Malthusian sinners: illegitimate fertility and economic crisis

A case study in Leuven, 1846-1856

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INTRODUCTION

Late and non-universal marriage, the Western European marriage pattern (Hajnal, 1965; Watkins, 1984), has been called Malthusian because in his Principle of Population, Malthus advocated delayed marriage as an appropriate (morally acceptable) strategy for preventing excessive population growth. In effect, it greatly inhibited the rate of childbearing in Western Europe (Coale, 1986). Moreover, this marriage pattern engendered a large reservoir of marriageable singles, which permitted nuptiality to respond in quite a flexible way to mortality crises and fluctuations in the economy (Dupâquier, 1972; Wrigley and Schofield, 1981). That is not to say that mortality crises and economic conditions determined the level of nuptiality, and through that, fertility, nor that these factors formed a homeostatic demographic system (see Weir, 1984), and certainly not that these factors are a necessary or a sufficient explanation for the prevalence of late and non-universal marriage in Europe. Low nuptiality has been shown to endure even in places, times, and groups where the Malthusian constraints of land and food did not apply (Alter, 1991, 2). Moreover, if there was a causal link between the economy and the nuptiality regime, it was certainly not a one-way-link. Hajnal (1965, 132-133) was aware of this as he pointed to the economic consequences of the marriage pattern he described.

Economic circumstances can only indirectly be linked with nuptiality anyway: they are mediated through a culture that includes beliefs and norms regarding the proper age and suitable circumstances for a marriage to take place. Here, the most widely cited cultural factor is the rule of neo-local residence: at least in the North of Western Europe the newly wed are expected to leave the paternal household and set up their own ones, which requires time to accumulate resources (Watkins, 1986). Again, the kind and amount of resources needed to set up a household is not just determined by 'hard' economic needs, but also by regional and class-specific standards of proper living conditions. Who will guarantee these resources and in what way, is a matter of class- and gender-specific role expectations (Weir, 1984).

Whatever their origins, beliefs concerning the proper age to get married were clearly a normative cultural factor. Frans van Poppel (1992, 29-116) described these for the Netherlands in the nineteenth century. There, as in many regions throughout Europe, nineteenth century elites were alarmed when more and more industrial or proto-industrial workers started to marry at earlier ages. This was denounced as carelessness on the part of the proletarians, often in explicitly Malthusian terms. Bourgeois writers advised the lower classes to be more provident and not to marry in a hurry. Some even gave very specific directions about decent ages for a marriage and preferable ages for the partner to choose.

Next to a high age at marriage, a second enduring element in the European reproductive culture, is the principle of legitimacy (Dupâquier, 1972, 200-205), in the words of Malinowski the rule "*that no child should be brought into this world without a man - and one man at that - assuming the role of sociological father*" (cited in Laslett, 1980, 5). Although virtually all cultures include rules selecting proper circumstances for giving birth, the bastard is a typically European figure. Just like there were no spinsters in Japan in the European sense (Cornell, 1984), there was no Japanese equivalent of the bastard before the introduction of European philosophy and systems of registration (Hayami, 1980, 397). Bourgeois rules of respectability required that Europeans *"procreate only with partners to whom they are wedded at the time of the procreative act"* (Laslett, 1980, 6). But in some early modern European areas, especially in Central Europe and Scandinavia, sexual activity was an expected part of courtship and betrothal, often legitimated as 'testing' or 'trying out' women's fecundity. Still, the principle of legitimacy generally held in these areas as well, because marriage was expected to follow in case of pregnancy or because popular definitions of marriage did not conform to church or state definitions (Caspard, 1974; Shorter, 1975, 98-108, 121-148; Mitterauer and Sieder, 1982, 121-126; Mitterauer, 1983, 55-67; Alter, 1988, 113-114). Just like the norms regarding the proper age for marrying, the principle of legitimacy was part of the Malthusian system of 'moral restraint'. Indeed, the preventive check through late and non-universal marriage presupposed the principle of legitimacy and, hence, of illegitimacy (see Blaikie, 1993, 13-21).

This essay focuses on the group that did not behave like Malthus would have it: the group that bore children out of wedlock or married relatively early, or both, in a period of severe economic depression. The analysis presented below tries to figure out what social groups had the higher probabilities of getting pregnant in the early twenties, who married early, and what was the relationship between these two. In particular, it focuses on the role of the family and migration. Did women get pregnant at early ages because they were isolated from their families and the local community? Were women's families in a position to avoid absconding?

In combination, a high age at marriage and the principle of legitimacy implied that sexually adult youngsters were expected to refrain from sexual intercourse for a long time, as symbolised in the Christian contrast of chastity and fornication (Mitterauer, 1983). But expectations or norms generate the possibility of deviance. It is not surprising to find, then, that in the middle of the nineteenth century, large numbers of illegitimate births alarmed contemporary state and church authorities, moralists, local doctors, and scientific observers. In the social sciences, illegitimacy and premarital sex in general have typically been interpreted in terms of deviant behaviour (Stone, 1979, 397-398; Laslett, 1980, 1-4; Blaikie, 1995). Imposing norms implies social control to command conformity. But control operated a double standard. Families were supposed to supervise the chastity of their daughters/sisters carefully at least until marriageable age, when serious courtship could be expected. Sexual experiments of sons/brothers were tolerated more, if not encouraged (Mitterauer, 1983, 55-67; Alter, 1988, 116-125). Attempts to explain the European rise in illegitimacy and bridal pregnancy of the late eighteenth century have repeatedly referred to a breakdown of family control.

Indeed, a common theme in scholarly work on extramarital sex and pregnancy is the weakening of traditional social control mechanism; of constraints imposed on early courtship by family, local community, and church authorities (Blaikie, 1993, 13-17; Tranter, 1985). Shorter (1975, 255-268) argued that the formation, first, of a proto-industrial proletariat in the countryside and, then, of an urban-industrial proletariat, implied that increasing numbers of young unmarried people were working under free-market conditions. They experienced the logic of mobility and inter-individual competition inherent in market capitalism. This mentality, Shorter argued, spread into various non-economic domains of life, specifically into those ties that bind the individual to the surrounding community, and to the whole domain of cultural rules that regulated familial and sexual behaviour. *"The wish to be free produced the illegitimacy explosion"*, and in Shorter's view, this wish affected women more than men. Women working under free-market conditions were gaining individual wages and if they did not have an inclination to escape the expectations and restrictions of their parents and families, they at least had the *possibility* of doing it. Economically independent women have greater liberty than economically dependent ones, and this makes them more prone to abandon traditional chastity and instead go out with different men and have sex before marriage.

Where Shorter sees freedom, Tilly, Scott, and Cohen (1976) observe increased vulnerability. Many young proletarian women were willing to engage in premarital sex because they expected that their partners would marry them in case of pregnancy, in line with early modern customs. In cities, loneliness,

isolation, and economic necessity impelled young working girls to find mates, because women's wages were extremely low and employment unstable. Courtship and mate selection was not family – or community – regulated in this situation, which made these women more vulnerable to hit-and-run intercourse with men who were no longer tied to the local community themselves. Marital expectations were often frustrated. Hence, the number of extramarital births increased.

This article will not re-open the debate that highly concentrated on Shorter's speculation that women's emancipation produced the illegitimacy explosion (Shorter, 1971; Shorter, 1975, 255-268; Tilly, Scott and Cohen, 1976; Lee, 1977; Fairchilds, 1978; Alter, 1988). Rather, it will start from the common denominator, which associates sexual intercourse of single young women with proletarian living and working conditions, isolation from the family of origin, and spatial mobility. Most scholars had to speculate about the effects of living conditions on the hazard of never-married young women to get pregnant, because relevant indicators were lacking in their sources.

2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Empirical research in Western Europe has generally confirmed that extramarital pregnancy was most common among working class women and agricultural servants (Oosterveen and Smith, 1980, 110-113; Stewart, 1980, 132-133; Matovic, 1980, 341-345; Alter, 1988, 125-131; Oris, 1989; Seccombe, 1992, 225-229). However, studies that were able to assess empirically the effects of separation from the native community and family or origin are hard to find. Most research has been based on birth and marriage registers from church or civil authorities. Such vital registration has the advantage that it is available throughout Europe, but a highly relevant drawback is that the association of vital events with the situation in the household is very difficult, if not impossible to achieve on the nominal level. Information on co-residence patterns is usually only available at census dates (see Blaikie, 1993, 122-157). Civil birth and marriage registers often include place of birth and some indication of occupation, but never on household situation. Furthermore, the relation between extra-marital pregnancy, illegitimacy and marriage cannot be observed accurately with vital registration data only, because the population at risk for these events is mostly not known.

Population registers combine household information with vital registration, including migration. This enables analyses in principle both to trace co-residence patterns and to calculate accurate numbers at risk (Van de Walle, 1976; Gutmann and Van de Walle, 1978; Leboutte and Obotela, 1988).

One of the few analyses of bridal pregnancy and illegitimacy based on population registers was carried out by Alter (1988). In his study on the female

life course in nineteenth century Verviers, Belgium, he confirmed the association between proletarian conditions and spatial mobility on the one hand, and pre- or extra-marital pregnancy on the other. Adult migrants in particular ran higher risks of becoming unwed mothers. However, Alter was sceptical about interpreting this in terms of social isolation. Data from population registers revealed that in Verviers, single pregnant women were not isolated from parents or kin. Those who became unwed mothers had migrated to the city more recently than brides, but almost all of them came with parents and siblings. Migrant or not, the presence of at least one parents did not seem to prevent extra-marital sexual activity of the daughters (Alter, 1988, 112-131).

3. SETTING: LEUVEN, 1846-1856

The analysis presented below is also based on Belgian population registers, but in quite a different context. In contrast to Verviers, Leuven is situated in the Dutch-speaking part of the country, where economic modernisation, secularisation and the fertility transition generally lagged behind the southern part of the country (Lesthaeghe, 1977). While the population of Verviers more than doubled in the second half of the nineteenth century, largely because of immigration, there was a 40 per cent growth only in Leuven, which was for the biggest part natural. In- and out-migration in Leuven was often temporary and seasonal. At census time in 1846, 66 per cent of the 30.000 inhabitants were Leuven born; at the turn of the century this was even 70 per cent (Matthijs, Van Bavel and Van de Velde, 1997).

Economically, Leuven was also very different from Verviers. In contrast to the latter city, Leuven has a long urban tradition as an administrative, trades and crafts centre. It is situated in the historical duchy of Brabant, of which it was the capital city in the late middle ages, when it still was more important demographically and politically than Brussels or Antwerp.[1]

In the middle of the nineteenth century, about a third of the registered labour force worked in industry, while a fifth was employed in non-specific sectors. Intense but temporary immigration from the rural environment provided for day labourers, that came and went with the seasons. Overall, 45 per cent worked in services, trades or transport. Only 3 per cent was employed in agriculture.

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1. In the fourteenth century, it counted as much inhabitants as at the start of the nineteenth century (Brepoels e.a., 1985, 12-26).

Never did Leuven experience a rapid and large-scale industrialisation like Verviers in the nineteenth century. Instead, its economy drifted with the industrialising and rapidly expanding national economy. The provincial town played a supportive role in the Belgian industrialisation story, primarily through its functions as a centre of education, trades, and transport. The small-scale local industry expanded and modernised only gradually, and included mainly food industry (especially breweries), craft textile manufacturing, tanneries, wood, and construction.

Although its function as an administrative centre was overshadowed by the nearby capital city of Brussels, the services sector had expanded since the independence of Belgium in 1830. Leuven became an important educational centre, offering primary and secondary education to the provincial environment, and higher education to the whole country. Most educational institutions were connected with one of the many religious congregations. The same holds true for the hospitals. Virtually the entire higher-educated clergy of Belgium spent several years studying in Leuven. Worldly activities in the tertiary sector included transit, wholesale and retail trade, and an important military settlement.

Employment opportunities for women in industry were very scarce. In sum, only 1150 women were employed in industry, according to the census of 1846, which is 11 per cent of the female population between ages 15 and 65. More than half of these (683) were working as lace-makers. The others were seamstresses, dressmakers, knitters, laundresses and comparable, traditionally female working-class occupations (Magits, 1975, 164-178, appendix XI).

Not surprisingly, this town recruited many domestic servants, mainly young women coming from the rural villages (Van 't Dack, 1972); 30 per cent of the registered female labour force consisted of servants in 1846, making up the single most important occupational category for women. Clearly, it was an important factor in attracting female immigrants to Leuven. During the period studied here, 1846-56, 120 female immigrants were registered for every 100 male immigrants (Matthijs, Van Bavel and Van de Velde, 1997, 81). The imbalance is probably overestimated, however. People employing domestic servants were supposed to register them as migrants. But the town hosted students and many soldiers as well, and male day labourers finding unstable employment and housing in Leuven. Most probably, many who came went unrecorded.

The census of 1846 gives a picture of the *de facto* population. The age-specific sex ratios for single youngsters were mostly positive during courtship ages, with on average about 20 per cent more unmarried men than women between ages 16 and 27. However, the number of available two-years-older men to 100 single women decreases below 100 in the typical age categories for first marriage (table 1).

TABLE 1 NUMBER OF SINGLE MEN PER 100 SINGLE WOMEN, LEUVEN, 15 OCTOBER 1846

	Women's age		
	15-19	*20-24*	*25-29*
Men same age	109	124	108
Men two years older	118	107	75

4. 1846-1856: A PERIOD OF GENERAL CRISIS

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the economic welfare of Leuven was still to a high extent dependent on agricultural production. Crises in the countryside were clearly felt in the city. After the city and the whole region had recovered from a period of economic depression around 1830, even much harder times started with the extremely severe and long winter of 1844-1845. This winter destroyed large parts of the wheat harvest. To compensate for the losses, farmers started growing potatoes more intensively, but in the summer of 1845 this harvest failed almost completely as a blight hit the potato crops all over Europe. Food prices soared and the quality of available products was generally bad (Van Isacker, 1978, 68). In 1847, the families of one in three Leuven citizens were supported by local poor relief initiatives. The cost of living went down between 1847 and 1850, but still 30 per cent of the population was on poor relief in 1849 (Fiers, 1984; De Vos and Van der Haegen, 1980, 44-45). In 1855, bad weather was again responsible for extremely high food prices.

In this period, the mean age at first marriage for women fluctuated between figures as high as 27.8 and 30.5.[2] Like in most places, soaring prices on the food markets had consequences for the Leuven marriage market, as can be seen in figure 1. When the cost of living became extremely expensive, many marriages were postponed, and as a result, the marriage rate decreased. Correlation between the detrended, logged price index of food products on the one hand, and the marriage rate on the other, was -0.55 during the period 1840-1860.[3]

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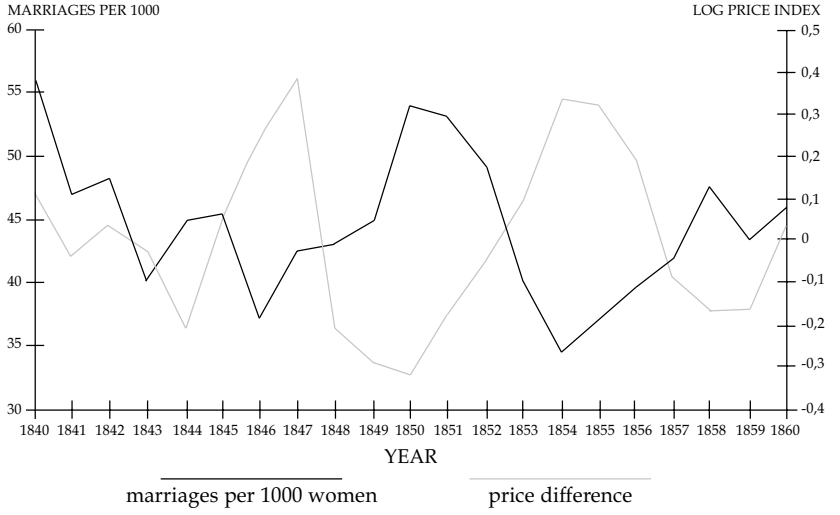
2. Figures based on a one in three sample of marriage acts in Leuven (see Matthijs, 1996).

3. First, the log of the yearly price index (1835-1880) was Hodrick-Prescott filtered. The graph and the correlation coefficient make use of the difference between these filtered, detrended price trend and the original logged values. It should be noted that Harvey and Jaeger (1993) have shown that the Hodrick-Prescott filter may create spurious cycles in the detrended series. However, the cycles in the price differences used here clearly correspond to cycles in the raw series (corr. coeff. 0.80). (I am grateful to Tommy Bengtsson, Goran Broström and Cameron Campbell for bringing the HP filter with its advantages and drawbacks to my attention).

The price index includes rye, wheat, potatoes, beef and pork meat. All prices are yearly averages for the prices paid on the markets of Leuven, as reported in the city council reports.

Rye and wheat weigh most heavily in the average, as they were the most widely used cereals in Flanders and Brabant (Vandenbroeke and Vanderpijpen, 1970).

FIGURE 1: MARRIAGE RATE: NUMBER OF MARRIAGES PER 1000 UNMARRIED WOMAN AGED 15-49, LEUVEN, 1840-1860.



Bad diet must have made this population more vulnerable to the typhus and cholera plagues that hit in 1848 and 1849 respectively (Van Isacker, 1978, 68). Especially the cholera hit Leuven very badly, as hard as larger cities as Antwerp, Brussels, and Ghent. Victims were working class people in general and young children, the elderly, and woman in particular. Nearly 47 per thousand Leuven inhabitants died (De Vos and Van der Haegen, 1980; Matthijs, Van Bavel and Van de Velde, 1997, 44-47).

Typically, illegitimacy figures were generally high in garrison- and university towns compared to their provinces (Mitterauer, 1983, 72). This traditionally held for Leuven as well. But in these years, illegitimacy reached exceptionally high peaks. Between 1846 and 1856, one in five to more than one in four births were illegitimate. A better index in the illegitimacy rate, which expresses the number of illegitimate children born per 1000 unmarried women aged 15 to 49. During the crisis period, every year 40 to 50 children were born to 1,000

unmarried women (see figure 2). The number of foundlings and abandoned children peaked as well. Between 1846 and 1856, the number of foundlings and abandoned children varied between 40 and 160 per year. In 1854, for instance, 1000 children were born, of which one in four out of wedlock, while nearly 160 children were abandoned or became foundlings. The figures for 1849 are similar (Matthijs, Van Bavel and Van de Velde, 1997, 37-41).

FIGURE 2: ILLEGITIMATE RATE: NUMBER OF ILLEGITIMATE BIRTHS PER 1000 SINGLE WOMEN, AGED 15-49, LEUVEN, 1840-1860.(*)

(*) Number of single women 15-49 interpolated from census-data (cubic interpolation).

5. DATA AND METHODS

The following analyses focuses on women in the courtship ages during the period of general economic and demographic crisis just described. The sample consists of all women born in 1830 who were mentioned in the population registers of Leuven running from 15 October 1846 until 31 December 1856. Hence, the birth cohort under study was for the biggest part 16, some still 15, when the register opened, and all were 26 when it closed.

However, the exact date of birth is far from always mentioned in the population registers. When the year of birth was not mentioned, the age at the time of inscription was taken into account. For example, an immigrant woman reported to be 24 when she entered in 1854, was included in the sample, even if she entered on the first of January. As a result, next to the people misstating their ages and mistakes in the reported dates of birth, the sample will in fact

include quite some people born in 1829. For 169 women in the sample at least the exact year of birth was stated in the registers, while for 173 women, only the age at the time of entry was given.

At any moment between 1847 and 1856, at least 217 women were under observation. The minimum was reached in the beginning of 1851, the maximum in June 1853, when 241 women were at risk. The number is fairly stable, but during the first crisis period, when women were in their late teens, many left Leuven. Between the two crises periods, many immigrated, often as domestic servants. Overall, 2426.48 woman-years were observed for 342 different women, so on average, women were at risk for 7 years.

The reason why only a one-year birth cohort was chosen, instead of sampling a broader-defined generation, is that this sample forms part of a bigger study including three birth cohorts, 1830, 1850, and 1864, both men and women, whose life course will be followed during the complete childbearing ages. Record linkage between subsequent registers will be much more efficient in this way than with a random sample, because it can be done semi-automatically (Oris, 1990; Gutmann, 1977).[4]

To the children found in the population registers, children were added that remained unrecorded there but were mentioned in birth and death registers, starting with the vital registers of 1845, when the cohort was 15 years old. The main reason is that stillbirths were never included in the populations registers, and many babies that died in their first one or two weeks were omitted as well (Gutmann and Van de Walle, 1978). The population registers included 186 children born to women from our birth cohort while 15 children added from the vital registers.

To make them ready for event history analysis, the fragments of the female life courses observed were further divided into smaller intervals each time one of the following things happened: a change in marital status, immigration (marking the beginning of a spell), out-migration or death (marking the end of the observation interval), conception of a child, and birth of a child. The dependent variables in the following models are time intervals from entry into the population at risk until conception, childbirth, and marriage. The date of conception had to be calculated by subtracting nine months from the date of birth of a child.[5] Only conceptions that occurred while at risk in Leuven

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4. Thanks to George Alter and Michel Oris who suggested this sampling strategy.

5. The duration of gestation is not a constant but has a particular distribution. According to estimates by Leridon (1973), given an effective conception in month 0, on average 2 per cent of the babies are born in month 7, 23 per cent in month 8, 66 per cent in month 9, and 9 per cent in month 10. This implies, of course, that subtracting 9 months from the date of birth is only a 'best bet'. About 25 per cent of the children born in the seventh or eighth month after marriage, who we consider as prenuptially conceived, will actually have been

are included. Women who left the city had to be truncated nine months before the date of out-migration.

According to the interval between conception and marriage, one can distinguish between four pathways to giving birth to a first child at an early age, each having a meaning.

1. Marriage – Conception – Birth: the child is postnuptially conceived. In these cases, pregnancy or childbirth was not the reason for marriage. Rather, this pathway conforms to bourgeois and church norms, according to which marriage marks the start of legitimate sexual activity.

2. Conception – Marriage – Birth: the child is prenuptially conceived but born within wedlock. These cases included shotgun marriages, where the decision to marry follows pregnancy. Or, sexual activity may have started because marriage was imminent (Wilson, 1989). With the data at hand, the difference cannot readily be made.

3. Conception – Birth – Marriage: the birth of an illegitimate child is followed by marriage. Many of these marriages legitimated the child. Illegitimacy may have occurred because of temporary barriers to marriage, for instance economic hardship or housing shortage.

4. Conception – Birth: mothers who remain unwed at least at an early age; they may have married at a higher age.

In what category were first marriage and childbirth most likely to occur before age 26? The raw frequency distribution can be very misleading, because the data are censored due to migration and death. For instance, a pregnant woman may move out very shortly after marriage, in which case we do not observe any birth, so no premarital conception either. Event history analysis techniques can deal with this type of right-truncation (Yamaguchi, 1991, 3-9). Mainly Cox regression for continuous duration data were used, because of its flexibility. However, observations are also left-censored with respect to first pregnancy and childbirth: women born in 1830 who came to Leuven in their late teens and early twenties, might have given birth to a child before they came to Leuven. Hence, the analyses are valid only for pregnancy and childbirth that first occurred in town. The observed first births to women under age 27 can be related in a meaningful way to marriage. More than half of the women who gave birth in Leuven before age 26 were not (yet) married. In sum, three quarter of the first children observed were conceived while the mother was still single. As might be expected, the mean age at becoming mother was highest in case of post-marital conception. Mean ages at concep-

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conceived after marriage. However, subtracting 8 months would imply that all children born in the eighth month after marriage are considered postnuptially conceived, which makes the error even bigger.

tion for unwed mothers and pregnant brides are more or less the same, but the spread is higher for the illegitimate (table 2).

TABLE 2 MEAN AGE AT GIVING BIRTH AND NUMBER OF BIRTHS BY TIMING OF CONCEPTION

	N	%	*Mean age at birth*	*Std. Dev.*
Illegitimate birth	50	56.8	21.6	2.32
Prenuptially conceived	15	17.0	21.7	1.69
Postnuptially conceived	19	21.6	23.2	1.17
Born within marriage but marriage date unknown	4	4.5	22.7	2.07
	88	100.0		

To what extent did pregnancy and childbirth speed up marriage before age 26? Table 3 contains the effects estimated in a Cox regression of time until marriage on four time-varying independent variables: age, first pregnancy, first childbirth, and second pregnancy, all for never married women under age 26. The covariates reflect in fact the sequence of events outlined in the four pathways above. Clearly, a first pregnancy was the reason for many early marriages, or immanent marriage the reason behind many pregnancies. After the conception, the marriage rate multiplied by 28. However, if no marriage

TABLE 3 EFFECT OF PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH ON THE TIMING OF MARRIAGE (COX REGRESSION)

Covariate	*exp(Coeff.)*		*S.E.(Coeff.)*
Age	1.171	°	0.07853
Pregnancy (ref.: no pregnancy)			
1. First pregnancy	28.733	***	0.33024
2. First child born, not pregnant of a second	3.149	*	0.48186
3. First child born, pregnant of a second	0.165	*	0.88075
Number of observations (intervals)	*400*		
Women years observed	*2054.93*		
Number of marriages	*52*		
Chi-squared (df = 4)	89.498	***	

Statistically significant: ° at .10 level; * at .05 level; *** at .001 level

occurred before the birth of the child, the hazard went down again very much. But it was still three times as high as the hazard for women who had not yet been pregnant. Going one step further, unwed mothers who became pregnant for a second time had a dramatically lower marriage rate compared to all other categories.

This preliminary analysis suggests that the pregnancy period was crucial in determining the marriage chances after the first conception. Those who did not marry in time, would be more vulnerable on the marriage market. George Alter's (1988, 119-121) comments on the system of expectations involved in courtship in Verviers, structured by the double standard, may very well apply in Leuven as well. If a woman wanted to marry and started courting, the risk of becoming an unwed mother had to be weighed against the risk of remaining a spinster. Agreeing to the demand for sexual intimacy could perhaps strengthen the relationship and increase the likelihood of subsequent marriage. But then she had to take the risk of conceiving and becoming an unwed mother. That risk brought her in a double-bind situation. If she did *not* become pregnant, she might lose esteem in the eyes of her partner, and if she did not marry him, she would have less bargaining power in later relationships. If she *did* become pregnant, he might turn his back on her, especially if she was economically or socially deprived. Women who were less attractive on the marriage market *"had to take greater risks in courtship, and they could have less confidence that a partner would marry"* (Alter, 1988, 121).

6. FAMILY CONTROL, PREGNANCY AND MARRIAGE

Scholars have speculated that the relatively high incidence of extra-marital pregnancy among urban working class women and immigrants can be attributed to isolation or marginalisation in the city, and to the absence of controlling agents (Blaikie, 1993, 13-21). This would imply that youngsters living with family behaved more provident than, or at least were not so desperately seeking as those living alone or at least coming to the city alone. According to Tilly, Scott and Cohen (1976, 464), loneliness and isolation of work in the city and economic need impelled young working girls to find mates. We would expect, then, that loners would have to take the higher risks on the marriage market.

The following regressions include three groups of variables to indicate unmarried women's living condition within the city of Leuven (table 4). The first group of variables refers to co-residence with members of the family of orientation. Only parents and siblings are taken into account here. Parents may be (presumed) biological parents and step-parents. Siblings include full,

half-, and step-siblings. Adoption was rare. Co-residencies can in principle be reconstructed on the basis of the population registers, although the registration of residence histories is far from complete. Thus, for instance, one has to be aware of the fact that data on the movement from one house to another within the city of Leuven are quite unreliable. Especially proletarian classes were frequent movers, as they typically did not own their dwellings. Moreover, adolescents and young adults formed the most mobile part of the population, and it is unlikely that civil registration officers, even with the help of the local police, were in a position to keep track of all movements. As a result, co-residence with members of the families of origin will probably be overestimated.

The second indicator of living condition refers to migration. Following Alter (1988), women were divided into three groups: natives, child migrants, and

TABLE 4 DISTRIBUTIONS OF THE COVARIATES USED

N = 330 *Covariates:*		*Mean or Percentage*	*Std. Dev.*
• Age at entry into Leuven (begin of interval)		18.09	3.76
• Presence of parents:			
– (Reference: no parents present)		49.4%	/
– Only mother present		14.2%	0.35
– Only father present		6.7%	0.25
– Both parents present		29.7%	0.46
• Presence of siblings:			
– Siblings ages 0-14		0.42	1.00
– Number of brothers ages 15-64:	– younger	0.31	0.70
	– older	0.20	0.51
– Number of sisters ages 15-64:	– younger	0.29	0.63
	– older	0.23	0.58
• Social Class:			
– (Reference Bourgeois)		8.5%	/
– Middle: self-employed and white collar		19.4%	0.39
– Blue collar working class		38.2%	0.49
– NA		33.9%	0.47
• Mobility			
– (Reference: born in Leuven)		62.5%	/
– In-migrant before age 16		4.2%	0.20
– In-migrant age 16 and older		33.3%	0.47
• Alone		24.6%	0.43
• Born in village <5000 inhabitants		28.2%	0.45
• Employment:			
– (Reference: unemployed)		34.9%	/
– Domestic servant		28.8%	0.45
– Blue collar worker (mostly textiles)		15.4%	0.36
– Lace-makers		20.9%	0.41

adult migrants. Every woman born outside Leuven, is called a migrant. Within migrants, a distinction is made between those who came before age 16 and those who came later. For convenience's sake, the first group is called child migrant, the second adult migrant. As can be seen in table 4, the former type of migrants is only a small minority.

A third indicator of living conditions is based on the number of people, included in the regressions as a dummy, with whom the women examined here are entered in the register. Hence, for adult migrants it refers to whether they came to Leuven alone or accompanied.

The other covariates included, are identified in the literature as associated with extra-marital pregnancy: social class, employment, and rural versus urban background. They correlate with living conditions so they should be controlled for. Social class is in principle based on the occupation indicated in the register for the father or stepfather. If no father figure could be identified, the occupation of the mother or stepmother is used, or, if unavailable as well, women's own occupation. Hence, women's occupations are taken into account to assess social class only when a male head-of-the-family figure is not present (Haller, 1981; Lampard, 1995). Occupation is not a very precise indicator of social class (De Belder, 1976), but it suffices to make broad class distinctions (Srole, 1986; Peeters, 1996). For a third of the observed women, however, there is no indicator at all (table 4). Servants, for example, who typically came alone as life-cycle servants, had various class backgrounds (Hajnal, 1983, 95), so no social class was attributed to them.

Women's employment, primarily a working class phenomenon, was not always stable and often remained unrecorded. The registers do not allow to trace employment careers: typically, they only mention the employment at the time of entry. And at least some of the women for whom no occupation is mentioned will have had some job at the time of entry or later. But it can be assumed that those women whose occupation *is* registered, in effect were doing paid labour at the start of the spell. If employment was associated with the dependent variables, the following analyses will underestimate the associations, so if we find any, we can be quite confident that they are real. Four employment categories are distinguished: the officially unemployed (including girls whose employment remained unrecorded), domestic servants (which is most prevalent among immigrants), blue collar workers (mostly textiles), and lace-makers (because of its particularly high prevalence among natives).

Finally, a distinction is made between women born in a rural village with less than 5,000 inhabitants, and those born in larger towns and cities. It has been suggested that early modern, rural courtship customs made women more vulnerable in an urban setting, especially when these rural customs went unsupervised by the family (Tilly, Scott and Cohen, 1976; Alter, 1988, 116-125).

7. FINDINGS

Two competing risks are of interest here: extra-marital pregnancy and non-pregnant marriage. But there are two additional 'risks' competing, that correspond to right-censoring and -truncation: removal out of the population at risk because of death or migration, and staying at risk until (nine months before) census time without being pregnant or married. Figure 3 displays discrete-time hazards for the first three risks. The risk of getting out of Leuven was the highest at most ages; 93 migrated, 15 died. Pregnancy is the second risk. Its hazard curve follows a normal distribution, with most extramarital pregnancies occurring at age 21. In sum, 62 effective pregnancies were observed. The hazard for getting married without pregnancy, was very low at all ages. Only 24 virginal brides were counted. This suggests that most marriages before age 26, were shotgun marriages: if there was no pregnancy, marriage at this age was unlikely. To what extend can pre- and extra-marital pregnancies be attributed to lack of family control? Table 5 presents the estimated effects of the residential situation on the continuous version of the competing risks.

FIGURE 3: DISCRETE-TIME HAZARD RATES OF FIRST CONCEPTION, MARRIAGE AND EMIGRATION.

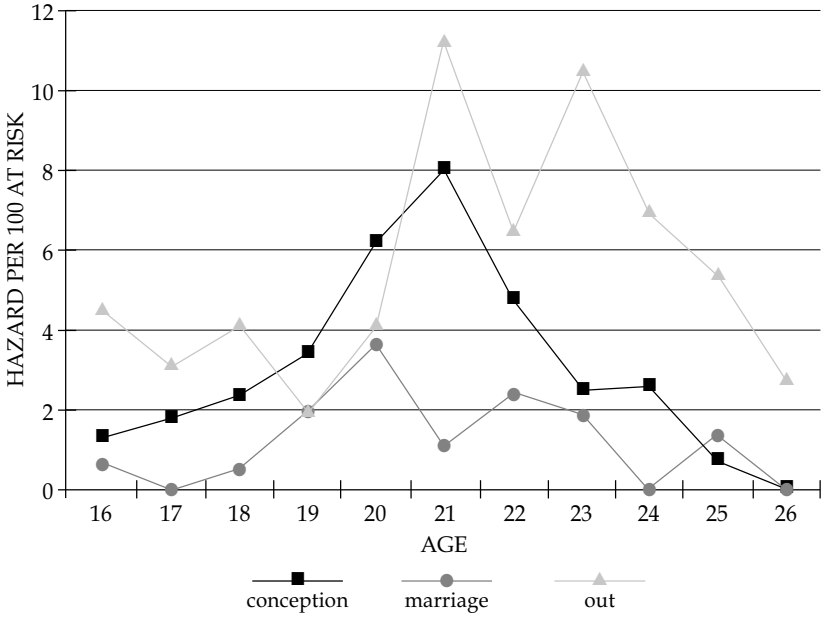

TABLE 5 COMPETING RISKS FOR FIRST CONCEPTION: HAZARD RATIOS

Risks: / *Covariates:*	*1 Conception*	*2 Non-pregnant bride*	*3 Out*	*4 Census*
Age at entry into Leuven (begin of interval)	1.679 **	1.159	1.259 **	7.804 **
Presence of parents:				
– (Reference: no parents present)				
– Only mother present	1.781	0.691	1.774	0.853
– Only father present	2.184	1.730	1.362	1.169
– Both parents present	0.679	1.517	1.815	1.045
Presence of siblings:				
– Number of siblings ages 0-14	1.509 **	1.195	1.380 **	0.809
– Number of brothers ages 15-64				
• younger	0.844	0.743	0.620 *	1.189
• older	1.243	0.950	0.981	1.102
– Number of sisters ages 15-64				
• younger	0.728	1.123	0.745	1.205
• older	0.650	1.178	0.874	1.123
Social Class:				
– (Reference Bourgeois)				
– Middle: self-employed and white collar	2.810	2.583	1.013	1.337
– Blue collar working class	4.060 °	2.688	1.054	1.394
– NA	1.977	8.781 °	1.087	1.581
Mobility				
– (Reference: born in Leuven)				
– In-migrant before age 16	7.747 **		2.789 °	3.566 *
– In-migrant age 16 and later	3.557 *	0.977	2.840 **	1.008
Alone	0.053 *	2.717	1.245	0.962
Born in village <5000 inhabitants	0.187 *	1.554	0.475 *	1.029
Employment:				
– (Reference: unemployed)				
– Domestic servant	0.538	0.083 **	2.601 *	0.696
– Blue collar worker (mostly textiles)	2.009	1.234	2.048 °	0.799
– Lacemakers	3.424 **	0.988	1.648	1.331
Number of events (total: 330)	62	24	108	136
Women-years: 1868.59				
Chi-squared	75.61 ***	17.92	121.08 ***	235.74 ***
(df)	(19)	(18)	(19)	(19)

Significant at: ° .10 level; * .05 level; ** .01 level; *** .001 level

If fathers or mothers would have liked to keep their daughters virginal until marriage, they were not very effective. At least they seem to have needed each other's help. Singles with both parents present were 33 per cent less likely to conceive out of wedlock than women living without any parents. But women living with a single mother were nearly 80 per cent more likely to get pregnant than those living without any parents. For single women with a single father, the hazard was even higher, although this group was the most likely to become virginal brides as well. Women living with a widowed mother were less likely to become non-pregnant brides in their early twenties. The group living with a father figure seem to have been the most active one on the marriage market.

The broad confidence intervals around the estimates of these regression parameters (not shown here) suggest that they are not very precise and therefore not statistically significant. But the estimated standard errors should indeed be taken as suggestive rather than definitive as well as the effect parameters. It is noteworthy to remember that the analysis uses data from the complete birth cohort, without sampling, so disturbances reflect unmeasured factors and unpredictability, not sampling distribution (Berry, 1993, 6-19; Achen, 1982, 30-41). Anyway, associating extra-marital pregnancy with isolation from parents would be the most improbable conclusion. Even positing no association at all is more consistent with the data. Especially the presence of a father was associated with a higher pregnancy hazard rather than with a lower one.[6]

The effect of the presence of siblings under age 15 is unambiguous: more children in the household was associated with a higher risk of getting pregnant for the older sister. The effect of older brothers in the house on the extramarital pregnancy hazard seems to be statistically insignificant but should probably be interpreted in the same direction. Only the effects of sisters and younger brothers seem to have been negative. Interpretation of all these parameters is not straightforward, but again, they are inconsistent with associating early sexual activity with isolation from the family of origin.

In line with earlier findings, social class was clearly associated with sexual activity at early ages: girls with a bourgeois background were the least likely to conceive out of wedlock, working class girls were most likely, with middle class girls somewhere in between. Interestingly, women for whom a social class indicator is lacking completely, have a very high chance to become non-pregnant brides in their early twenties. Closer inspection revealed that these women were living without a father figure in the neighbourhood. Their mo-

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6. To what extent this can be attributed to incestual sex between (step)father and daughter, remains unknown. See Gordon and O'Keefe (1984) and Clerkx (1988).

thers, if present, were living off of private means. Many were migrants and none reported any occupation. My best guess is that they were rather wealthy girls, desirable brides, who might have come to Leuven especially to marry.

Immigrants ran a higher risk of getting pregnant than natives, although the hazard for adolescent and adult immigrants is surprisingly lower than the hazard for the migrants who came before age 16. Furthermore, adult migrants were just as likely to become young non-pregnant brides as native women, but no child migrant married in Leuven without being pregnant. Again, these findings are not consistent with an interpretation in term of isolation from the local community. More generally, the higher risk for migrants to get pregnant cannot be attributed to isolation, as defined in the model. There are several indicators for this, but the one that may be most relevant in connection with migration argues against associating in-migration with sexual activity through isolation. Women who came to Leuven alone, as well as single natives, were much less likely to conceive than those who came or lived with any others, controlling for the other variables in the model. An adult migrant may have run a higher risk to get pregnant in Leuven, but not if she came alone.[7]

This cannot be explained away by the fact that adult migrants consisted for a large part of domestic servants. Not only is this variable controlled for, but inspection of raw bivariate tables revealed that the one solo-migrant who got pregnant and gave birth in Leuven before age 26 was a servant. In sum, only two out of 81 women living or coming alone got pregnant.

On the other hand, the model undoubtedly underestimates pregnancy among domestic servants, and their coefficient is almost certainly invalid, because the Cox model assumes independence between censoring times and timing of event, controlling for the covariates (Allison, 1984, 29). Most probably this assumption is violated at least in the case of domestic servants: it is very likely that servants who became pregnant had a higher hazard rate of out-migration than non-pregnant servants.

Furthermore, extra-marital intercourse in the early twenties was clearly not imported by migrants with a rural background and courtship culture. Rather on the contrary: rural immigrants had a lower risk to conceive out of

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7. This was confirmed when a model was fitted that included the interaction between mobility status (adult migrant or not) and whether the person entered alone or together with other people. The variables representing the presence of the family of origin had to be excluded to make robust estimation possible, so the interaction could not be included in the model presented in table 5. But the estimates of the reduced model including the interaction were consistent with the given interpretation: adult migrants who came to Leuven alone had a lower extra-marital pregnancy hazard than migrants who came with other people. Only the latter group had a higher hazard than natives and child migrants.

wedlock and a higher risk to become non-pregnant brides. On the town level, extra-marital pregnancy was typically not a migrant phenomenon. Most pregnancies happened among women born in Leuven. Irrespective of place of birth, what was critical was a working class background. Nothing new here, but what is particularly striking in Leuven is the very high risk of getting pregnant associated with lace-making. 93 per cent of these were Leuven born. More than half of the native single women who got pregnant were lace-makers. In sum, we observed 62 unmarried women getting pregnant for the first time, and 27 were Leuven born lace-makers. At age 26, nearly 4 in 10 Leuven born lace-makers are or have been pregnant.

Lace-makers in Leuven can hardly be called isolated from the local community. Instead, they were Leuven born daughters from proletarian families. All living fathers of lace-workers in this sample have blue-collar working class occupations. The work needed quite some skill, and children had to start learning this early at nun-schools specifically for pauper children, patronised by religious congregations (Uytterhoeven, 1995). According to the industrial census of 1846, 20 per cent of the lace-workers was younger than 9 years old, and 55 per cent between 9 and 16 years. The work clearly was intended to contribute to the family budget, but wages were very low: always less than 1 Frank a day for women older than 16 years, while men's daily wages in the same age category were typically between 1 and 2.5 Franks a day.[8] A report by the city council from 1848 comments on the situation in these pauper schools in the following terms. Instead of offering veritable primary education, they let young girls work very long days in what are, in fact, lace-making ateliers instead of schools. Misuses are manifold, and can be explained by, among other things, the greed of the parents, who let their children work without leaving them any time for a rest (report cited in Uytterhoeven, 1995, 13).

The lace-making industry was no charitable work, rather an urban form of the putting-out system that suited both the proletarian family wage economy and capitalist profit-making. For the women's families of origin, it not only meant some small contribution to the budget, it was also at least compatible with older sisters working with and taking care of younger sisters outside the crowded house. Labour-costs were low, the end-product a luxury good, so traders must have made high profit. On average, they employed 38 girls and women each. (According to the industrial census of 1846, 1210 lace-makers worked for 32 merchants).

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8. Data from *Industrie. Recensement général (15 octobre 1846)*, Brussels, 1851.

8. AFTER THE CONCEPTION: MARRIAGE OR ILLEGITIMACY?

If the risk of extramarital pregnancy cannot be attributed to isolation, the family may have been important in bringing about a marriage before the birth of a child. If marriage and illegitimacy were two different outcomes of courtship behaviour that was tolerated by or at least not prevented by parents and the community, parents might have been more eager to keep their daughter with the principle of legitimacy. Migration and the presence of parents are then expected to have stronger effects on the chances to get married after conception than on the risk to get pregnant per se. High geographical mobility of men and women might have caused many sexual relations to break down. Men may absconded while the mobility of their former sexual partners was hindered by pregnancy and childbirth (see Blaikie, 1993, 185-210).

In fact, none of the pregnant migrants got married before the birth of the child. Moreover, paternity was hardly ever acknowledged: only one father identified himself officially as the progenitor. This suggests that migrants were indeed more vulnerable to their sexual partners' absconding.

For the native pregnant women, the probability to get married before the birth of the child was modelled by logistic regression.[9] The model could be simplified a lot compared to the previous Cox-model. There was not enough variability in the social class background of pregnant single women to include this variable in the model: only two cases of bourgeois premarital pregnancies were observed. There was no difference between middle class and working class girls in the probability to get married before the birth of the child: in each class it was approximately 1 in 3. Furthermore, the variable for coming/living alone could be dropped for the same reason: only one pregnant native was living alone. There was only one native domestic servant who got pregnant, and she bore an illegitimate child. Co-residence with siblings was reduced to one variable: the proportion of siblings in the nuclear family that was younger than 15 years. Estimated regression coefficients are in table 6. The model is fairly accurate because it would predict marriage or illegitimacy correctly in 85 per cent of the cases. Correlation between what would be predicted on the basis of the model and what is observed, is 0.61.

While there was a big difference between lace-makers and the unemployed with respect to the risk of conception, there was no net difference at all in their chance to get married in case of pregnancy. The unemployed as well as

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9. Recall that conception was defined on the basis of observed childbirth, so the data are not censored for this analysis.

TABLE 6 LOGIT MODEL FOR THE PROBABILITY TO GET MARRIED AFTER CONCEPTION BUT BEFORE CHILDBIRTH

	Two-way cross-tabulations		*Logistic regression: probability to be married at time of birth*	
Explanatory variables	*% Married at time of birth*	*N*	*exp(Coeff)*	*S.E.(Coeff)*
Migrant	0.00%	16	/	
Leuven born	34.62%	52	/	
• Employment				
– (Ref: Unemployed)	43%	14		
– Blue collar workers	20%	10	0.313	1.152
– Lace-maker	37%	27	1.046	0.872
• Presence of parents				
– (Ref: No parents present)	26%	19		
– Only mother present	17%	12	0.610	1.031
– Only father present	29%	7	1.556	1.094
– Both parents present	64%	14	7.727 *	0.975
• Proportion of all siblings in ages 0-14			27.435 *	1.575
– higher than 50%	100%	5		
– 50% and lower	28%	47		
• Age at conception			1.171	0.224
– after age 21 (mean age)	31%	16		
– 21 or younger	36%	36		
Total	26.50%	68		

Goodness-of-fit:
85.30% predicted correctly

Marriage Predicted?	*Observed No*	*Yes*	*Total*
No	46	6	52
Yes	4	12	16
Total	50	18	68

the lace-makers became brides in approximately 2 out of 5 cases before childbirth. The blue collar workers next to lacemakers, mainly seamstresses, apparently had a lower chance to get married 'in time'. The presence of parents made the most important difference to the marriage chances of pregnant daughters. The presence of a father figure made a positive difference, especially when a mother figure was also present. In the latter case, marriage before childbirth was more than 7 times as likely as when no parents were present. Pregnant women living with a mother only, on the other hand, more often than all other categories became unwed mothers. The presence of dependent children in the household increased women's chances to marry in case of pregnancy. The higher their proportion in the nuclear family, the lower to risk to become an unwed mother.

These findings suggests that the motivation to marry, for parents as well as for pregnant women, increased with the relative number of mouths to feed. One baby more might have been just too much for these households, and the pressure to start a new family economy, adding a new male adult wage-earner must have been high in these cases. Virtually all parents must at least have given their consent to marriage: the Belgian Civil Code at that time required parental consent without possible exception for women under age 21, and after that, marriage without consent was only possible after a lengthy *and* very costly procedure, which required employment of a notary. On the part of the pregnant singles, the higher the proportion of dependent children in the parental household, the more she could improve her economic situation by starting a new family wage economy with her partner.

The perspective of a widowed parent with small children was more complicated. Especially widowed fathers, when not remarried, may have wanted to keep their adult daughters in the house to do domestic work and take care of small children. The progenitors of their daughter's children, however, may not have been very eager to take on (financial) responsibilities for a family-in-law. This would help to explain the lower probability of marriage where a mother figure was absent compared to situations were both parental positions were occupied. Cases like these were scarce because most widowed fathers with young children would remarry, but both of the two pregnant brides in my sample who lived with a lone father before marriage, continued to live with him after marriage at least until the birth of the child. None of the pregnant brides who lived with a mother figure only, still lived with her after marriage.

CONCLUSIONS

Most women marrying before age 26 were pregnant, employed natives with a working class background. However, living and working conditions had divergent consequences for the risks of pregnancy and subsequent marriage chances. Living with a parent did not keep young women from sexual activity. If anything, women residing with a mother or a father ran a higher risk to conceive out of wedlock than both those living without any parent and those living with both parents. Presence of young, dependent siblings in the family of origin had a consistently positive influence on women's chances to get both pregnant *and* married. Women's employment had a clear positive influence on the likelihood to conceive out of wedlock. Immigrants ran a higher risk to get pregnant at an early age than natives. However, it is unlikely that this was a consequence of isolation from their families, because unmarried immigrants who came alone were less likely to conceive out of wedlock than the others. Furthermore, women who had migrated to Leuven during childhood, and might therefore be expected to have more ties with the local community, were more likely to conceive out of wedlock than those who came later. Overall, these findings suggest that sexual activity of unmarried women in the courtship ages was a sign of integration rather than isolation from family and the local community.

The findings on the risk of unwed motherhood are more consistent with an interpretation in terms of relative isolation. For natives, especially the presence of a father figure seemed to make a critical difference in bringing about a marriage after conception. But immigrants ran a much higher risk than natives to remain unmarried at least until childbirth, and this may have further undermined their bargaining power on the marriage market. The high risk of all pregnant immigrants to become unwed mothers does suggest that social pressure exerted by peers might have been critical in forcing young men to marry the mothers of their children. This is one of the functions of early modern charivari and other, less ritualised forms of scandalising like gossip (Jacobs, 1988). Native girls and boys were able to develop close, extended networks of friendship from childhood that could exert strong peer control in the courtship ages. For immigrants, inclusion in such close networks may have been much harder to attain. In sum, these findings suggest that one needs to have a closer look at the structure of the marriage market to explain illegitimacy and bridal pregnancy.

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Malthusiaanse zonden: illegitimiteit en vroeg huwelijk in barre economische tijden. Een case-study in Leuven, 1846-1856

JAN VAN BAVEL

SAMENVATTING

De relatief hoge huwelijksleeftijd en het legitimiteitsprincipe zijn twee duurzame elementen uit (vroeg)moderne West-Europese reproductieculturen die, in combinatie, de nataliteit in grote mate beperkten. Deze bijdrage kijkt in cijfermatig detail naar vrouwen die ongehuwd zwanger raakten en relatief vroeg huwden. In de literatuur wordt zwangerschap van ongehuwde vrouwen in een stedelijke context vaak geassocieerd met proletarische levenscondities en met isolatie van familie, vrienden en buurt na migratie. Meestal moet hierover in hoge mate gespeculeerd worden omdat de nodige gegevens niet beschikbaar zijn voor statistische analyse. De Belgische bevolkingsregisters laten echter toe wat empirisch licht te schijnen over deze kwestie.

Onderhavige analyse maakt meer bepaald gebruik van de negentiende-eeuwse burgerlijke stand en de bevolkingsregisters van Leuven. Het decennium 1846-1856 was een algemene crisisperiode: zowel de voedselprijzen als de sterftecijfers bereikten zeer hoge pieken, terwijl huwelijken werden uitgesteld en de buitenechtelijke vruchtbaarheid een uitzonderlijk hoog niveau bereikte. De analyse gaat statistisch na welk verschil de woon- en werksituatie maakte voor vrouwen uit de geboortecohorte 1830 die ooit tussen 1846 en 1856 in Leuven woonden. De steekproefomvang bedraagt 2426 persoonsjaren voor 342 verschillende vrouwen.

Voorhuwelijkse zwangerschap verhoogde in grote mate de kansen op een vroeg huwelijk: de gemiddelde eerste huwelijkskans van de ongehuwd zwangere vrouwen was 28 keer zo hoog als die van de niet zwangere vrouwen (of correcter: niet zwanger van een kind dat negen maanden later geboren zou worden). Als er niet getrouwd werd vóór de geboorte van het kind, verlaagde de vroege huwelijkskans in grote mate na die geboorte, al bleef die nog altijd groter dan die van de 'maagdelijke' vrouwen. Ongehuwde moeders die voor een tweede keer zwanger raakten, hadden echter een gemiddeld lagere huwelijkskans dan om het even wie anders. Net als in andere contexten, kwam ongehuwde zwangerschap ook in Leuven vooral voor in de arbeidersklasse. De volgende analyse geldt dan ook in de eerste plaats voor arbeidersdochters.

Als ouders hun dochters voor het huwelijk kuis *zouden* hebben willen houden, dan waren ze daar toch alleen maar doeltreffend in als ze met z'n tweeën waren om controle uit te oefenen. Meisjes die met zowel een (stief-)vader als een (stief-)moeder samenwoonden, liepen inderdaad wat minder kans op voorhuwelijkse zwangerschap. Maar bij dochters die met een alleenstaande moeder of vader samenwoonden, kwam zwangerschap voor het huwelijk

dan weer veel vaker voor. Zij die met een alleenstaande vader woonden, hadden trouwens ook de hoogste vroege huwelijkskans, ongeacht ze zwanger waren of niet. Verder kwam voorhuwelijkse zwangerschap en vroeg huwelijk meer voor naarmate er meer jongere kinderen in huis woonden. Ongehuwde immigranten hadden een hogere kans op zwangerschap dan geboren Leuvenaars, maar niet als ze alleen naar Leuven verhuisden, wel als ze met familie kwamen. Over het algemeen ondersteunen de bevindingen dus niet het verband tussen isolatie van familie en buurt enerzijds, en voorhuwelijkse seksuele activiteit anderzijds.

Relatieve isolatie van familie en buurt zou echter wel kunnen verklaren waarom sommige zwangere vrouwen huwden voor de geboorte van hun kind en andere niet. Geen enkele geïmmigreerde zwangere vrouw huwde voor de geboorte van haar kind. Ruim een derde van de Leuvense vrouwen huwde wel 'op tijd'. De aanwezigheid van een vaderfiguur maakte bij de Leuvense vrouwen een belangrijk verschil uit: de kans op huwelijk voor geboorte was duidelijk hoger voor zwangere vrouwen die met een vader of stiefvader samenwoonden.

Pécheurs malthusiens: illégitimité et mariage précoce en période de crise économique. Étude de cas: Louvain, 1846-1856

JAN VAN BAVEL

RÉSUMÉ

Dans les cultures reproductrices de l'Europe de l'Ouest, le mariage tardif et le principe de légitimité sont deux éléments qui ont considérablement modéré la natalité. Cet article porte sur les femmes du XIXe siècle qui – tombées enceintes hors mariage et/ou mariées précocement – n'ont pas respecté les principes malthusiens. L'analyse part du dénominateur commun dans le monde scientifique, qui associe les rapports sexuels des jeunes femmes célibataires à leurs conditions de vie, à l'isolement par rapport à leur famille d'origine et à leur migration. La plupart des auteurs ont dû spéculer sur les effets de ces facteurs sur le risque de grossesse des célibataires, parce que les indicateurs appropriés manquaient dans leurs sources.

Cet article utilise les registres de l'état civil et les registres de la population de Louvain, vieille ville traditionnelle du commerce et des métiers dans le Brabant belge. La décennie 1846-1856 est une période de crise générale: les prix des denrées alimentaires et la mortalité atteignent des sommets et les mariages sont retardés. En même temps, la fécondité illégitime augmente. Cet essai veut déterminer le rôle joué par la position dans le ménage d'une cohorte de femmes nées en 1830 et qui ont vécu à Louvain à un moment donné entre l'âge de 16 et de 26 ans. L'échantillon se compose de 2426 femmes-année pour 342 femmes différentes.

La grossesse prénuptiale augmente fortement les chances de mariage précoce: le risque de se marier avant 26 ans est 28 fois plus élevé pour les femmes enceintes que pour leurs homologues non-enceintes (plus correctement: non-enceintes d'un enfant enregistré). Si le mariage ne survient pas avant la naissance de l'enfant, la probabilité de mariage diminue fortement, tout en restant malgré tout plus élevée que celle des femmes non-enceintes. Cependant, les célibataires tombées enceintes une deuxième fois ont une probabilité de mariage beaucoup plus faible que n'importe quelle autre femme.

Comme des études antérieures menées dans des contextes différents l'ont montré, la grossesse hors mariage ainsi que le mariage dit précoce sont plus communs dans les classes ouvrières que dans la bourgeoisie. Par conséquent, les analyses ci-après sont appropriées en premier lieu pour les filles ouvrières. Si les parents voulaient préserver la virginité de leur fille jusqu'à son mariage, ils étaient seulement efficaces s'ils pouvaient exercer ce contrôle ensemble. Le risque de tomber enceinte était, en effet, un peu plus bas pour les célibataires vivant avec leurs deux géniteurs que pour les femmes vivant sans aucun parent. Cependant, cette probabilité était beaucoup plus élevée pour les femmes

habitant avec leur mère seule ou leur père seul que pour celles vivant sans parents. Les femmes célibataires vivant avec leur père seul avaient aussi la probabilité la plus élevée de se marier sans être enceintes. En outre, la présence de jeunes frères et sœurs dans le ménage augmentait tant les chances d'un mariage précoce non consommé que celles d'une grossesse hors mariage. Les immigrées présentaient, en général, une plus forte probabilité de grossesse hors mariage, sauf quand elles entraient à Louvain sans famille. En somme, aucune indication ne permet d'associer activité sexuelle prénuptiale et isolement par rapport à la famille. En revanche, le contrôle de la famille et de la communauté locale semblent avoir été beaucoup plus importants pour assurer le mariage avant l'accouchement. Aucune femme enceinte immigrée ne se mariait 'à temps', tandis qu'un tiers de leurs homologues nées à Louvain y parvenaient. La présence du père constituait une différence critique pour les femmes de Louvain: le mariage avant l'accouchement était toujours plus probable si un père ou beau-père vivait dans le ménage.