragraphs comes from a micro-investigation of one Polish-speaking community in Prussian Upper Silesia at the end of the eighteenth century (Szołtysek 2003; 2004; 2007). Its significance for the subject of this essay is twofold: first, the study focuses on a population which existed under strict manorial control typical of the second serfdom; second, households and individuals could be followed through fifteen sequential census-type "communion books", allowing more dynamic aspects of female headship to be revealed.

There were 25 widows registered as household heads in the parish during the period of study (1766–1803). The average duration of their remaining in charge of the headship was slightly less than two and a half years, which still seems high if we take into consideration that under the prevailing normative rules, widowed women were supposed to head households only very temporarily (Orzechowski 1959). Moreover, the duration of female headship ranged from one and a half months to as much as eight years (changes in position of the women include remarriage, retirement, translocation, or death). Roughly speaking, more than one third of these women were in charge of households for longer than two years. Those retaining the headship for even longer were older than those who held that position for a shorter period of time. This is surprising, for one would expect precisely the former category to show evidence of manorial intervention into their household choices (Kula 1976). One can observe, however, that widows keeping the headship for longer than one year appeared much more seldom in the case of large farmers than in the case of smallholders. Remarriages of widows accompanied by a transfer of headship to their husbands usually occurred before one and a half years had elapsed. In most but not all cases this transpired if there was no adult son or daughter's husband in the household (Szołtysek 2004).

Moreover, a widow's decision to hand over the farm did not necessarily imply relinquishing any future matrimonial plans. This was the case

for Sophia Swoboda, widow of a smallholder and weaver, who held the household headship for two and a half years after her husband's death. In 1797, the son took over the farm just after his marriage, but in the next year the widow also remarried, staying in the household as *Auszüglerin* (retired household head).

In addition to that, some family stories discernible from household lists and parish registers suggest a further significance of female agency and women's empowerment despite the normative structures of the 'second serfdom'. Because of the limited space available, only one case must suffice to shed light on these issues.

The family in question held a large farmstead in the village of Paniowki, in which the widow ruled for at least seven years after her husband's death in 1759 (Szołtysek 2003, 289–290). Left with two preadolescent children (a daughter of 10 years and an 8-year-old son), the female-headed household presumably had a high demand for the labour power needed for cultivation of the land and rendering the compulsory labour dues. In response to that demand, a servant was hired by the widow, a male who within the year became the husband of the now 17-year-old daughter of the widow. Through the coresidence of the two conjugal family units under one roof (widow and her son, plus daughter with son-in-law), this household governed by a widowed woman was able not only to increase its labour capacity, but also to reduce its expenditures (through inclusion of the male servant in the family labour group). Notwithstanding that, a year later, the widow herself brought her second husband into the household and the couple together ruled over the farmstead for the next five years. The original female head gave up the headship to her son-in-law only after her second husband's death.

The extent to which the landlord could have actually interfered in the strategic actions taken by the female-headed household described above is not stated in the sources. Nor is the potentially important role of other kin, neighbours, and the local bailiff.[34] However, it is hard to believe that such a successful managing of the large farm by a woman would be possible in a community environment lacking in any recognition and acknowledgement (even if partial and conditional) of the importance of female

34 On the key role of the village headman (German *Scholtz*; Polish *sołtys*) among Bohemian serf communities, see Ogilvie 2005.

agency.[35] Allowing women to act as responsible and reliable persons meant giving them the chance to choose a life style they had reason to value.[36]

Conclusion

The population we have investigated in this essay came from a region traditionally considered as unfavourable for the development of women's independence and for the enhancement of their capability set. To a large extent, the analysis carried out here has brought to light a mixture of pros and cons with regard to that picture.

First, it has been revealed that female headship was, on average, rare across almost all investigated regions in this large sample. With a great degree of certainty it may be stated that in the pre-industrial rural communities of historical Poland female-headed households constituted only very marginal phenomena in socioeconomic and family life in most of the populations in question.

The analysis of sex ratios in specific categories of household members revealed females' earlier exit from parental home. This in turn produced a two-fold result. On the one hand, young women were expelled earlier and

35 That is also reflected in the extent to which widows' welfare in old age was protected by means of retirement contracts – widespread among rural families of Upper Silesia well into the 1920s (see County Court Archive in Żory, *Grundacten von Klein Paniow*).

36 Kula's normative model of relationships between the landlords and peasant families – and women governing households in particular (Kula 1976), appears too mechanistic when the evidence revealing actual practices of rural classes is scrutinized. Widows resigning the headship can actually be found in existing village court rolls from southern Poland. However, the circumstances surrounding these events run counter the usual assumptions about the nature of landlord-peasant interactions. Not only were female widowed heads buying and selling land, but also their decision to give up the headship seemed to be dictated by purely economic concerns, rather than having resulted from the landlord's interventionist policy (see for example: Płaza 1969, 59, 587, 589, 675, 688, 695, 698, 721, 755). However, only partial observations are offered here, and they cannot be taken as fully supporting a theory of "communal autonomy" of serf communities; see the discussion of the issue in Ogilvie 2001; 2005.

at a faster pace from the provision of family welfare than men. On the other, leaving the parental home earlier and more abruptly opened up prospects for entering the market for hired labour and for getting acquainted with contractual labour relationships to a much greater extent. Female chances on the labour market still may not have been equal to male, however. It has been shown that the majority of the young rural labour forces recruited in the form of life-cycle servants in this society was male, and the surplus of male over female servants shows up strongly across the whole sample. The extent to which women's chances for well-being might have actually been compensated for by living in kin-related households or by engaging in various coping strategies subsumed under the "economy of makeshifts" is not unambiguously clear.

The comparison of male- with female-headed households reveals that the latter were generally smaller and, more importantly, less economically viable. As a consequence, they were more exposed to various threats against the well-being of their members. However, scanty evidence we have at our disposal seems to suggest that the cross-sectional character of the data can actually mask some important time-variant changes which may have helped to sustain and even to extend the well-being of female-headed households. That women as household heads were not solely the victims of economic and demographic constraints imposed on them is also revealed by the fact that female-headed households were more successful in offsetting unfavourable changes in family dependency compared to male-headed ones. Local variations would be of prime importance in determining the sustainability of households headed by women over time.

Time, again, would be an important factor determining women's well-being for other reasons as well. The evidence presented, both aggregated and localized, suggests a significant life-cycle effect on female well-being: the older the women were, the more exposed they found themselves to forces endangering the stability of their residential patterns, and the more threatened their well-being appeared to be.

To sum up: if we do not want to restrict ourselves to advocating further and more comprehensive research on the subject, then what is already known suggests that women's economic position in the rural areas of historical Poland was affected adversely rather than favorably by the manorial institutions of the second serfdom. Consequently, these institutions

must be regarded as having a negative influence on female well-being.[37] However, the most serious limitation of the approach presented here is inherent in the very nature of historical accounts of the subjective experiences of individuals in the past. As many standard measures of well-being were developed on the basis of observation of Western (post-) industrialized societies (Robeyns 2003), they may not be fully applicable to understand historical agents. If "capability" is taken to represent the alternative combinations of things a person (a woman particularly, in this context) is able to do or be – the various "functionings" he or she can achieve (Sen 1993, 30) – then a careful and constant effort is required on the part of the researcher in order not to impose our own value systems on historical agents. Although it would be hard to dismiss all universalist accounts of central human functions and capabilities (e.g. such as the ability to live to old age in dignity) (Nussbaum 2000, 5; Robeyns 2003, 74, 76–77), people of the past were mostly silent about their subjective preferences.

After all, the past is a foreign country.

References

ALTER, George, MANFREDINI, Mateo and NYSTEDT, Paul, 2004, "Gender Differences in Mortality", in Tommy BENGTSSON, Cameron CAMPBELL and James LEE (eds), *Life Under Pressure: Mortality and Living Standards in Europe and Asia, 1700–1900,* Cambridge (Mass.), MIT University Press, pp. 173–208.

ARRIZABALAGA, Marie-Pierre, 2007, "Household organization as an indicator of individual well-being from a gender perspective in the Western Pyrénées", Paper presented at the COST ACTION A34 First Symposium, "Well-being as a Social Gendered Process", Modena, Italy, 26–28 June, 2006.

BARANOWSKI, Bogdan, 1986, "*Ludzie gościńca w XVII–XVII w.*", Łódź, Wydawnictwo Łódzkie.

BECK, Rainer, 2001, "Traces of emotion? Marital discord in early modern Bavaria", in Richard WALL, Tamara K. HAREVEN and Josef EHMER (eds), *Family History Revisited. Comparative Perspectives*, Newark, University of Delaware, pp. 135–160.

37 Time, however, may verify that picture as more comprehensive investigation of existing qualitative evidence from the historical Poland will eventually advance in the future.

BEREND, Ivan T. and RÁNKI, György, 1982, *The European Periphery and Industrialisation, 1780–1914*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

BERKNER, Lutz K., 1972, "The stem family and the developmental cycle of the peasant household: an eighteenth-century Austrian example", *The American Historical Review*, 77, 2, pp. 398–418.

BOGUCKA, Maria, 1990, "Women and economic life in the Polish cities during the 16th–17th centuries", in Simonetta CAVACIOCCHI (ed.), *La donna nell'economia secc. XIII–XVIII*, Prato, Istituto Internazionale di storia economica Francesco Datini, pp. 185–194.

BRAUDEL, Fernand, 1985, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th–18th Century*; vol. 3, *The Perspective of the World*, translated from the French by S. Reynolds, Berkeley, University of California Press.

BRENNER, Robert, 1989, "Economic Backwardness in Eastern Europe in Light of Developments in the West", in Daniel CHIROT (ed.), *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe,* Berkeley, University of California Press, pp. 15–52.

CERMAN, Marcus, 1999, "Serfdom and family". Paper presented to the Conference "Household and family in past time", Palma de Mallorca, 9–11 September, 1999.

–, 2008, "Social structure and land markets in late medieval central and east-central Europe", *Continuity and Change*, 23, 1, pp. 55–100.

CHAYANOV, Alexander V., 1966, *The Theory of Peasant Economy*, Homewood, Irwin.

CUMMINS, Robert A., 2005, "Moving from the quality of life concept to a theory", *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 49, 10, pp. 699–706.

CZAP, Peter, 1983, "A large family: The peasant's greatest wealth: Serf households in Mishino, Russia, 1814–1858", in Richard WALL, Jean ROBIN, and Peter LASLETT (eds), *Family Forms in Historic Europe,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 105–151.

DAS GUPTA, Monica, 1999, "Lifeboat versus corporate ethic: social and demographic implications of stem and joint families", *Social Science and Medicine,* 49, 2, pp. 173–84.

DRIBE, Martin, 2000, *Leaving Home in a Peasant Society. Economic Fluctuations, Household Dynamics and Youth Migration in Southern Sweden, 1829–1866*, Lund, Lund Studies in Economic History.

FAUVE-CHAMOUX, Antoinette, 1983, "The importance of women in an urban environment: the example of the Rheims household at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution", in Richard WALL, Jean ROBIN, and Peter LASLETT (eds), *Family Forms in Historic Europe,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 475–492.

–, 2002, "Widows and their living arrangements in preindustrial France", *History of the Family*, 7, 1, pp. 101–116.

FELCE, David and PERRY, Jonathan, 1995, "Quality of Life: Its Definition and Measurement", *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 16, 1, pp. 51–74.

GIEYSZTOROWA, Irena, 1976, *Wstęp do demografii staropolskiej*, Warszawa, PWN.

GREEN, David R. and OWENS, Alastair (eds), 2004, *Gender, Property and Inheritance since the Seventeenth Century*, Westport, Praeger.

GUZOWSKI, Piotr, 2007, "Marriage strategies and inheritance system in Polish peasant families in the 15th–17th centuries". Paper presented at the COST ACTION A34 Second Symposium "The Transmission of Well-Being: Marriage Strategies and Inheritance Systems in Europe (17th–20th Centuries)", University of Minho, Guimarães, Portugal, 25–28 April, 2007.

HAGEN, William W., 1998, "Village Life in East-Elbian Germany and Poland, 1400–1800", in Tom SCOTT (ed.), *The Peasantries of Europe: From the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Century* London, Longman, pp. 145–190.

HAJNAL, John, 1982, "Two kinds of preindustrial household formation system", *Population and Development Review*, 8, 3, pp. 449–494.

HAMMEL, Eugene A. and LASLETT, Peter, 1974, "Comparing household structure over time and between cultures", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 16, 1, pp. 73–109.

HAREVEN, Tamara K., 1978, "Family history and the life-course", in Tamara K. Hareven (ed.), *Transitions: the Family and the Life-Course in Historical Perspective*, New York, Academic Press, pp. 17–64.

HARTMANN, Mary S., 2004, *The Household and the Making of History. A Subversive View of the Western Past*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

HØRNQUIST, Jan Olof, 1989, "Quality of life: concept and assessment", *Scandinavian Journal of Social Medicine*, 18, 1, pp. 69–79.

IZYDORCZYK-KAMLER, Anna and WYCZANSKI, Andrzej, 1990, "La femme et l'économie rurale en Pologne aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles", in Simonetta CAVACIOCCHI (ed.), *La donna nell'economia secc. XIII–XVIII*, Prato, Istituto Internazionale di storia economica Francesco Datini, pp. 275–282.

KAMLER, Anna, 2005, *Chłopi jako pracownicy najemni na wsi małopolskiej w XVI i w pierwszej połowie XVII wieku*, Warszawa, Jacek i Krzysztof Olesiuk.

KASER, Karl, 2002, "Power and inheritance: male domination, property and family in Eastern Europe, 1500–1900", *History of the Family*, 7, 3, pp. 375–395.

KERTZER, David I., HOGAN, Dennis P., and KARWEIT, Nancy, 1992, "Kinship beyond the household in a nineteenth-century Italian town", *Continuity and Change*, 7, 1, pp. 103–121.

KOPCZYŃSKI, Michał, 1995, "Służba na wsi kujawskiej u schyłku XVIII wieku", in Anna ŻARNOWSKA (ed.), *Pamiętnik XV Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich, vol. 2*, Gdańsk-Toruń, pp. 67–77.

KUKLO, Cezary, 1998, *Kobieta samotna w społeczeństwie miejskim u schyłku Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej. Studium demograficzno-społeczne*, Białystok, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku.

KULA, Witold, 1976, "The Seigneury and the Peasant Family in Eighteenth-Century Poland", in Robert FOSTER and Orest RANUM (eds), *Family and Society. Selection from the "Annales. Economies, Societes, Civilisations"*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 192–203.

LASLETT, Peter, 1983, "Family and household as work group and kin group: areas of traditional Europe compared", in Richard WALL, Jean ROBIN and Peter LASLETT (eds), *Family Forms in Historic Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 513–563.

–, 1988, "Family, kinship and collectivity as systems of support in preindustrial Europe: a consideration of the 'nuclear-hardship hypothesis'", *Continuity and Change*, 3, 2, pp. 152–175.

–, 2000 [1965], *The World We Have Lost Further Explored*, London, Methuen.

LASLETT, Peter, WACHTER, Kenneth W., and LASLETT, Robert, 1978, "The English evidence on household structure compared with the outcomes of microsimulation", in Kenneth W. WACHTER, Eugene A. HAMMEL and Peter LASLETT (eds), *Statistical Studies of Historical Social Structure*, New York, Academic Press, pp. 65–87.

LESZCZYŃSKI, J., 1956, "Ludzie luźni i czeladź najemna na Śląsku w pierwszym dziesięcioleciu po wojnie trzydziestoletniej", *Sobótka*, 11, 4, 513–580.

ŁUKASIEWICZ, Dariusz, 1995, *Czarna legenda Polski: obraz Polski i Polaków w Prusach 1772–1815*, Poznań, PTPN.

MCNAY, Kirsty, HUMPHRIES, Jane and KLASEN, Stephan, 2005, "Excess female mortality in nineteenth-century England and Wales", *Social Science History*, 29, 4, pp. 649–681.

MELTON, Edgar, 1998, "Population structure, the market economy, and the transformation of Gutsherrschaft in East Central Europe, 1650–1800: the cases of Brandemburg and Bohemia", *German History*, 16, 3, pp. 297–327.

MIRONOV, Boris N., 1996, "When and why was the Russian peasantry emancipated?", in Michael L. BUSH (ed.), *Serfdom and Slavery: Studies in Legal Bondage*, New York, Longman, pp. 323–347.

MITTERAUER, Michael, 1999, "Ostkolonisation und Familienverfassung. Zur Diskussion um die Hajnal-Linie", in Vincenc RAJŠP and Ernst BRUCKMÜLLER (eds), *Vilfanov zbornik. Pravo-zgodovina-narod. In memoriam Sergij Vilfan*, Ljubljana, ZRC, pp. 203–221.

–, 1992, "Peasant and non-peasant family forms in relation to the physical environment and the local economy", *Journal of Family History*, 17, 2, pp. 139–159.

MORING, Beatrice, 2002, "Widowhood options and strategies in preindustrial northern Europe. Socioeconomic differences in household position of the widowed in 18th and 19th century Finland", *History of the Family*, 7, 1, pp. 79–99.

NUSSBAUM, Martha C., 2000, *Women and Human Development. The Capabilities Approach*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

OBRANIAK, W., 1968, "Sytuacja demograficzna komorników i czeladzi chłopskiej w wieluńskiem w końcu XVIII wieku", *Przeszłość Demograficzna Polski*, 2, pp. 109–117.

OCHIAI, Emiko (ed.), 2002, *The Logic of Female Succession: Rethinking Patriarchy and Patrilineality in Global and Historical Perspective*, Kyoto, International Research for Japanese Studies.

OGILVIE, Sheilagh, 2001, "The Economic World of the Bohemian Serf: Economic Concepts, Preferences and Constraints on the Estate of Friedland, 1583–1692", *Economic History Review*, 54, 3, pp. 430–453.

–, 2005, "Village community and village headmen in Early Modern Bohemia", *Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der böhmischen Länder*, 46, 2, pp. 402–451.

OGILVIE, Sheilagh and EDWARDS, Jeremy, 2000, "Women and the 'second serfdom': evidence from Early Modern Bohemia", *The Journal of Economic History*, 60, 4, pp. 961–994.

OGILVIE, Sheilagh and CERMAN, Markus, 1995, "The Bohemian Census of 1651 and the Position of Inmates", *Social History/Histoire Sociale*, 28, pp. 333–346.

ORIS, Michel and OCHIAI, Emiko, 2002, "Family crisis in the context of different family systems: frameworks and evidence on 'When dad died'", in Renzo DEROSAS and Michel ORIS (eds), *When Dad Died: Individuals and Families Coping with Family Stress in Past Societies* Bern, Peter Lang, pp. 17–81.

ORZECHOWSKI, Kazimierz, 1956, "Uwagi o komornikach na Górnym Śląsku u schyłku epoki feudalnej", *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego*, 6, Seria A, pp. 119–160.

–, 1959, *Chłopskie posiadanie na Górnym Śląsku u schyłku epoki feudalnej, Studium historyczno-prawne*, Wrocław, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.

PLAKANS, Andrzej, 1975, "Seigneurial authority and peasant family life: the Baltic area in the eighteenth century", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 5, 4, pp. 629–654.

PŁAZA, Stanisław (ed.), 1969, *Księga sądowa wsi Iwkowej, 1581–1809*, Wrocław, Ossolineum.

ROBEYNS, Ingrid, 2003, "Sen's capability approach and gender inequality: selecting relevant capabilities", *Feminist Economics*, 9, 2–3, pp. 61–92.

ROWNTREE, Benjamin Seebohm, 2000 [1901], *Poverty. A Study of Town Life*, Bristol, Policy Press/Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

SABEAN, David W., 1990, *Property, Production, and Family in Neckerhausen, 1700–1870*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

SCHULTE, Renate, 1984, "Infanticide in rural Bavaria in the nineteenth century", in Hans MEDICK and David W. SABEAN (eds), *Interest and Emotion. Essays on the Study of Family and Kinship,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 77–102.

SECCOMBE, Wally, 1990, "Starting to stop: working class fertility decline in Britain", *Past and Present*, 126, 1, pp. 151–188.

SEN, Amartia K., 1993, "Capability and well-being", in Martha C. NUSSBAUM and Amartia K. SEN (eds), *The Quality of Life*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 30–53.

–, 1999, *Development as Freedom*, New York, Anchor Books.

SEPPEL, Marten , 2004, "The Assistance of Manors to Peasants in Cases of Subsistence Crisis in Seventeenth-Century Livonia", *Acta Historica Tallinnensia*, 8, pp. 3–19.

SOSNOWSKA, Anna, 2004, *Zrozumieć zacofanie. Spory historyków o Europę Wschodnią (1947–1994)*, Warszawa, Trio.

SZOŁTYSEK, Mikołaj, 2003, *The population of the parish of Bujakow in 18th and 19th century. Between "the unique" household formation system and peculiarity of borderland*, Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Wroclaw, Poland.

–, 2004, "Astride the Hajnal line – household and family in the Upper Silesian parish of Bujakow, 1766–1803", *Polish Population Review*, 11, pp. 59–93.

–, 2007, "Central European household and family systems, and the 'Hajnal-Mitterauer' line: the parish of Bujakow (18th–19th centuries)", *The History of the Family*, 12, 1, pp. 19–42.

–, 2008, "Rethinking Eastern Europe: household formation patterns in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and European family systems", *Continuity and Change*, 23, 3, pp. 389-427.

SZOŁTYSEK, Mikołaj and RZEMIENIECKI, Konrad, 2005, "Between 'traditional' collectivity and 'modern' individuality: An atomistic perspective on family and household astride the Hajnal's line (Upper Silesia and Great Poland at the end of the 18th century)", *Historical Social Research*, 30, 3, pp. 130–170.

TOPOLSKI, Jerzy, 1974a, "Economic decline in Poland from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth centuries", in Peter EARLE (ed.), *Essays in European Economic History, 1500–1800,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 127–142.

–, 1974b, "The manorial-serf economy in Central and Eastern Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries", *Agricultural History*, 48, 3, pp. 341–352.

VERDON, Michel, 1998, *Rethinking Households: an Atomistic Perspective on European Living Arrangements*, London, Routledge.

VETULANI, Adam, 1957, (ed.), *Księga sądowa Uszwi dla wsi Zawady, 1619–1788*, Wrocław, Ossolineum.

WALL, Richard, 1981, "Women alone in English society", *Annales de démographie historique*, pp. 303–317.

–, 1987, "Leaving home and the process of household formation in pre-industrial England", *Continuity and Change*, 2, 1, pp. 77–101.

–, 1991, "European family and household systems", in *Historiens et populations. Liber Amicorum Etienne Helin,* Louvain-la-Neuve, Academia, pp. 617–636.

–, 1998, "Characteristics of European family and household systems", *Historical Social Research,* 23, 1–2, pp. 44–66.

–, 2002, "Elderly widows and widowers and their coresidents in late 19th- and early 20th-century England and Wales", *History of the Family,* 7, 1, pp. 139–155.

WALLERSTEIN, Immanuel, 1974, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, New York, Academic Press.

WILK, Richard, 2005, "Quality of life and the anthropological perspective", *Feminist Economics*, 5, 2, pp. 91– 93.

WILK, Richard R. and NETTING, Robert Mc, 1984, "Households: Changing forms and functions", in Robert Mc. NETTING, Richard R. WILK, and Eric J. ARNOULD (eds), *Households: Comparative and Historical Studies of the Domestic Group,* Berkeley, California, University of California Press, pp. 1–28.

WOLFF, Larry, 1994, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford, Stanford University Press.

WOŹNIAK, Andrzej, 1987, *Kultura mazowieckiej wsi pańszczyźnianej XVIII i początku XIX wiek (Wybrane zagadnienia)*, Wrocław, Ossolineum.

WYCZAŃSKI, Andrzej, 1978, "Czy chłopu było źle w Polsce XVI wieku?", *Kwartalnik Historyczny,* 85, 3, pp. 627–641.