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# Matrimony: A Key element in the Demographic System of Modern Europe

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In this paper, I summarize Moreno's work cited above. This summary discusses the factors affecting human natural fertility and also considers European experience during the Modern period. This has been made possible thanks to the advancement of the science of human fertility over the last 60 years.

Some theories on "demographic Change" in the 1950's and 60's, proposed that human fertility, before 'the modern transition', had reached its "biological limit" and the only fundamental variable regulating its changes in the short, medium and long term was 'mortality'.<sup>1</sup> No one doubts that past mortality levels were higher than our contemporary experience. Besides, variations in mortality, be they ordinary or extraordinary (as a result of wars, hunger and infection), played a greater role than presently in regulating population increase. However, it is one hypothesis to admit that mortality played a crucial role in population demographics and another to propose that ultimately variations in population demographics depended exclusively on changes in mortality. Was that really the case? Were there other factors that significantly affected population growth? More, how did western civilization regulate fertility before the demographic transition?

## **1. The determinants of "natural" human fertility. The influence of cultural factors**

Natural fertility depends on five factors;

- 1.1 The age in which couples get married or the beginning of the sexual relationships
- 1.2 The frequency of the sexual intercourse of the couple,
- 1.3 Intrauterine mortality,
- 1.4 The post partum (post natal) anovulation<sup>2</sup> period, and

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<sup>1</sup> ROWLAND, R." married Systems in the Iberian Peninsula (centuries XVI-XIX). A regional perspective" in PEREZ MOREDA, V - REHER, D.S. (eds) *Historical demography in Spain*. The Arquero, Madrid, 1988 pp. 72-137. For a critic of this vision pp. 72-75

<sup>2</sup> Anovulation or anovulatory menstrual cycle simply means that a woman is not ovulating and the absence of ovulation will cause infertility.

### 1.5 The menopause interval.

The first and last factors point to the beginning and the end of the fertility period. The remaining factors determine the birth rate. Intrauterine mortality refers to mortality arising from spontaneous abortions. Normally, there is approximately one spontaneous abortion for every five pregnancies. Post partum anovulation is usually the interval after pregnancy when the woman is infertile. In a high percentage of cases, this period changes when breast feeding (lactating) a child. Since the lactating period varies a lot from one culture to another, the anovulation period also varies a lot from one culture to the next.

Which of these factors has the greatest impact on fertility? Bongaarts has established that, on average, the frequency of conjugal relations and intrauterine or spontaneous abortions have a minimal effect on fertility. The average age of a woman's menopause is very stable among most human populations and is between 38 and 41 years<sup>3</sup>. These factors therefore have low weighting when determining the last born child in a given population.

However, the age of marriage and the post partum anovulation period could have a very significant impact on birth rates. Experience shows that, averagely speaking (and holding all other factors constant) the age of marriage could cause birth rate variations in the order of 5 to 10 children while anovulation could cause variations of 5 to 9.5 children. Combining both of these factors could vary natural human fertility theoretically by 4.3 to 16.7 children<sup>4</sup>. These are very significant numbers.

This means firstly, that natural fertility did not always mean high birth rates or fertility at the "biological limit". Secondly, both factors influence the variability in number of births. The beginning of sexual relations (marriage) and the post partum anovulation period (lactating period) are behaviors extensively influenced by culture (in all its facets, legal, economic, psychological...); in fact, for this very reason one can conclude that human fertility has always been a cultural variable everywhere. Human history shows that "natural" fertility has never been confused with "biological" fertility, something that would be reasonable in an "animal" whose nature is at the same time its very own culture<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> LIVI-BACCI, Massimo: *Historia mínima de la población mundial (A Short History of World Population)*. Ariel, Barcelona, 1990, pp. 18-20

<sup>4</sup> Op. Cit. 19-22. Theoretical possibilities come first. It is certain that there has never been such a high average of fertility in human population observed, however populations next to the very minimum have been observed.

<sup>5</sup> VICENTE ARREGUI J. - HUTS, J. *Philosophy of the man. An anthropology of the privacy*. Institute of Sciences for the Family, Univ. Of Navarre, Pamplona, 1992

## 2. The determining factors of the fertility in Europe during the Modern Age.

Advances in historical demography have established that Europeans had a system to regulate population increase, in which variations in fertility played a primary role. This capability is available thanks to the development of a method which can reconstruct family trees going back 400 years (back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>6</sup> These family biography reconstructions have used registries of marriages, births, baptisms and confirmations in parishes. We can now use these data to study the modern period which in our case is construed as the 16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. We will first consider the culture of breast feeding and then the practice of marriage Europe.

### 2.1 Breast Feeding or Lactating (post-partum infundity)

We can determine the lactating period by evaluating the effect of breast feeding on fertility. This is done by comparing the second intergenerational cycle (or the period between one child and another) with the first or comparing inter-generational cycles in the cases of children who survived or died.

#### Table 1:

Estimating the average duration of post natal anovulation period (anovulation or anovulatory menstrual cycle simply means **not ovulating and the absence of ovulation will cause infertility**) using the difference between the first inter-generational cycle and the protogenetic interval (interval between marriage date and the first child).

Place	Months
<b>England: 16 Parishes</b>	
1600-49	12.17
1650-99	13.35
1700-49	11.53
1750-99	12.07
<b>France</b>	
Crulai (1700-30)	5.2
Île de France (18th Century)	8.6

<sup>6</sup> By “family tree reconstructions” is understood the use of parochial registries of sacraments,( baptisms, marriages and deaths), to reconstruct massive family biographies. The registries of baptisms allow us to know dates of birth (and therefore their age) and the number of children that they had, thus construct the time interval between the birth of two children one following the other. The marriage registry has allowed us to know the marriage age (the difference between the date of marriage and the date of baptism) and the registry of deaths the marriage interval (which is the difference between the date of death and the date of baptism).

Tourouvre (18th Century) 7.2

**Belgium**

Blankenberfhe (1650-1849) 5.2

Source: WILSON, Ch. "The Proximate Determinants... p. 221 y 226

From the table above, Wilson showed clearly that the post natal anovulation period was much higher in comparison to other regions (France and Belgium) and that because of this the birth rate in England was relatively low. The longer anovulation period in England was mainly due to practice of lactating which was absent in parts of France and Belgium. In conclusion, it has proved clearly that the period of breast feeding period has great impact in the mothers fertility from one country to another.

## 2.2 Marital Age and the Matrimonial Model in Europe

In the 1960's J. Hajnal<sup>7</sup>, called attention to the fact that Europe West of the line between Trieste in Italy and St. Petersburg in Russia, marriage age before 1940 was late and many people did not get married. This differed from the rest of Europe, Asia, and Africa. The latter countries show a much younger age of marriage (almost at puberty) and that almost everyone got married. In England specifically this was the case since the 16-18<sup>th</sup> century. It has also been proven that this model of late marriage practices and "reluctant" spouses was generalized throughout Western Europe from the 16-17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>8</sup>. This was not the case in the medieval age or in the early centuries. The scientific method of reconstructing family trees has been effective in analyzing the impact of late marriage on population growth.

In England Wrigley and Schofield show that in the modern period, major variations in population change were largely due to infertility arising from the practice of late marriage and not due to the death rate.

## 2.3 The Origin of Late Marriage Practice in Europe and Canon Law

Much has been written on the reasons for the practice of late marriage in Western Europe. Chaunu has presented it as an original and unique response to the Western Latin Christianity which separated Western Europe from the rest of the world and to its own past history. It was a fundamental step in Western European civilization, demographic system and which strengthened conjugal relationships<sup>9</sup>. It implied a gradual control of sexual impulse exercised

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<sup>7</sup> HAJNAL, J. "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective", en GLASS D.V.-EVERSLEY D.E.C. (Eds) *Population In History. Essays in Historical Demography.*, E.Arnold, Londres, 1965 p. 101-143

<sup>8</sup> Para Inglaterra, WRIGLEY E.A.-SCHOFIELD, R.S. *Population Studies.* 37, 1983, pp. 157-84. E. Arnold, Londres, 1981 pp. 421-430

<sup>9</sup> CHAUNU, P. *Historia ciencia social.* Encuentro, Madrid, 1985. Para este autor, el proceso de transición del modelo "antiguo" al "moderno" duró entre 150-200 años, y tuvo lugar en diferentes etapas dentro de la Europa Occidental. En la Europa del Noroeste se desarrolló entre el siglo XIV y XVI, en España entre el siglo XVI y el siglo XVII. pp.450-453.

by waiting at least 10 years between puberty and the beginning of sexual relationships<sup>10</sup>. A singular effort practiced almost to perfection. Although it may have arisen from faulty doctrine it was generally very good for Europe because according to Moreno it liberated constructive energy, at the same time strengthened conjugal bonds and weakening family lineage structures<sup>11</sup>.

The young women were trained to look after children and the home. This practice also implied the advancement of women and children because it was during this period of the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> Century that there was a massive alphabetization in Europe. This permitted the massive increase in writing text and reading throughout Europe more than any other place in the world. It revolutionized Europe. There still isn't extensive agreement on the beginning of the late marriage practice but it is may have started from the late medieval age or the beginning of the modern age<sup>12</sup>. R Smith<sup>13</sup> disputes Hajnal's thesis and presents a case where he shows that England had the practice of late marriage almost as far back as the 14th century, where the ratio of marriages is comparable to that of the twentieth century.

From anthropological perspective Goody proposes the concept of "Divergent Devolution" to explain the inheritance practice with regard to women during the 6-7<sup>th</sup> century. The Christian sect became a church according to him and that demanded that it had to build wealth based on land accumulation. He proposes that the system of feminine inheritance endangered the wealth of the family because the woman could be married by any one and therefore transfer the wealth of the family to another family once married. Hence, he proposes that the endogamy was practiced to keep the wealth of the family in the same family group.

Goody's theory is that the Catholic canon laws on marriage changed the concept of incest during the 4<sup>th</sup> – the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. The range within which incest was to be construed was greatly widened to include any consanguineous relationship as far as memory could remember. Besides, the Church permitted a very wide range of testimonials on incestuous

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<sup>10</sup> Con algunos matices. A partir de los datos conocidos sobre concepciones prenupciales e ilegitimidad, él interpretaba un mejor control de los impulsos sexuales en la Europa católica de matiz agustiniano, luego las regiones influidas por el calvinismo sacramentario, por último había una Europa más "laxista", que es marginal y septentrional. Op.cit. p. 458

<sup>11</sup> El matrimonio de linaje era un contrato arreglado, el matrimonio realizado después de la pubertad era una unión libre por afinidad. Op. Cit. p.503

<sup>12</sup> HAJNAL, J. "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective ...pp. 117-120

<sup>13</sup> SIMTH, Richard M. "Some Reflections on the Origin of the 'European Marriage Pattern' in England", en *Sociological Review*. 28, 1979, pp. 74-112 y "Hypothèses sur la nuptialité en Angleterre aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles" en *Annales E.S.C.*, n° 38(1), 1983, pp. 107-136

El sugería -como otras historiadores habían pensado- que los registros utilizados por Russell contenían una importante ocultación de solteros que al añadirlos al total de la población producían tasas de nupcialidad más bajas a las calculadas por Hajnal y comparables a las poblaciones Europeas de matrimonio tardío de la Edad Moderna.

possibilities. All these in turn favored exogamy (i.e. marriage outside close marriage limits) which in turn meant that many women would not marry for lack of exogenous partners. In turn this weakened the practice of retaining wealth in the hands of the family. As a result, he concludes the church, using this 'occult' method, gained a lot of land from women who did not get married or whose families refused them exogenous marriage. Hence, for him, the beginning of late marriage practice goes back to the early medieval age.

Canon law was dramatically improved between the 11th and the 15th century. It is a period often referred to as the "classic apogee"<sup>14</sup>. The change in marital law had as its foundation the slow substitution of consanguinity with that of consent and Grace. The latter gave rise to what we may call "spiritual Fatherhood". The Church's reflection on marriage during this period rested on the conviction that consent was the only requisite for matrimonial consummation, the roles of the parents in matrimony became secondary and could not influence it and marriage became a public act as opposed to a private one. In addition the Church considered the deep spiritual effects of grace in the sacrament of matrimony. Thanks to Goody's thesis it is now possible to postulate that the change in marriage practice may have been affected by the changes in canon law which the above reflections and practice engendered.

## **2.4 The European Matrimonial Model and the Predominance of a Nuclear Family**

During the 1970's<sup>15</sup> and the 1980's<sup>16</sup> researchers from the University of Cambridge made the discovery that the nuclear family, based on conjugal relationship, was predominant in most of Western Europe at the beginning of the modern period (16<sup>th</sup> Century). This was amazingly before the Industrial revolution and the massive urbanization of Europe. This in turn enabled them to draw out the essential features of the nature of European marriage practices. They discovered that the marriage partners were 'companions', in the sense that they were almost the same age and that marriage, just as in Christian doctrine, is centered on the family rather than mere wealth creation. They also found out that in the modern period the family lived in a home different from their parental home (new home). They reiterated the late marriage practice and a high level of the presence of domestic servants (life-cycle-servants).

Lasset had demonstrated earlier the importance of domestic servants or life cycle servants for the existence of the novel family. This resulted in the augmentation of work hands helping the family and massive population displacement. The sons also had to generate enough money to start their own homes once married. But it sometimes happened as Wrigley and Schofield

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<sup>14</sup> GAUDEMET, J. *Historia del matrimonio en Occidente*. Taurus, 1993, especialmente pp. 161-312

<sup>15</sup> LASLETT, P. - WALL, R. *Household and Family in Past Time*. CUP, Cambridge, 1972

<sup>16</sup> WALL, Richard - ROBIN, J. LASLETT, P. (Eds) *Family Forms in Historic Europe*, Cambridge, 1983

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have proved that at the times when the Gross National Product for England was low, the sons delayed in getting married because of delayed productivity. This in turn caused “delayed” marriages and therefore “infertility” and the opposite when productivity was high. Wrigley and Schofield have demonstrated the relationship between variations in real wages and variations in the Gross Rate of Reproduction during the Modern Age for England.

The life-cycle-servant had another essential effect on Western civilization. Some consider that the life-cycle-servant developed for pedagogical purposes; a rather pessimistic view of human nature<sup>17</sup>.

The development of life-cycle-servants took two distinct forms; ‘education’ and ‘collaboration’. These aspects were partly parallel and partly concomitant; there was a common tendency of families to educate the youth life-cycle-servants and to transfer them the load of forming their children. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, England and the Scandinavian countries were the regions with greatest index of basic education in Europe and also those in which the phenomenon of life-cycle-servant one was most extensive<sup>18</sup> It was a School of individualism, a manifestation of the development of free relations as opposed to consanguineous relationships, victory of personal initiative and the freedom of enterprise.

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<sup>17</sup> BURGUIERE, A. ET Alii *History of the Family*. Bowl II, Alliance University, Madrid, 1988. p.45-48

<sup>18</sup> This norm signified that the new couple established a new home after marriage, constituting a new domestic structure in society. Other authors like MURDOCK, G.P. have found out that this “new-home” was another feature present in Europe as opposed to other civilizations.