



Topic: Family, daily life and social inequality in Europe

Description:

This theme develops aspects related to the evolution of social organisation in Europe. Firstly, it explains the migratory processes that thousands of years ago led to the formation of the first European cities. The evolution of the European population from the Middle Ages to contemporary times.

Secondly, the concept of the family and its evolution from the Ancien Régime through the practices associated with marriage and inheritance. Family diversity and the legislative changes made in recent decades make it possible to address the importance of cultural and ideological changes in European society. The family is also explained as a space for sociability and the creation of relational networks through which people develop their life cycles.

Finally, the presence of social inequality in the history of Europe since antiquity is developed from the explanation of the existence of social hierarchies, which undergo processes of change and continuity over time.

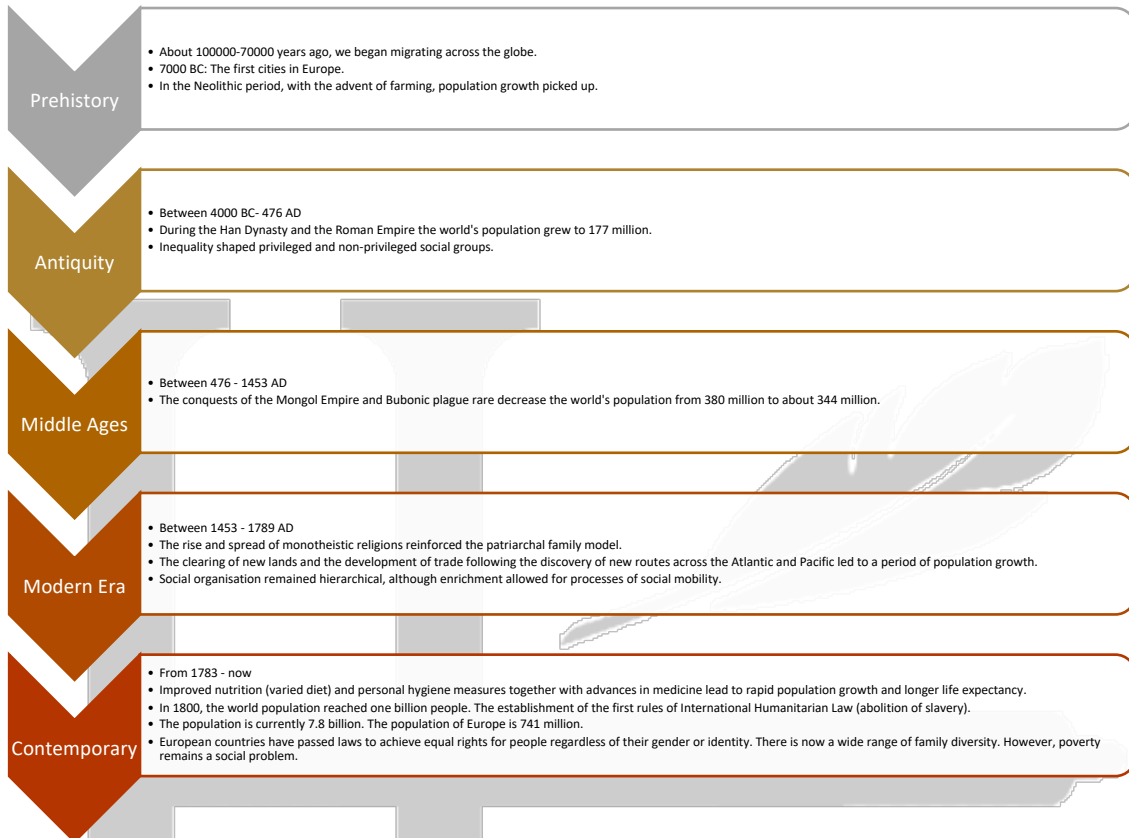
Concepts

- population
- demographic cycle
- families
- marriage
- inheritance
- life cycle
- social inequality

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Population, Demographic cycles and vital trajectories in Europe

Population is defined as the total number of people that live in a specific area. It increases or decreases based on different variables such as the birth rate, the death rate, and migration. These, in turn, are influenced by the physical characteristics of the area, the way people live and take advantage of the land, and external constraints such as natural and weather events.

Indeed, an abrupt change in the climate 70,000 years ago caused a massive migration of modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) from the center of Africa into Eurasia. The climate changed from a period called the Africa Humid Period to a drier one, and at the same time, temperatures dropped. It was not the first time that this had happened; scientists have established various waves of migration between 200,000 and 55,000 years ago. For all of them, the climate factor is the most important in explaining the migration of these first humans from the interior of the African continent to Europe and Asia. In the scientific community, the consensus is that these migrations followed a path out of Africa through the Sinai Peninsula on their way to the Arabian Peninsula. However, other



theories indicate alternative routes into Europe, such as the extreme south of the Red Sea or by way of the Strait of Gibraltar.

A second important moment for population growth was during the Neolithic Revolution. The discovery and progressive improvement of farming and livestock breeding techniques made it possible to create stable, sedentary populations and the development of the first urban areas. The production of foodstuffs enabled accelerated population growth, although this did not occur in the same way or at the same time across all areas. In the Near East, this process happened quickly, but in the regions of Central and Western Europe it did not happen until the end of the Bronze Age. For this reason, the first urban areas (villages and settlements) began in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Asia Minor. The first cities began to appear in Egypt around 4000 BC (Thisis, Nubet, Nekheb, Nekhen) and Mesopotamia (Uruk, Lagash, Kish, Umma, Ur, Eridu and Ea) and share characteristics like the development of an urbanization process (temples and fortifications) and the appearance of writing, a ruling class, and administrative organization.

The first city in Europe was Plovdiv, in Bulgaria, founded around 6000 BC. After it came the Greek cities of Argos and Athens, founded in 5000 BC, followed by Kutaisi in Georgia (2000 BC), Larnaca in Cyprus (1300 BC), Lisbon in Portugal (1200 BC) and Cádiz in Spain (1100 BC). The majority of these peaked during the golden ages of the Phoenician, Greek, and Roman civilizations. From the Neolithic to the age of the Roman Empire, the world population began to grow progressively. It is estimated that the world population doubled every 1700 years. According to recent studies, at the beginning of our era, the world population was approximately 150 million people: one third of them located in areas occupied by the Roman Empire, another third located in the Chinese Empire, and the remainder spread across the planet.

From that point onward, population growth was slower due to wars and epidemics, such as the Antonine Plague in the year 165, which is estimated to have caused the death of 7 million people. On at least two more occasions, the territory occupied by the Roman Empire suffered the deadly effects of serious pandemics: the Plague of Cyprian in the 2nd century and the Plague of Justinian in the 6th century. In addition to epidemics, the effects of climate change that caused more frigid temperatures and the disastrous consequences of natural disasters, such as the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79, affected growth. Climate change and weakness in the Roman Empire caused many villages in Northern Europe to look for new lands to settle further south (the Huns, Goths, Vandals, Bulgarians, Alans, Suebis, Frisians, and Franks). This fact caused a period of significant migration between 300 and 500 AC, the 'Migration Period' (also known by its name in German, *Völkerwanderung*).

In the Middle Ages, the pace of growth was no different. In fact, the world population didn't reach 300 million until the first millennium. In Europe, a period of warmer climate



caused the population to increase and forests to be plowed for urban development. However, epidemics were frequent and, the Black Death of 1346–53, in particular, reduced the European population by a third. In addition to these crises, the expansion of the Mongol Empire in Asia and Eastern Europe in the 8th–15th centuries took the lives of nearly 80 million people and represents the conflict that caused more deaths than any other in history.

A new cycle of growth took place during the centuries of the Modern Age. Specifically, around the 17th century, the world population reached 500 million people and continued to grow, doubling every 200 years. In fact, only a few years after the publication of the well-known work of Malthus (1798) on the imbalance between the rate of production of food (arithmetic progression) and the increase in population (geometric progression), this figure reached 900 million people.

The causes of this cycle of population growth were mainly the decrease in the death rate due to improved hygiene conditions and improvements in medicine, and an increase in the birth rate. There were also important economic factors caused by the Industrial Revolution, which started in England in the 18th century and spread to many European countries (France, Germany, Holland, Sweden, Portugal, Spain, and Italy) over the following century. In countries like France, England, and Germany the economic effects of the Industrial Revolution (agglomeration of factories and a boom in the supply of raw materials and energy) caused a series of notable demographic and social changes. In the most industrialized regions and the trade hubs, the population increased rapidly, and large cities were formed. On the axis that connects England and Genoa, the biggest industrial centers grew around the coal and iron mines of the Rhine and Po rivers. This helped countries like Belgium, which had significant carbon deposits, to become one of the major powers on the European continent. However, a wealth of energy resources was also an important factor in the increase in economic and social imbalances between Northern and Southern Europe, which was more traditionally focused on agriculture and the textile industry.

As regards population, there was an inflection point in the first half of the 20th century. The disastrous consequences of the world wars together with the public health crisis caused by the Spanish flu epidemic in 1918 eroded the world population. It is estimated that approximately 70 million people died as a result of the two world wars. As for the Spanish flu epidemic, according to the latest estimates, it is believed that more than 50 million died worldwide from the illness.

Nevertheless, between 1800 and 1900 the world population nearly doubled, and halfway through the 20th century it reached 2.5 billion people. From that point forward, above all, towards the end of the 20th century, population growth stagnated. The key factor contributing to this was the fall in the birth rate, especially in countries in the northern hemisphere. At this point, a gap appeared between growth in Africa, Asia, and



South America, where birth rates continued to be elevated, and European countries. The population in the latter, due to low mortality rates, began to age, while the growth rate slowed (below 0.5% annually). Despite an increase of 180 million people between 1950 and 2000, at present, only one out of every ten people on the planet live in Europe. In all of Europe, demographic growth is weakening, and a majority of regions are even experiencing negative growth. This decrease has been partially mitigated by massive transoceanic emigration during the first decade of the 21st century.

Despite the differences among European countries, some common characteristics exist that differentiate them from other continents:

Sharp decrease in infant mortality rates (8.3 to 3.6 per 1000). The lowest death rates were recorded in Sweden (1.87 in 2020) and Finland (1.9 in 2019) while the highest were noted in Romania (6.15 in 2020) and Bulgaria (5.6 in 2019).

High life expectancy at birth (between 75–79 years in the majority of European countries) and a rapidly aging population (more than 15% of the population are older than 65). Projections show that in 2050 more than 36% of the population in Europe will be older than 65.

Rural flight. According to information from the OECD, depopulated regions tend to be rural and have low incomes or be postindustrial with few job prospects for the active population. The exodus of young and skilled workers affects the population aging process, generation renewal, and rural development (more than 75% of the European population lives in cities, while this figure is higher than 85% in Germany, the UK, Holland, and other countries).

Negative rate of natural increase caused by an increase in the death rate and a decrease in the birth rate. In 2020, the RNI was 2.5.

Fertility rate below the replacement-level fertility rate, which contributes to zero growth. Currently, the fertility rates for the most developed nations are around 10-20 per 1000. According to data from 2019, the fertility rate in Europe is 1.53.

An increase in migration pressure from poorer countries. At present, the countries from the EU that receive the most immigrants are France and Spain. The majority of these immigrants come from Morocco, Romania, and Ecuador.

According to estimates from the UN, if migration policies and flows for European countries continue as is, the population on the continent will decrease by 91 million people by 2050. The countries who will suffer the biggest decrease in population will be Russia (20.9 million), Italy (16.2 million), Ukraine (11.5 million), Spain (9.4 million) and Germany 8.8 million). Moreover, according to predictions from Eurostat, the countries that will grow 10% by 2025 are Ireland, Luxembourg, Denmark, and Holland. By contrast, countries like Sweden and the UK will not experience any decrease through 2025.





These negative rates of natural increase affect the life paths of people. All of these demographic and migration factors influence what we know today as the life cycle, which entails progressing through different stages (1. infancy, 2. early childhood, 3. middle childhood, 4. late childhood, 5. adolescence, 6. early adulthood, 7. midlife, and 8. senior years). Hippocrates established seven stages of life for human beings. Attempts to catalog the stages of the human life cycle were graphically represented in the Late Middle Ages, but the most frequently imitated version was created by Jörg Breu in the first half of the 16th century. In it, a stepped bridge depicts the different phases of life, one for each step, from birth to death. Throughout the 19th century it was common in Europe and the United States to see lithographs on the subject. Although various life stages can be established, the truth is that there is consensus on distinguishing four main stages: infancy, youth, adulthood (preferable to the traditional term 'maturity') and old age.

However, for historical demography the concept of 'life cycle' is related to different demographic events, such as marriage, leaving home, pregnancy, and death. Studying these events is of interest when a single group of humans undergoes them at the same time. This group is called a cohort, and a specific case is called a generation, which is a cohort of people born in the same time span, typically a year. What is remarkable is analyzing how the demographic behavior of a generation is affected by different historic events. In this way, personal time and historical time are connected. Family represents the basic unit of demographic behavior; inasmuch as key demographic events take place within its confines. As a result, it is important to understand the relationship between individual time, family time, and historical time.

This relationship is what allows us to speak of family life cycles, which begin at the moment the family is created through marriage or any other type of union and ends with its dissolution due to the death of one of the spouses or separation; the family life cycle includes other stages related to children: beginning (birth of children), consolidation (end of childbearing period) and departure (children leave or create their own families). In this way, personal and family life cycles overlap, which causes demographic variables and family decisions to be directly affected by the historical context in which they occur; this includes both structural factors (economic, cultural, political, social) and circumstantial factors.

Low fertility rates affect the formation of new families. In turn, the difficulties young people face in achieving stable employment and economic independence from their families also impact the formation of families. These factors, together with social and cultural factors that directly impact the structure of families, have made a wide variety of family structures more visible: single parent, extended, homosexual parents, and children from adoption or artificial insemination, among others.



Currently, new concepts of family have emerged related to life cycles and the manner in which they advance that are the result of new practices: families that choose not to have children, divorces, new marriages, separations, adoptions and many other variations that have redefined the life cycle. People's aspirations to improve their social well-being and their careers have remained constant over time; by contrast, changing perspectives and economic circumstances have increased the possibility for social mobility in comparison to prior centuries. In time periods like the Old Regime, while social mobility existed, it was much reduced and depended on the ability of the person to amass economic resources through complex social and family networks. As a result, in most cases, you could predict the social and life cycle of a person at birth based on their social class. Nowadays, in developed countries this linearity regarding life cycles has become blurred as opportunities have grown.

From a cultural perspective, it is noteworthy how the prevailing patriarchal model of society has been called into question since the end of the 19th century due to the progress of democratic values. The main consequence of this fact is that women have progressively gained ground in terms of rights, which has leveled the playing field with men in many regards (the right to vote and access to university studies and jobs that were previously forbidden for women). Nevertheless, a significant salary gap still exists, and it is one of the main challenges at present. According to a report from the United Nations, on average women earn 23% less than men who perform the same job. Countries where the differences are greatest are located on the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen and Saudi Arabia), in West Africa (Morocco and Mauritania) as well as India.

Origin and development of inequality and social stratification: serfs, slaves, estates and social classes

Differences exist in all human groups and in all societies. Ultimately, diversity is derived from these differences. There are many types of differences, and they are associated with the characteristics, qualities, properties or attributes—intrinsic or extrinsic—that humans possess. Some of these characteristics may stand out and become relevant, such that whether or not an individual possesses them transforms a difference into an inequality to the extent that it becomes discrimination. As a result, imbalances occur as those that possess that attribute are no longer considered equivalent to those who do not, and one group is considered superior to the other.

The first, and one of the biggest social inequalities that has ever existed as it encompasses half the population, is gender. It has been a constant for many centuries, and, all the same, is still present today. For centuries, men were considered superior to women and, for this reason, were denied many rights. Women were considered less intelligent, not to say they lacked it altogether. They were banned from certain professions. For many legal transactions, they needed the authorization of their





husbands. During the middle of the 19th century, the women's suffrage movement emerged with demands of political rights for women, but it was not until the 20th century that women were granted the right to vote in various countries. However, at present, some countries still do not recognize the right of women to vote. This male chauvinist vision persists today, and gender violence crimes confirm that many men still do not accept the autonomy, freedom, and ability of women to act.

Throughout the historical process, there have been many causes of social inequality that have caused discrimination, and some of these, such as religion, persist to present day. At the end of the 15th century in Europe, when the modern State was beginning to emerge, religious unity was considered one of the key pillars to achieving political unity. The religious reform in 16th century Europe confirmed this tendency, in such a way that those who did not adhere to the official religion of the state were prosecuted or expelled. It is not difficult to find present day examples of this type of situation.

There are many other criteria that have caused social inequality: ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, political affiliation, occupation, health, disabilities, education, and culture, among others. Notwithstanding, economics is, more than any other criteria, the most important. It deals with the distribution of wealth and the difference in income that conditions access to resources and opportunities. This does not just mean defining a fundamental distinction between the rich and the poor or even between different social classes but rather it also applies within each one of them. The validity of economic inequality in today's society is such that, in recent years a new social phenomenon has appeared: aporophobia; that is, the rejection and repulsion felt towards poor people, which may result in fear and apprehension.

Ultimately, inequality creates a social hierarchy, and when people form groups following specific criteria or based on specific shared attributes, social stratification emerges. A stratum is a group of individuals that share the same social position, the same status, and as a result, benefit from or are penalized by their inclusion in it. That said, the criteria by which a stratum is formed, and as a consequence, how society is organized, vary across time and space. Given that layers are nothing more than established categories, it is important to understand how they are formed and why.

The first point to consider is that the way to restore the balance that inequality causes is to justify its existence as necessary or inevitable, and inherent to social organization, which is itself hierarchical and stratified. This provokes an ideological discussion that serves to legitimize inequality, which results in one group attempting to dominate—or rather, imposing its dominion on—all the rest. One of the first justifications is related to religion; recourse is made to Divinity to explain social stratification. At present, economics, specifically market forces, are used to explain social inequalities.



Generally, there are four main systems of stratification: slavery, castes, estates of the realm (and also orders), and classes. The differences between them stem from their rationale. In this sense, slavery consists in exercising power, while castes are based on religious beliefs. Estates derive from the legal system, while classes are born of different economic possibilities.

A caste is a social system in which personal status is assigned for life. As a result, in societies organized by castes the different layers are ascribed, and individuals remain in the same social layer they were born in for their entire lives. Consequently, in a caste society groups are segregated into completely isolated spaces, and a strong aversion for other groups is felt, even from a biological perspective.

Slavery is, without a doubt, the greatest, most atrocious, and absurd of all social inequalities. It entails turning a human into an object that becomes the property of another human being. There are many different justifications for this system. Since antiquity, slavery has nurtured war, in such a way that captured prisoners were doomed to become slaves. This phenomenon continued in the Middle Ages as well as the Modern Age, though in the later religion was added as a justification. Prisoners that held other faiths were enslaved. For this reason, in the Mediterranean there were Muslim slaves in Christian territory and Christian slaves in Muslim territory. In modern times, slavery was widespread for economic reasons as it provided cheap labor to mining and agricultural operations in America. Enslaving black Africans was justified by asserting that slaves lacked a soul, hence they had no rights and were marginalized by the legal system. Economic interests explain why slavery was not abolished until the 19th century, earlier or later depending on the country. Nevertheless, those same economic interests keep workers in conditions that are close to slavery today.

Social stratification by estates was inherent to the Middle Ages. With its origins in Roman society, it meant classification based on a functional criterion that corresponded with the social, political, and economic reality of feudalism, which was characterized by insecurity and instability. Hence, the first estate monopolized the use of violence, whether defensive or expansive: warriors, *bellatores* (those who fight) were ultimately nobles. The second estate was responsible for the spiritual health of society. As this was not ideal, and human beings were considered sinners, there had to be a group dedicated to praying and intervening on their behalf before God: the *oratores* (those who pray), that is, the clergy. The third estate was that of the *laboratores* (those who work). They were the workers responsible for maintaining the other two estates. Given that feudal society was primarily rural, the peasantry was the largest group and was divided into free peasants and serfs. The latter were subject to the authority of their lord and tied to the land, such that they were not fully free. As the process of urbanization advanced, craftsmen and merchants were added to the group of *laboratores*.



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A direct descendant of the estates of the realm system is the social stratification that existed during the Modern Age. In fact, it maintained a tripartite division of society that was articulated in nobility, clergy, and commoners, estates that correspond to the three medieval estates. The logic of the estates of the realm system rested upon legally recognized privilege that gave rise to social inequality: the nobility and the clergy were the privileged groups that enjoyed all manner of benefits (legal, social, political, economic, and fiscal). Nobility was ascribed at birth, hence bloodline and lineage were essential parts of the estate system. The economic development that took place from the start of the Modern Age allowed the element that was key to the imbalance to become apparent: wealth. A new social group, the bourgeoisie, emerged as a result of this wealth, and while it was still part of the peasantry, it had important economic resources and included groups ranging from merchants to liberal professionals. Society became ever more complex, and this caused varying internal divisions in each estate, which created a multitude of social situations. This explains how, despite the restrictions imposed at birth, the somewhat dynamic environment meant these could be overcome. The concept of social mobility emerged, that is, the ability to change social status. Although it was difficult, members of the peasantry could become part of the privileged groups. Wealth was the means best employed to this end. In this way, many bourgeois managed to ennoble their families, and marriage was the most common approach. However, being granted a royal favor as compensation for certain actions, typically economic, was no less important.

In social stratification by classes, the determining criterion is economic. According to Marx, two opposing groups are described: capitalists, who possess property and the means of production, and the proletariat, who provide the labor. However, class as a form of social stratification has a broader meaning as it is grounded in personal abilities and achievements. It is based on situations of a private nature: property, profession, or culture, among others. For this reason, it is an open criterion for classification since it is possible to move from one class to another. This class system occurs, especially, in capitalist society, and it generates notable social inequality as a minority of individuals control a large portion of the economic and political resources, all of which is justified by the functioning of market forces. Under these circumstances, it can be said that western societies have an upper class (big-business owners, industrialists, and senior executives), a middle class (professional trades and middle managers), a working class (manual laborers and blue collar workers) and segments that live in poverty, indigence, or are marginalized.

Different ways of family's organization. Marriage and inheritance in the European regions along times

There is a close connection between the concepts of family, marriage, and inheritance since the last two not only take place in the context of family but are also



determining factors when it comes to starting a family. Marriage as a concept has a multitude of definitions depending on the time period and geographic or sociocultural context in question. Thus, the conception of marriage that a plebeian from Ancient Rome might have had is not the same as the ones a merchant from Antwerp in the 16th century, a French courtier from the 18th century, or a laborer in Castile in the 19th century would have had. Cultural, ideological, religious, social, and economic differences lay the foundation that allows marriage to be described in terms of similarities and differences. In addition to the above, it must be noted that marriage can be addressed from an anthropological, historical, ideological, or legislative approach, and based on which is chosen, certain characteristics will stand out.

Marriage not only broadens kinship networks (its contribution to renewing society), but in the past it also consolidated many different types of social organization. In the society of the Old Regime, marriage cannot be understood without also understanding the weight of the patriarchal society and of the Judeo-Christian and Muslim religions. In Europe, the precepts of Judeo-Christian morality influenced the structure of families from the beginning and, as a result, marital and inheritance practices as well. The supremacy of man over woman, firmly established in the mentality of the time period, reflected the legal, religious, and secular rules that governed marriage and inheritance. Despite the peculiarities of each place, from a legal standpoint, women were considered dependent on men. In general, they were in custody of their fathers as children and adolescents and under the guardianship of their husbands as adults.

The role of women as mothers and wives in the mentality of the time period frequently relegated their presence to social spaces in the home, which has influenced their invisibility in the context of teaching history. However, teaching students about the role of women in the context of marriage, inheritance, and the family is also essential to understanding demographic aspects. The legal age for marriage, fertility and birth rates, and infant mortality cannot be understood without first understanding how marriage worked in the past. The explanation of marital acts (intermarriage, endogamy, matrimonial dispensation) and even other forms of union such as concubinage do not make sense if the context of their occurrence is not taken into consideration.

In the Old Regime, individuals essentially lacked any independence (it would require much debate to address whether personal freedom to make decisions existed or not in that era, and some may even dispute its existence at present). On the contrary, decisions were determined by higher institutions such as the family, kinship, lineage, and also by the multitude of horizontal and vertical relationships in which a person was entangled. Without a doubt, there were structural frameworks that conditioned individual actions when it came time to marry and start a family. On the one hand, we can address production systems and work systems, and on the other, systems of inheritance, combined with the weight of customs and traditions as well as the prevailing social



values. But above all else is social inequality and the distribution of wealth. In this way, many personal actions only truly make sense when interpreted in their historical context.

Thus, marriage must frequently be seen as a family strategy. Strategies are the result of historical experimentation with the variables at hand (family and non-family variables). If the historical context is stable (legal, economic, etc.), the strategies employed are also stable; however, when there is a change of context, strategies no longer work and produce adverse results such that new experimentation must begin, which results in uncertain outcomes that may cause profound changes to family behavior. In this way, the legal age for marriage, the choice of a spouse, the decision of how many children will marry and which ones, the partitioning of an inheritance, and at what age children begin to work, among others are decisions that were made not only by the father of a family but also by the entire family; likewise, this varied depending on the historical circumstances.

In this sense, whether or not a person married, at times, was not entirely their decision. Thus, families, with the intention of maintaining their wealth, designed strategies that combined marriage and celibacy of their children. In Catholic Europe, sending sons and daughters to become clergymen and nuns respectively was a socially accepted way of maintaining them celibate. Although there were instances of a daughter or son who remained unmarried and lived with their parents with the goal of caring for them as they aged. In the regions where the Protestant Reformation spread, marriages were more flexible. The Catholic Church reacted to this in the Counter-Reformation by instituting the sacrament of marriage and its legal definition.

In any event, when two people married, it was because they had sufficient resources to establish and start a family; without resources, marriage was impossible. There were areas in Europe, such as Tyrol in Austria where legislation prohibited marriage for those who did not have a minimum level of income; it was a manner of prohibiting marriage among the poor.

However, in other areas, historiography has shown that couples from the working classes got married earlier specifically because they were not affected by the issue of access to sufficient resources. On the contrary, individuals belonging to the landowning classes, as well as the nobility and the bourgeoisie were required to delay marriage until they had sufficient resources. One way of obtaining them was through inheritance, so they had to wait until their father passed away to inherit the property; however, this could also be achieved by advancing the inheritance. There were other ways to obtain wealth, such as working for a third party. For women, it was common to work as chambermaids in order to accumulate sufficient capital for their dowry, which made them more attractive in the marriage market.



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In any case, in the Old Regime, marriage was a tool to regulate the demographic system. In point of fact, by increasing the legal marriage age for women, the amount of time they could viably procreate was reduced and, as a result, so was the number of children they could have. On this point, there were generally differences between Western and Eastern Europe. In the latter, the legal age for first marriage for women was less than 22 years old, and there was a definitive female celibacy rate of less than 5%. On the other hand, in Western Europe women married for the first time between 24.5 and 26.5 years old with a definitive female celibacy rate between 10 and 20%. As a result, marriage was used as a veritable contraceptive in Western Europe that functioned to limit the birth rate and, consequently, slow demographic growth. By contrast, when a crisis affected mortality due to epidemics, famine, or war, the marriage rate increased, and that also increased the birth rate allowing population levels to recover.

In any event, what has yet to be said is that during the Old Regime a marriage did not just join two people: it joined two families. This brings us to question the motives to get married. It seems that beyond the will of the future spouses, the previously mentioned family strategies provided other reasons and motivations to do so. A good example is marriage between relatives with the goal of avoiding the dispersal of family wealth. In these cases, how much was due to free choice and how much was the recommendation of the family? Although it is true that parents held considerable authority in the Old Regime, this does not mean that they abruptly chose a spouse and imposed their decision on their children. Rather, it would be more appropriate to say agreements were reached; this does not discount the use of persuasion techniques that were often quite subtle.

In any case, marriage was undertaken for different reasons, not least of which were economic motives. Nevertheless, starting in the 18th century affection between spouses gained increasing importance. It is noteworthy that the Church rejected the idea of passion among spouses, and consequently, this was considered inadequate for marriage. Yet, the sentimental revolution combined with the process of secularization taking place in European society helped the concept of emotional bonds to gain importance when deciding to get married; that said, this conception had its limits as the rules of social homogamy continued to prevail.

Currently, it would not be appropriate to speak about marriage as much as different types of unions. Why do some people decide to get married or to unite? Is it a conscious, premeditated decision? Are there constraints to get married, were they imposed, or was it a personal decision, made freely? Today, there is no dispute that the decision to unite—marriage is no longer the prevailing method—is made freely and consciously by couples. It is based on love, and seeks to establish the emotional complementarity that promotes personal fulfillment in order to achieve common goals.



Another family custom through which social structures can be examined is inheritance. The existence of both equitable inheritance systems (partitioning of assets among legitimate descendants) and others that favored a sole heir influenced the formation of new families; starting a family with assets was not the same as trying to do it without them. The characteristics of the physical environment on an economic level, the opportunities for subsistence, and social class were other conditioning factors that determined marriage and inheritance decisions.

To generalize, the predominant social structures in Europe during the Old Regime were the extended family and inequitable inheritance practices that benefited men to the detriment of women. Even in regions where equitable inheritance was more advanced, such as the Crown of Castile, there were mechanisms (a third of the estate for betterment, a fifth of the estate freely disposable, entailed estate) to consolidate wealth with a sole heir. Similar institutions existed in other European countries, under the name of majorat (England, France, Germany), morgadio (Portugal) or ordynacja (Poland). These practices reinforced gender and social inequality for decades. Nevertheless, local and regional history contains examples of women managing important noble families and playing an important political role, above all, in the nobility.

In the 18th century, these customary practices related to marriage and inheritance began to change. This can be observed in the case of Spain with the repeated publication of decrees that attempted to reinforce the authority of parents regarding the marriage of their children (Pragmatic Sanction approved by the Spanish King Charles III in 1776). This fact demonstrates the need to control a society that was showing signs of opening up in favor of individual decisions and also becoming less dominated by factors such as family background (bloodlines) or status than it had been over previous centuries. In the modern age, changes to marriage were more drastic, especially throughout the 20th century. Driven by the increase in women's rights in the 19th century, the effects of liberal revolutions, and the progressive loss of power by the Church, the Civil Code of several European countries began to include civil rights such as separation and divorce.

Today, there are still reforms underway that affect marriage and, as a result, the creation of families; these reflect the plurality of ideological, religious, and cultural perspectives that globalization has brought about in the 21st century. Diversity in families and the legal recognition of different types of marriage are, without a doubt, a reflection of the maturity of values such as respect, liberty, and democracy in European societies. The decline of the traditional family and the patriarchal model has opened up the possibility for different family structures and behaviors that go beyond traditional gender roles. Nowadays, we should speak of families, and not family, to encompass the variety visible at present: single-parent families, adoptive, without children, reconstructed, and with homosexual parents, among others.



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Likewise, gender identity has also gone beyond the binary man-woman concept to include a mixture of both or others (transgender, fluid, neutral, polygender) that identify the perception a person has of themselves. This has been a true challenge for family and kinship studies as well as for countries trying to update their policies to reflect this new social reality. Over the last decade, the parliaments of many countries have approved laws that recognize and ensure the equality of rights for everyone, regardless of their gender. In Latin America, Argentina (2011), Colombia (2015), Bolivia (2016), Ecuador (2016), Chile (2018), Costa Rica (2018), and Uruguay (2018) changed their laws. In North America, Canada approved a law in 2017 allowing people to legally change their gender, and although no federal law has been passed in the United States, 26 States allow a person to change their gender without having to undergo surgery. Africa is the continent with the strictest laws in the world, and only three countries have legalized sex changes (Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa). In Asia, 27 countries have legalized sex change as well as two in Oceania. Europe is the continent with the most countries where sex change is legal, and in nine of them (Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Holland, Norway, Portugal, and Spain), this can be done without meeting any prior requirements.

Housing, food and material culture. Inequalities in the History of Europe

Material culture encompasses the objects and products created by people that are used in their day-to-day lives. Together with dwellings and diet these three concepts provide information on daily living habits and help to describe a social and cultural group. Changes to housing, diet, and material culture, in addition to the continuity of the same, can be observed over time. Economic and social inequality is a factor that has affected people throughout history and conditioned their lives. As human beings began to control their natural environment more efficiently and became more sedentary with the construction of small villages that later grew into the first cities, inequality in the possession of assets has become more evident.

In general, from antiquity till the Industrial Revolution, the economies of Europe were for the most part subsistence economies, especially in the Mediterranean basin. Economic and social inequality influenced housing, diet, and the distribution of material resources. Throughout this time period, the staple diet of the population, except for the privileged class, was grains and legumes and to a large extent, fish. Meat, above all game meat, was exclusive and reserved for the upper classes. In fact, gout was popularly known as an illness of the rich because it was common among kings and Popes, who consumed large quantities of meat. It must be noted that in this time period social status was not only manifested by economic wealth but also through intangible assets, and flaunting wealth was also a synonym of privilege. For this reason, it was not only important to be rich but also to look it in the eyes of the rest of the population.





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In antiquity and during the Old Regime, dwellings and furnishings had to reflect the social class that a person or family belonged to. Journeymen, craftsmen, livestock farmers, and merchants belonging to the peasant and intermediate classes lived in homes constructed from adobe, rock, and wood. They were basically a single, large room where daily life took place. It was not unusual for members of three generations to live under the same roof. Moreover, it was customary to portion off a part of this residence or to build a new room on the top floor of the family residence for newlywed couples to live in.

These dwellings were located far from the estates and palaces of the most privileged families, which were composed of various outbuildings and smaller houses where part of their services staff (slaves, serfs, and servants) could live. In many cases, families of aristocratic origins had various residences: one to spend the winter months in and another for the summer months. In the Middle Ages and the Modern Age, the houses of Kings were, in many ways, simply aristocratic houses on a bigger scale. As the chronicler of the court of Burgundy, Georges Chastellain, observed in the court of the Duke and Duchess of Burgundy: "after the feats and exploits of war, which are claims of glory, the residence is the first thing that leaps to the eye, and as a result, must be handled and run properly."

This mentality influenced families with privilege causing them to care for their furnishings and other possessions kept in their homes in order to demonstrate their social status. Magnificent libraries can be found in the inventories of families of rich merchants, bankers, and nobles. One example is the personal library of Ferdinand Columbus (1489–1539), the natural son of the admiral Christopher Columbus, which had between 15,000 and 20,000 volumes and was probably the largest private European library at the time. In addition to books, other objects that were recorded in notarial protocols were furniture, household goods, linens, and jewelry, among others. Dresses are also an element of material culture. Fashion is not an indulgence, and from the beginning it represented a characteristic of the social status of people. In the words of Manrique (cited by Rodríguez, 2017, p. 15): "the kings, and rightly so, reward the value of their subjects with privileges, precious objects, and, of course, sumptuous clothing in golden or scarlet colors that awaken the envy of their neighbors once the islanders had made the return journey to Iceland". For the remaining families without privilege, objects from daily life, including clothing, were homemade and when inherited were not always in the best of conditions.

As for diet, industrialization in Europe enabled the mass production of food. Factories began producing flour, oil, jam, butter, and cheese, and in this time period, more efficient methods for preserving food by canning and freezing (fruit, legumes, meat, and fish) were also discovered. The result of all this was that the staple diet of the population



expanded and so did health conditions and other demographic factors that influenced the growth of the population in Europe.

Starting in the 20th century, the most important change in the field of food production at a European level was the development of fast food and the boom of food delivery businesses. Some studies indicate that these factors have put the Mediterranean diet at risk and increased negative effects for health (especially childhood obesity).

Generally speaking, in the regions where the urbanization and economic development processes were less intense, solidarity among inhabitants helped to limit the differences related to the possession of assets. In fact, recent studies indicate that the gap between the rich and the poor is growing faster in developed countries when compared with others like China, Brazil, or India. The most recent global economic crises, in 2008 and again after the COVID-19 pandemic, have caused the differences in dwellings, diet, and assets among people in countries such as Spain to accelerate. A recent report produced by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) warns that Spain and other countries (Italy, France, Greece, and Portugal) have also experienced an increase in social inequality.

Reducing inequality and ensuring that nobody is left behind are an integral part of achieving the Sustainable Development Objectives. The United Nations indicates that inequality is also increasing for the most vulnerable populations in countries with deficient health systems and those that are facing humanitarian crises. Refugees and migrants, as well as indigenous populations, the elderly, people with disabilities, and children are at particular risk of exclusion. Moreover, hate speech directed at vulnerable groups is increasing.

In recent years, social legislation has improved in various European countries with the goal of offering people at risk of social exclusion or on the brink of poverty better protection for housing, diet, and basic necessities (water, electricity). On a European level, these objectives have a legal foundation that is set out in Articles 19, 145 to 150 and 151 to 161 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). The fight against poverty and social exclusion is one of the specific objectives of the European Union in the area of social policy. Between 1975 and 1994 the European Economic Community carried out a series of pilot programs with the goal of fighting poverty and exclusion. However, given the absence of a legal foundation, the community action undertaken in this realm was constantly criticized. That is why the European projects that have been approved and the efforts made by different countries to reduce social inequality in recent years are so important. In France in 2019, a program providing support to 9 million Frenchmen living below the poverty line was approved for a value of 8 billion euros. In Italy in 2013, the *Sostegno per l'Inclusione Attiva* (SIA) was approved, which provides funds via a bank card to the most disadvantaged in order to buy basic necessities.





In the same vein, the Spanish government approved a Royal Decree in 2020 to establish a subsistence wage. This was motivated by data published in 2018 by Eurostat, according to which the Gini coefficient in Spain was almost three times higher than the average for the European Union. Incomes of the lowest 20% of the population in Spain represent only one sixth of the incomes of the highest 20%, while in the European Union this figure is only one fifth. Portugal is in a similar position to Spain. It is one of the most unequal countries in the European Union, and the incomes of the richest 20% of the population are 6.8% higher than the incomes of the poorest 20%. According to a recent study, the impact of social transfers (not including pensions) on reducing poverty levels is clearly lower in Portugal than in other countries, although without these policies (e.g. the subsistence wage) the intensity of poverty would be much greater.

However, the most striking case at the European level is Sweden, which has experienced a sharp increase in social inequality despite being a model welfare state since the second half of the 20th century. Nevertheless, since the start of this century the richest 0.1% have an average disposable income 38 times greater than the average wage earner. In fact, data indicate that the richest 1% of Swedes owned 18% of all assets in 2002, but this figure rose to 42% in 2017. The result is that Sweden has one of the highest levels of inequality in Europe, on par with Brazil, South Africa, and the United States.

Without a doubt, reducing social inequality of the population is an urgent challenge after the recent global economic crises in 2009 and as a result of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. European institutions and governments should provide efficient aid programs so people in situations of poverty and at risk of exclusion can obtain basic necessities. It is also important to provide the necessary mechanisms to bolster job stability that will ensure access to housing, health, and education. It is not enough that the right to decent housing or access to free education has been included in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union since 2000. Over the following decades, European citizens will need to push forward and take action. Active and democratic participation must lead to the approval and implementation of effective programs and measures to reverse the present situation of increasing social and economic inequality, both at the national level of European countries as well as across the globe.

Family social space in Europe: from education to adapting to social networks

The family is an essential concept in the social sciences and, specifically, in teaching history. It is a complex concept that has many different meanings. Perhaps the simplest defines the family as the basic unit of social organization. As a result, it is the first group of people an individual belongs to. In this definition, the idea of belonging is key because it identifies the existence of a blood relationship or strong emotional bond that unites people. The arrangement of social groups that structure a society, the domestic economy, demographic aspects, political culture, religion, customs, and





artistic manifestations, among others, can be studied through the family. Therefore, from an individual's immediate environment, their behavior in the natural, social, and cultural environment can be analyzed. This makes studying the family essential for various social and human sciences such as anthropology, sociology, human rights, demography, geography, history, and art history.

In history, the family has been a key subject in historiography to understand the structure of present and past societies. The study of the family in Europe started in the 1950s in connection with demographic studies, and in the 70s and 80s three schools of thought were developed. First of all, the family became a relevant historical category based on the dominant historiographical school of thought, the Annals school. Interest in studying mentalities, sexuality, and childhood placed daily life at the heart of research, and various studies were published by such notable authors as Le Goff, Michelet, and Foucault. In the mid-1980s, the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, driven by the works of Peter Laslett, stood out in the field of family studies. In this period, influential research was produced in the field of historical social anthropology, which focused on family models and their evolution over time.

Within the family as a social space, aspects such as education are key to understanding how cultural and ideological norms of society are replicated. In his classic work *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien régime* (1960), translated to English as *Centuries of Childhood* in 1962, Ariès asserted that childhood was a differentiated stage in the life cycle, and parents did not pay greater attention to their children until the 18th century. Before this time period, children did not typically receive much attention from parents, except during the first few years of life when they were completely defenseless. Moreover, it seems that strong emotional ties were not developed with them in the same way as happens today. In fact, there was a demographic reason: a fourth of all children never reached a full year of life, while another fourth did not reach 10 years of age. Thus, the real possibility of the death of a child restrained, somehow, attachment and affection towards children. This affected all social groups: from the children of the humble journeyman or the rich merchant all the way up to Kings, as was the case with Prince Balthasar Charles, immortalized by Velázquez.

In addition, in times of famine, shortages, or severe economic crises, children were the first to be sacrificed. It was not just newborns who were abandoned at convents, hospitals, or private homes—although in many cases there were not only economic reasons but also other causes related to honor or social reputation in the case of illegitimate births. Children were also abandoned in the countryside (reflected in popular stories) and there were even cases of infanticide.

In addition, children quickly entered adulthood (around 7 years old), and for many, especially peasant children, this happened by leaving home to become servants; this took place both in rural and urban environments, as children did not simply perform





domestic service but also agricultural labor or farm hand work. Others became apprentices to craftsmen or lived in the house where the artisan workshop was located, all of which the parents negotiated with the master craftsman for whom the child worked; frequently, this would be included in public deeds in the presence of a notary.

Children from the middle classes (and also from the lower nobility) were made to study, which could also imply having to leave the family residence and stay in the home of a relative that lived in a city where there were more educational opportunities, which greatly expanded from the start of the Modern Age. Some children continued to live at home with their families. This happened in the aristocracy, although this situation did not always mean that the parents remained emotionally detached from their children. The children of peasants also frequently stayed at home in order to take on different agricultural and farm tasks.

As a result, child labor was widespread in the Middle Ages, and when the Industrial Revolution began there was no impediment to children working in factories or mines. What happened was, by that time, the view of children and childhood had changed. They were then considered exposed and, as a result, worthy of special attention. For this reason, the long and inhumane workdays they were subjected to, not to mention a total lack of minimum conditions, began to be publicly condemned, and this paved the way for social reforms. Moreover, children were not supposed to have to work but rather study and educate themselves. This debate took place at almost the same time as the development and generalization of public education, though differences existed among countries and between rural and urban settings. In any event, access to education also began to show notable inequalities, such that many children from the lower classes continued working and could not receive a formal education; notwithstanding, it is true that the 20th century witnessed the generalization of childhood education.

It was not until after World War II, specifically in 1959, that the UN issued the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, whose preamble summarizes the modern concept of childhood: "Whereas the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth [...] Whereas mankind owes to the child the best it has to give, Now therefore, The General Assembly Proclaims this Declaration of the Rights of the Child to the end that he may have a happy childhood and enjoy for his own good and for the good of society the rights and freedoms herein set forth..."

However, there is still much to be done as the aforementioned declaration is not complied with in many parts of the world; millions of children still suffer from the problems associated with poverty, discrimination, marginalization, xenophobia, and violence. There are still children who are the victims of war and terrorism, child labor,



prostitution, and sexual abuse. It is not unusual to encounter images of child soldiers, children living in landfills, or others dying of curable diseases or hunger.

Poverty limits the possibilities of universalizing the conditions of citizenship. Social exchange through family-based networks is one of the ways in which people at risk of exclusion can overcome their difficult situation. Nowadays, social exchange networks of friends, neighbours and relatives - through which people give and receive things to and from each other - are one of the survival mechanisms.

In the words of Lomnitz (1981, cited by Garrido and Madariaga, 2001, p. 446-447): "a person's social relational field usually has a spatiotemporal representation among many people, some of whom are known to many, while others are only a link between them". These networks are important not only at the economic level. Customs, mentality, culture are learned through social interaction with other people in society. The networks of relationships generated from families enable the learning and transmission of cultural tradition from generation to generation. This process is known as socialization. The social reproduction of hierarchies throughout the Ancien Régime cannot be understood without the role of families and their relational networks. Nor can the business world or political power be understood today without the configuration of social networks. Credit Suisse presented the 'CS Global Family 900 universe', a database of the 920 largest family-owned companies in the world. These 920 companies are spread across 35 countries, have a market capitalization of at least US\$ 1 billion, and family-owned stakes of at least 20% (Novartis, Roche, Walmart, Facebook, Anheuser-Busch InBev, Oracle, Samsung).

According to Garrido and Madariaga (2001), the trust that creates the relationships and interrelationships that form social networks is the result of interaction and social proximity: both physical and economic proximity. This interaction promotes the key elements for people to exchange goods, affection, money, love, and even help each other in different situations throughout their lives. Trust implies familiarity (social proximity), opportunity (physical proximity), and the knowledge of mutual needs and shortcomings (economic proximity). This network is characterized by strong ties and a small number of members, distributed among friends and family, who are culturally homogeneous and interact face-to-face. Social networks continue to function even when some of their members have had to move to another place. For this reason, despite the peculiarities of the regions of the European continent, social networks have been essential throughout history. This applies to understanding both upward social mobility (individuals that have benefited from this process) and the survival of families with limited resources.

Glossary of concepts





- Ancien Régime: an expression for the final centuries (17th and 18th) of the Modern Age - from 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Turks, to 1789, with the French Revolution.
- Birth Rate: is defined as the number of births registered per thousand inhabitants in a given time, usually one year.
- Death Rate: the quantity of people that die in a specific place and time in relation to the total population.
- Fertility rate: the ratio of the number of births occurring in a certain period of time to the number of people of childbearing age in the same period.
- Infant mortality rate: number of infant and child deaths occurring during the first year of life per 1,000 estimated births, for a given area and period.
- Life cycle: the life process of an organism from birth to death.
- Material culture: are the objects and products made by people that are used in everyday life.
- Migration: the movement of a population from one place to another that brings about a change in habitual residence.
- Natural increase: indicates the increase or decrease in population that occurs as a result of the difference between live births and deaths only.
- Neolithic Revolution: expression that characterizes the abrupt and profound change for humanity that resulted from transitioning from hunting-gathering societies to agricultural villages.
- Population: a group of people that live in a specific area.
- Rate of Natural Increase: the difference between the number of births and deaths in a population in a specific time period.
- Social stratification: when people are grouped according to certain criteria or because they share certain attributes.
- Spanish Influenza (1918-1920): was a pandemic caused by an outbreak of influenza virus type A, subtype H1N1.
- The Antonine plague (165-180 AD): was an epidemic of smallpox or measles that killed ten percent of the Roman population.
- The Black Death: was the most devastating plague pandemic in human history, affecting Eurasia in the 14th century.

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WEB RESOURCES

Evolution of the population:

- American Museum of Natural History. "Human population through time". <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUwmA3Q0 OE>
- https://www.worldhistory.org/Migration_Age/

European demography:

- <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/population-demography>

Gender inequality:

- <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1209683/the-eu-gender-equality-index-by-country/>



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