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Servants in Preindustrial Europe: Gender Differences

Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux*

Abstract: The specific mobility and type of work of servants of both sexes were indeed a major feature in the delineation of building up European societies. Domestic service was the main way to elect for young rurals wanting to migrate towards small and big towns, since they could consider service as a transitory phase, giving them an opportunity to adapt themselves to a new way of life before marriage. From that point of view, domestic service contributed greatly to social change: a great number of young males and females turned their backs to traditional family and village life to the prospect of better ways of life in urban surroundings for a change, but were only able to find immediate employment as servants in these preindustrial eras. The prevalence of domestic service for young people is put in evidence, studying gender differences according to age groups. We might say that large towns counted more than 10 women out of 100 in a position of servants at a master's home at the end of the 17th century, and usually less than 10% of men in the same position. This rate increased steadily for all European towns as a consequence of massive rural exodus and of the opportunities offered on the overall female job markets, particularly on the domestic service market.

Many studies have been published on the condition of 19th century servants, but the history of domestic service in Preindustrial European societies has still to be written. This would be the only way to determine with some accuracy the role of servants, which we suspect to be a major one, in the multisecular process of socio-economic transition and urbanization which affected these populations. The specific mobility and the sort of work of the servants of both

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sexes - women playing a role at least equivalent to that of men - were indeed a major feature in the delineation of building up European societies. The domestic service was the best way to be elected by young rurals who wanted to migrate to small and big towns, as service could be considered as a transitory phase, giving them an opportunity to adapt themselves to a new way of life. Undeniably, from that point of view, domestic service contributed considerably to a social change: indeed a great number of young males and females turned their backs to the traditional family and to village life at the prospect of a better way of life in urban surroundings, but there the only available immediate employment was that as a servant in these preindustrial eras.

The role of ancient guild systems was such that it took full charge of apprentices and companions, but this kind of professional ***insertion*** in early modern societies was quite different, because it was strictly regulated. The guilds offered their members opportunities to make a regular career in their own frames, thus taking up traditional socio-economic structures. On the other hand, would-be servants entered domestic jobs with the help of family and recruitment networks with the only aim to relinquish this essentially temporary condition for a better one to be found outside the »service« frame (Gutton 1981). Employment contracts were only oral and of short duration.

Domestic service: a parameter of the European family model

Young people's spatial mobility was a constant feature of the European family model. Of course, the rural domestic service, without large mobility, coexisted with the urban one and we cannot ignore its socio-economic role in preindustrial Europe. Characterizing the West European family models, John Hajnal and Peter Laslett emphasized the major role of the domestic service as both a stage in life and an autoregulating parameter of societies under demographic pressure, where a late and selective marriage was more and more common, ***as a preventive check*** (Hajnal 1965, 1982, 1983 ; Laslett 1972, 1977, 1983). According to this model, with demographic and social features submitted to Malthusian controls, we usually observe in such societies a narrow correlation between high rates of celibacy and the presence of servants in the household, as well as a notable high rate of illegitimate children. But it is not our aim here to question in detail the European model of family formation; we only try to assess the role of the domestic service as a socio-demographic phenomenon.

Our quantitative sources for the Ancient Regime are not many, and they are scattered. The marrying of servants was mentioned in their marriage contracts, - but marriage usually was precisely the occasion when they left their condition -; there is another way to trace them in their masters' wills or in inventories after death. Censuses recorded indeed the presence of domestic servants in

households, but names and age were seldom listed. Tax registers (especially ***capitation*** registers in 18th century France) mentioned servants for the record only: as masters paid taxes for their servants, tax inspectors only took care to mention how many they were and the type of job they had in each household. Our most revealing sources are memoirs and family record books: there we find how much and when servants were paid, when and how they were engaged. But there were few masters who left such testimonies. We can only conclude that servants made up a considerable and badly described segment of the whole population. Only in exceptional times of crisis, for instance in 1709, we are able to get better insights out of capitation registers. This is the case for Lyon (Muheim 1965), for Paris in 1755 (Mols 1954) or for Aix-en-Provence in 1695 (Carrièrre 1958).

Servants and apprentices away from home

According to Philippe Ariès, »domestic service mixed up with apprenticeship, a broadly widespread form of education... Thus domestic service ought to be considered as a way for a master to transmit to a child - not his own - the sum of knowledge, knowhow and human wisdom he is supposed to own... in the 16th and 17th centuries, ***gargon*** meant both a very young man and a young servant. Our way to address a waiter in a café nowadays is a leftover from that time« (Ariès 1973). Ariès thought then that domestic service was usually correlated to young age, but recent family research does not corroborate that claim (Mitterauer 1990, Wall 1978, 1983, Fauve-Chamoux 1994). Urban as well as rural domestic service was rarely correlated with childhood: servants (male and female alike) aged less than 15 seldom account for more than 10% of the population of servants, at least in 18th century towns (Table 5).

Analyzing urban societies, we ought to distinguish as much as we can male or female servants from employees with bed and board such as shop girls or companions. Contrary to servants, these employees lived in modest craftsmen circles, they resided in different parts of the urban space and they were less or not at all concerned with housework, although they were working under the household head's authority - man or woman - and often living at his or her home.

In Lyon for instance, »servants« which appear in the 1597 and 1636 censuses were as well homeworkers as shop assistants or workers (Zeller 1983). The latter were actually part of the household, helping in the family production unit: there were many crafts - textiles are a good example - where job classifications were unknown. »Servant« at that time could mean a shoemaker's apprentice, as well as a companion weaver, a manservant in the gentry, or a young heir to a merchant lineage trainee at a wholesaler's home. Before 1650, in Lyon, the word »apprentice« was generally referring to a 10 to 12 years old boy living at

his master's home according to a contract concluded with his father. »Companion« was seldom used, and suggested a relation with a guild (especially the printers guild).

As for female servants in France patronymic names did practically appear nowhere in pre-revolutionary censuses, nor did age, place of birth or length of service. No attention was paid to such details until the Revolutionary and Napoleonic times when their whereabouts were noted down: The census taken in ***An II*** (1793) to which we refer for the rural Pyrénées are rich enough to give us an opportunity to distinguish the farm maid from the country inn maid or from the young shepherdess. It is paradoxical that we cannot igually differentiate the jobs of male servants, who are mostly called ***valets.*** Female servants at towns could be found at the local worthies' homes. In big cities, of course, the members of the High Courts of Justice ***(parlements),*** the King's officers, prelates, municipal magistrates, businessmen, etc. employed several servants, according to an often described hierarchy of male and female jobs. But grooms, footmen, clerks, tutors and so on were engaged eventually and in only very few houses. Maids or journeymen, with very little qualification or apprentices and companions living at their mastercraftsman's home made up the bulk of servants in any Ancient Regime town. The qualification »maid for all work« ***(bonne à tout faire)*** appeared much later in 19th century bourgeoisie and was a rather parisian custom.

Number of servants in the European population

Domestic servants in Lyon in the first half of the 16th century have been estimated with about 10 to 12 percent of the whole population. This percentage can be applied more or less to other European towns, e.g. Switzerland or what later became Germany or Norway: everywhere local middle classes employed servants: maps of servants' residences always correspond to residential areas of well-off notable persons. But the number of servants culminate in some rich areas of London or Rome in the 17th century, where keeping several servants was a common practice. In St Mary Woolchurch parish London by the end of the 17th century, the number of servants was 2,1 for each household, but we cannot truly assert whether such a very high rate was typical for all the well-off areas of London. Richard Wall evaluated the number of female servants at 13,7 percent of the whole English population, rural and urban, in the period 1650-1749 (Wall 1983). Earlier estimations - worked out with lesser accuracy - had suggested a proportion of 18 percent - a rate which we should now consider as overevaluated. In preindustrial France, the proportion was below 10 percent in the countryside, always below 15 percent in towns, the small towns usually staying below 10 percent with a larger number of females in service than men. The proportion is 12.3 percent in the big city of Rheims, Champagne (Table 1).

It has been said that »servile« population might have been as much as 17 percent of the adult urban population (older than 15) in 17th century Europe (Cipolla 1976). Calculations of that kind are not very enlightening, since the condition of a servant was no permanent occupation, but only a transitory stage at the beginning of the active life especially for many women who saw in it a preliminary training to the condition of spouse. The wages accumulated during the years in service were to build up a nest egg which allowed to marry at the best possible level and to settle down. The domestic service was the field for young people, so we should now consider the mean age of servants.

Servants' ages

How many domestic servants were recruited when still teenagers, young men or women (Table 2)? We have choosen to compare the conditions in an urban area (Rheims) and in a rural one in the Pyrenees. The 1802 census in Rheims was elaborate enough to allow a classification according to age and sex of all the servants living at a master's or mistress' home, excluding male apprentices and shop maids, and at that time we find very few servants aged less than 15 years in this town. The results are quite distinct for Lannemezan, a small market town at the foot of the Pyrenean mountains (763 inhabitants), according to the 1793 census.

Obviously, in the Pyrenees, rural children entered domestic service at a very low age, and that is not only accurate for Lannemezan, but also for the surrounding villages in the Baronnies. The number of old children of not yet 15 years (and even not yet 10 years old) is considerable (16 percent of the girls aged 10-14 were in service and 12 percent of the boys) and it partly corroborates Ariès's views. Such proportions of very young female servants have not been attested before in France for such a late preindustrial period. We even want to cite the exceptional case of Espèche, a small village in this Pyrenean area: where servants below 15 years (males and females taken together) came to a 62 percent of all servants (Table 5)! They were actually young shepherdesses, herdsmen of cattle or pigs, very useful in these mountainous areas where cattle breeding was the main activity, at a time when young men of somewhat more advanced years choose to emigrate, because they were not heir to the family patrimony and had no prospects of a good marriage, maybe also because they were not willing to serve in the revolutionary army. The mobility of children is already an established fact in preindustrial European societies, but we may reasonably say that children servants (of not yet 15 years) rarely amounted to more than 15 percent of all domestic servants, often under 10 percent - with some notable exceptions as we saw - (Table 5). We might consider that the model of the central Pyrenean area - the Baronnies - was a residual medieval pattern very similar to the one which was attested for

Table 1: Percentage of domestic servants in the population, by sex and together, comparing rural and urban French communities

	year	men	women	together
1/Villages				
Lyonnais	1759	4,8 %	4,7 %	9,5 %
-Pyrénées				
Lannemezan	1793	5,7	9,2	7,5
Espèche	1793	17,3	4,0	10,6
Bourg-Bigorre	1793	19,3	3,5	2,7
Bulan	1793	5,0	7,2	6,1
2/Towns				
Franche-Comté				
Dole	1688	6,1 %	8,7 %	14,8 %
Dauphiné				
Grenoble	1725	3,4 %	6,2 %	9,6 %
Normandie	1762			
Fécamp	"	3,4 %	5,3 %	8,7 %
Gisors	"	1,4 %	2,2 %	3,6%
Magny	"	3,4 %	5,4 %	8,8 %
Pont l'Evèque	"	4,2 %	7,1 %	11,3 %
Bayeux	1768			7,6 %
"	1775	4,9 %	?	?
Pontoise	1781	4,0 %	5,1 %	9,1 %
Lyonnais				
Lyon (10 parishes)	1597	8,3	4,5%	12,8%
Lyon (2 parishes)	1709	1,7 %	11,6 %	13,3 %
Montbrison	1759	2,4 %	7,2 %	9,6 %
Aix-en-Provence	1695			8 %
	1701			7,4 %
	1715			11,3 %
	1765			11,7 %
Rheims	1802	9,8 %	14,1 %	12,3 %

Sources: Messance, 1766, p. 30,70. ; Lebebvre-Teillard, 1969, p.22 ; El Kordy, 1970, p. 67 ; Dupâquier, 1992, p. 63 ; Garden, 1970, p. 149, 249; Maza, 1986, p. 28; Fauve-Chamoux, Census Data bank.

Table 2: Percentage of domestic servants in the population, by age and sex, comparing Lannemezan (Pyrénées) in 1793, and Rheims (Champagne) in 1802.

	Lannemezan 1793		Rheims 1802	
	men %	women %	men %	women %
0-4				
5-9	0	6,8		
10-14	12,1	16,2		
15-19	8,8	23,3	26,6	11
20-24	12,5	14,8	21	29
25-29	0	16,6	7,7	20
30-34	15,3	30,5	8,0	16,5
35-39	9,0	5,4	5,2	12,5
40-44	3,7	14,2	3,4	9
45-49	0	0	2,7	9
50-54	8,3	0	2,6	6
55-59	13,6	0	2,6	9
60-64	0	0	4,5	10
65-69	0	0	3,9	6
70-74	0	0	0	4
75-79	0	0	0	0
all ages	5,7 %	9,2 %	9,8 %	14,1%

Sources: Pyrénées, Lannemezan, 1793, Census; Rheims, 1802, Fauve-Chamoux, data bank.

Toscany during the Renaissance (Smith 1981). Cattle breeding, cottage industry and mines created various opportunities for the employment of children.

Coming of age servants in the 18th century

The structure of domestic service as it has been observed in the French Baronnies would correspond to an archaic type, while a mobility of children like that to which we referred would better fit to the feudal system which has gradually disappeared in Western Europe - except in some secluded valleys - during the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century, along with early marriage. The fact that a system of non egalitarian family transmission, the stem-family system, also subsisted in this Pyrenean region is coherent with that

view and gives it more strength. But, after all, Danish and Icelandic models for the 18th century (Tables 3 and 4) are not very far away from the central Pyrenean pattern, yet they have definitely nothing in common with the famous English nuclear family system (Table 4) described by Peter Laslett (1977) where domestic service is clearly a premarital job for young people aged 15-25.

Most of the 18th century Western European domestic servants were older more than 15 and younger less than 30 years old: two out of three, or even three out of four belonged to these age groups. The following synopsis (Tables 5 and 6), including Austrian data for a comparative view (Mitterauer 1990), illustrates a general trend for servants - both males and females, rural and urban - being older than they had been in early modern Europe. Without doubt, their aging corresponded to a Malthusian pattern of later age at marriage, in agricultural and cattle breeding regions although we cannot ignore that, in the meantime protoindustrial activities (mining as in Dürnberg and Dorfbeuern, or textile cottage industry in Maria Langegg) favoured the employment of children away from the family sphere.

In Kärnten, as has been observed in all cattle-breeding areas, children were frequently working as herdsmen, but at the same time the very high rate of servants aged 25-29 years attested for two villages in 1757 is quite surprising: very late marriage, maybe high celibacy rates, could be the reason behind such an unusual occurence (Brudner and White 1997). In these areas with non egalitarian transmission of property - that is the case too for South-West France -, marriage was not easy for the younger children of a stem-family where usually only the eldest inherited the farm, so they had to make a living as rural servants, when they did not rather choose to migrate far away.

Rural origins of urban servants

This does not mean that only young rurals of stem-family areas migrated to town. The trend of migration from country to town was a general phenomenon in early modern Europe (Table 7). Less than 10 percent of domestic servants were born in the city where they were employed. But most people did not migrate far away. One male servant out of three serving in Bordeaux or Toulouse was born in a nearby village; as for female servants, every one out of two was born very near Toulouse, and three out of four were born near Bordeaux (Table 8). Proximity was the main factor of migration to these towns. Rheims on the contrary was attracting many individuals from East and Central Europe who had in mind to go further West to Paris. Therefore Paris recruited servants within a much larger radius, even from very far away. Male more than female servants came from very distant provinces.

A detailed sorting of female servants in 1802 Rheims according to age (Table 9) corroborates our first statements: immigrated women servants were

Table 3: Percentage of domestic servants by sex in the Danish rural population in 1787 et 1801, by age

	men %	women %
5-9	4	4
10-14	36	26
15-19	52	50
20-24	56	51
25-29	43	28
30-34	23	13
35-39	14	6
40-44	6	5
45-49	6	4
50-54	5	3
55-59	5	2
+60	0	0

Source : Hajnal, 1983, p. 94, and J.C. Johansen, 1975, table 10.18.

Table 4: Percentage of domestic servants by sex in rural Iceland, 1729 and England 1599-1796, by age

	Iceland, 1729		England, 1599-1796	
	men %	women %	men %	women %
10-14	21	20	5	4
15-19	33	34	35	27
20-24	39	44	30	40
25-29	34	32	15	15
30-39	12	24	6	7
40-49	9	17	2	2

Source: Hajnal, 1983, p. 94; Laslett, 1977, table 1.7.

Table 5: Age of domestic servants, males and females, comparing urban and rural European communities

	Date	-15	15-29	+30	(total = 100)
TOWNS					
-Zurich	1637	10,3	75,4	14,3	
-Salzburg	1647	3,6	70,9	25,5	
	1790	1,6	58,4	40,0	
Austria: small towns					
-Upper Austria(Gmuden)	1762	8,7	64,8	26,5	
-Lower Austria (Perchtoldsdorf)	1754	9,4	74,5	16,1	
" (Stein)	1762	6,8	67,3	25,9	
RURAL COMMUNITIES					
- near Salzburg					
cattle breeding (Abtenau)	1632	13,4	72,0	14,6	
"	1790	9,2	58,4	32,4	
" (Altenmarkt)	1733	7,2	53,7	39,1	
" (Thalgau)	1648	8,3	62,0	29,7	
" "	1781	7,0	57,5	35,5	
.cottage industry (Dorfbeuern)	1648	13,0	71,8	15,2	
"	1772	6,8	74,0	19,2	
.mines (Dürnberg)	1647	17,1	74,3	8,6	
" (Hofgastein)	1690	7,3	68,3	24,4	
-Tirol					
.cattle breeding (Villgraten)	1750	6,1	64,9	29,0	
" (Zell a Ziller)	1779	5,9	54,1	40,0	
-Kärten					
. cattle breeding (Feistritz)	1757	7,0	50,3	42,7	
" (Obermühlbach)	1757	12,1	51,1	36,9	
" (Sirnitz)	1757	11,2	43,9	44,9	
" (St Lorenzen)	1757	12,2	53,8	34,0	
-Lower Austria					
.cottage industry (Obergrafendorf)	1787	6,3	66,1	27,6	
" textile (Maria Langegg)	1788	26,2	57,1	16,7	
-French Pyrenean Baronnies					
Lannemezan	1793	28,2	47,9	23,9	
Espèche	1793	62,0	19,0	19,0	
Bourg-Bigorre	1793	32,9	27,0	40,1	
Bulan	1793	29,4	58,8	11,8	

Sources: Mitterauer, 1990, p. 16-17; Pyrénées, 1793, Fauve-Chamoux Census data bank.

Table 6: Proportion of domestic servants, males and females in each age group, comparing urban and rural 17th and 18th centuries European communities

	Date	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29
TOWNS					
-Zurich	1637	9,1	34,4	38,4	23,4
-Salzburg	1647	9,3	45,0	71,5	48,9
	1790	5,4	38,7	58,2	14,7
SMALL TOWNS, AUSTRIA					
-Upper Austria (Gmuden)	1762	10,0	32,5	41,9	24,1
-Lower Austria (Perchtoldsdorf)	1754	12,8	38,6	38,9	26,4
" (Stein)	1762	13,4	44,9	62,5	50,0
RURAL COMMUNITIES					
-<u>near Salzburg</u>					
.cattle breeding (Abtenau)	1632	12,2	31,9	38,2	21,5
"	1790	11,4	28,2	9,9	37,6
" (Altenmarkt)	1733	16,1	40,0	56,4	51,7
.cottage industry (Dorfbeuern)	1648	9,5	26,9	26,6	15,8
"	1772	8,6	31,0	48,3	20,0
.mines (Dürnberg)	1647	10,2	32,7	20,3	5,9
" (Hofgastein)	1690	3,8	19,6	26,8	4,0
-<u>Kärten</u>					
. cattle breeding (Feistritz)	1757	26,7	52,7	56,7	48,2
" (Obermühlbach)	1757	34,3	52,8	55,7	49,0
-<u>Lower Austria</u>					
.cottage industry (Obergrafendorf)	1787	3,7	24,5	30,3	25,6
" textile (Maria Langegg)	1788	14,5	29,8	19,5	5,0
-<u>French Pyrenean Baronnies</u>					
Lannemezan	1793	14,4	15,6	13,7	10,2
Espèche	1793	75,0	14,2	14,3	0
Bourg-Bigorre	1793	6,8	4,7	4,0	0
Bulan	1793	13,5	26,9	12,5	0

Sources: Mitterauer, 1990, p. 19-20; Pyrénées, 1793, Fauve-Chamoux Census Data bank.

Table 7: Proportion of non-natives among male and female servants, urban France

towns	period	males	females
Toulouse	1727-1729	92,1	96,3
	1787-1789	95,7	94,2
Bordeaux	1727-1729	94,0	93,3
	1787-1789	96,9	97,4
Paris	1787-1789	97,7	90,9
Rheims	1802		86 %

Source: Fairchilds, 1984, p. 62 ; Fauve-Chamoux, 1994, p. 45.

Table 8: Proportion of non-natives from a close rural area among male and female servants, urban France

town	péeriod	males	females
Toulouse	1727-1729	32,5	58,3
	1787-1789	49,2	56,9
Bordeaux	1727-1729	37,0	79,3
	1787-1789	22,2	72,9
Paris	1787-1789	13,5	22,2

Source: Fairchilds, 1984, p. 63

the overwhelming majority in the capital of Champagne. When analysing the origin of the whole Rhemish female population (and of the single women), we altogether can confirm that at least one third of them was not born in Rheims, and even 86 out of 100 servants were not born in the city. Female servants were mostly single and very mobile. After some time in service, servants were trying to find a spouse: it was easier to settle once they had gathered and saved a little money from their work. After some years they left the job, married in town or went back to their native village. This is why older servants (older than 45 years of age) are more often natives: half of them are local spinsters, very few are widows.

We can come back now to the proportion of all domestic servants of the population of Rheims, native and non native, according to age groups, for the male population and for the female one (Table 2). The rates of female servants

Table 9: Proportion of non-natives living in the town of Rheims, 1802, in each age group, by sex and status.

age groups	males non -native	females non -native	singel females non -native	females servants non -native
0-4	6 %	5 %	5 %	
5-9		16 %	6,5 %	6,5 %
10-14	17 %	15 %	14 %	80 %
15-19	31 %	25 %	24 %	72 %
20-24	29 %	43 %	47 %	98 %
25-29	16 %	41 %	44 %	79 %
30-34	43 %	48 %	61 %	91 %
35-39	57 %	42 %	48 %	74 %
40-44	49 %	52 %	55 %	72 %
45-49	53 %	46 %	41 %	55 %
50-54	50 %	54 %	43 %	86 %
55-59	47 %	43 %	35 %	43 %
60-64	46 %	50 %	32 %	67 %
65-69	47 %	52 %	67 %	68 %
70-74	52 %	47 %	46 %	
75 +	50 %	53 %		
All	33 %	36 %	36 %	86 %
children (-15)	12 %	8,5 %		
Adults (15+)	41 %	44 %		

Sources: Rheims : Fauve-Chamoux, Data bank.

in Rheims were high and categorizes this town among Europe's big cities: servants there made up 14 percent of the female population, against 8 percent at Zurich in 1671, 19 percent in 1756, 20 percent in 1790. In this important city of Switzerland by the end of the 18th century, female servants made up 16,6 percent of the female population, due to their growing number, but it is also likely due to the diversifications in job offers. In France, domestic servants were concentrated in a relatively limited number of families: 10 percent of the Rhemish households had got (at least) one female servant, against 8 percent in Rouen or 11 percent in Tours (Bardet 1983; Fauve-Chamoux and Wall 1997). In comparison to other European cities servants were more scattered about among households.

The mobility of rural people to urban areas and the differences in the mortality of males and females constituted two demographic factors and determinated the specific feature of 18th century European towns: the general surplus of young women. Therefore one of the characteristics of preindustrial European urban centers was therefore the great number of grown up women with no spouse either single or widowed, working for their living, that must be added to the number of domestic servants (Fauve-Chamoux 1983, 1995; Fauve-Chamoux and Wall 1997).

In Rheims one grown up woman out of two was born in the countryside (Table 9, column »females non native«), but among servants (column »female servants non native«), there were eight out of ten, who came to town to save several years' wages, hoping that such a nest egg would make marriage and family formation easier. But harsh demographic realities did not allow that a good many of them could find a spouse, neither urban nor rural. The growing female mobility to the towns in the course of the 18th century only increased an already unbalanced sex ratio (Fauve-Chamoux 1994, 1995). Rural exodus was linked with demographic growth, in a time when the economic crisis was endemic. It drove young people away from the villages where they did understand that their future was uncertain. It should be mentioned that in France young men felt a stronger attraction to Paris than young women (Table 8).

The example of the town of Rheims at the end of the 18th century shows that there is a great correlation between the number of non-Rhemish born women (36 percent of the population as a whole) and the female labour market, the domestic service market included (we know that the latter kept growing during the 19th century): 86 out of 100 female servants were not born in Rheims, but in the countryside. Female mobility indeed varied according to social classes, as we have established in a previous study (Fauve-Chamoux 1995). Middle-class women married to merchants, and to owners, etc., came, when they were no natives, from other small or big towns, quite different to female servants whose origin was predominantly rural. Their mere presence is the major reason for the unbalanced sex ratio we observed for the age groups under 35 years of age.

Middle-class mobility had no similar significant demographic consequence of that kind: it resulted in a somewhat balanced exchange of women between urban circles. In contrast to this the extreme increase of rural girls coming to town had a direct effect on the sex ratio in popular classes. The study of the gender differences in the Rheims population regarding domestic servants corroborates both the importance of the domestic service phenomenon in preindustrial European towns and its differential weight according to sex.

Of course we could not ignore that in the past there was a coexistence of different European family models, especially specific Northern and Middle-European patterns. Rural Flemish, Danish and Norwegian households

for instance were very often headed by married couples who put up a home with a large number of offsprings along with several servants, while Dutch peasants inspite of their geographical neighbourhood, were known to put up a home with very few kin's people and servants. There was an evident correlation between the forms of property, inheritance systems, marriage models and household structure. Recent studies have brought to light the great diversity of family transmission systems leading to varying situations, with the result that drawing coherent European maps of family behaviour is still a very difficult task. In France, specific regional situations are related to juridical customs combined with changing socio-economic conditions.

Conclusion

The growing European female mobility towards towns during the 18th century could only aggravate to a detriment for females with regard to the already unbalanced matrimonial market. Now mobility was a necessary consequence of general demographic growth and of a latent economic crisis which forced young people to leave their villages. Many of them belonged to those migrants who would marry late or would not be able to marry at all. It also explains why the number of illegitimate births grew in the course of the 18th century, especially of servant mothers whose only resort was to abandon their offspring as consequence to their condition of life at their master's home (Chamoux 1973).

The prevalence of the domestic service for young people was put in evidence, with one difference only, that is of gender. We might say that at the end of the 17th century in large towns more than 10 women out of 100 had a position as a servants at a master's home, while there were usually less than 10 percent of men in the same position. This rate increased steadily for all European towns as a consequence of the massive rural exodus and of the opportunities offered on the overall female job markets, particularly on the domestic service market. The opportunity for jobs for young men and women in the domestic service significantly developed during the 18th century and this development went on during the 19th century, although on different socio-economic lines.

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