

Rural History in Europe 11

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Social Networks, Political Institutions, and Rural Societies

Edited by Georg FERTIG



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The Series Rural History in Europe

Sometimes viewed as the producer of foodstuffs and raw materials, as a garden or a space for the production of energy; sometimes seen as a reservoir of manpower destined to be subverted to the needs of cities and industries or as a peaceful haven which welcomes weary city-dwellers; also regarded as a place of easily-incensed 'backward' societies or as an idyllic spot, close to nature where societies act as guardians of a certain conception of quality of life, the countryside has not ceased to be at the centre of economic, social, political, and now environmental concern of governments and public opinion. Pulled between contradictory demands, the countryside of today presents an image of a place and a society in clear transformation, which, in itself, is difficult to decipher.

In Europe, the difficulty is that the countryside, which forms a complex and evolving universe, is experiencing ruptures and also exhibits inertias. These complex transformations of the rural world can only be fully understood if they are viewed in a manner which transcends national boundaries and if the discrepancies, which can only be observed by adopting a broad view, in fact at the continental scale, are taken into account. These changes cannot be explained without reference to their past. The question is how to create such a dialogue between researchers which goes beyond national boundaries, crosses chronological barriers and breaks disciplinary boundaries.

The main objective of the 'Rural History in Europe' collection is to provide just such keys to unlock the changes experienced by present-day European rural societies in the light of their historical experience. It is to produce the historical knowledge which will allow us to conceptualise the future of European country-dwellers, as they face the kinds of problems which historians have grappled with in examining societies in the past: under-employment and multiple occupations, migrations and rural depopulation, distortion of competition by the marketplace or by the policies established by political authorities, competition with non-European producers, problems of resource allocation (land and water), distribution and redistribution of heritages and land-holding, the future of owner-occupied farms and the function of agriculture as employer, the tensions between private ownership and public access to land, the changes induced by settlement of urban migrants, environment and sustainable development, and so on.

In most European countries, rural society and long term change have been the subject of intensive research. Over the last half-century, a lively historiography has developed around questions concerning the factors of growth and systems of agricultural production, as well as the periodisation of growth and the impact of agriculture on industrial development. As a result, a body of knowledge has built up on techniques, forms of land-use, levels of production, the differing conditions and nature of the peasantry and the strategies of economic agents. More recently

environmental concerns have made a dramatic impact on the consciousness of historians in the field, while previous findings have been questioned in a critical way and new perspectives have been drawn.

The field known as Rural History remains very much alive, despite the decline of the agricultural sector over the last several decades. Rural History remains fundamental in a Europe which has for so long been kept together by its Common Agricultural Policy and which now has to face the heavy impact of Brussels-based initiatives upon its rural regions, and an unprecedented revision of current agrarian systems and systems of production in the countries which have recently joined the EU. How can the changes taking place in present-day Europe be understood without taking into account a past which is still very present, and which determines both structures and behaviour?

The first volumes of this collection are the result of twelve workshops which have been held during three years (2006-2008) and which have mainly been supported by funds of the European Action COST A 35 and by other institutions like CORN, GDR CNRS Sociétés Rurales Européennes, Universities... The COST Action intends to extend the historical analysis of rural society over the last millenium in order to envisage the problems of the countryside in an extended timeframe and also to draw upon the commentary and expertise of specialists from other disciplines (sociology, economics, anthropology). This will enable the first real comparison of Europe from historians from all over the continent, from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean and from the western frontier to the eastern limits. Papers from these meetings will be published after a peer-review process, supported by the editorial board and, of course, the work of the authors and editors of the volumes. This collection will be constructed upon four main pillars: Landed property; The management of rural land; Peasant societies; The state, government, politics and peasants. Each of these will bring new perspectives and produce new tools to better understand the changes which are taking place today. In order to ask the relevant questions about the future of these peasantries and rural spaces in transformation, the books of this collection will deal with the *longue durée* and will present either research in progress or a synthesis on a regional or national scale. The cumulative effect of this approach will be to produce volumes, the geographical coverage of which will be the whole of Europe.

The volumes will also, of course, take into account the role of history as an explanatory factor for contemporary European Societies. If rural societies have been overthrown, if rural landscapes have been profoundly transformed and if the intervention of the State has considerably strengthened the regulation of production and trade, the contrast between a contemporary rural world in rapid transformation and a traditional rural world with frozen landscapes, petrified societies, immobile economies and lethargic political contexts will be an illusion. It is important, therefore, to detect, to measure and to interpret the range of recent changes by illuminating those that have taken place in past centuries in a European context.

4. Unmarried adolescents and filial assistance in eighteenth-century rural Flanders¹

Thijs LAMBRECHT

I. Introduction

On a New Year's Day, sometime during the 1750s, the priest of the village of Hooglede addressed his parishioners in a sermon about the institution of marriage. Although his sermon was directed at the married couples of his parish, the message he conveyed also had a particular meaning for the adolescents who were contemplating marriage. The sermon contained a serious warning against hasty and early marriage. The priest stated that all too frequently adolescents rushed into marriage without a clear understanding of the material and financial consequences of this new station of life. Ideally, marriage should only take place when the couple had accumulated some savings, acquired a decent stock of textiles and clothing and if there were prospects of employment. If these conditions were not met, a couple ran the risk of falling into poverty after marriage (Hennequin, 1763: 335-336). This sermon was certainly not exceptional. Other authors of religious and moralist literature and conduct books equally stressed that marriage should only be contemplated if some basic material and financial preconditions were fulfilled (Storme, 1992). From the pulpit, pre-marriage resource acquisition was strongly defended. Next to advice on marriage, parishioners also regularly received instructions on parent-child relations. In almost all Flemish Roman Catholic sermons, conduct books and catechisms, attention was given to the reciprocal duties of parents and children. Children, it was stated, not only owed their parents honour and obedience but also spiritual and material assistance. Especially in the context of the Fifth Commandment ('honour thy parents') it was stated that children were expected to contribute to the material well-being of their parents. These prescriptions stated explicitly that children should assist their parents in old age, sickness and poverty (see *e.g.* Vermeersch, 1787: 114-115; vanden Bossche, 1725: 311-317; Anonymous, 1797: 58-63). The Fifth Commandment was used in Flanders (and elsewhere in Catholic Europe) as a moral justification to stimulate intergenerational transfers and filial assistance (Bast, 1997: 54). The help offered by children to their parents was portrayed as the repayment of debts accumulated during childhood.

¹ I would like to thank the editor and the two anonymous referees for their constructive comments and suggestions. Funding for this research was obtained from the Flemish Research Foundation.

From these normative sources we can infer that unmarried adolescents thus faced a double challenge. Neo-locality forced them to accumulate resources prior to marriage in order to establish a new household that could survive independently. At the same time, there was a strong moral imperative to assist their parents and safeguard their material and financial interests. This chapter is an exploration of how unmarried adolescents, and farm servants in particular, coped with these seemingly contradictory societal expectations in eighteenth-century Flanders. How did unmarried adolescents reconcile the logic of neo-locality with filial assistance? To what extent did servants remit part of their wages earned outside the parental household back to their kin and how did these patterns ultimately influence the process of household formation? Although the level of analysis is restricted to unmarried individuals and their kin, such an approach can be helpful to understanding the fundamental characteristics of the household economy of the rural population during this period. Such questions require a micro-approach of the social and economic relations at the household level. In this chapter, I analyse parent-child relations and expectations and how these were shaped by local patterns conditions of landholding. I argue that the specific relations of assistance that can be identified between parents and their offspring in service were shaped by both regional patterns of landownership and the restricted availability of public welfare resources. However, this was not a 'closed' system of exchange that operated independently from the wider social and economic context. The nature and intensity of inter-generational exchange were equally determined by changes in population, price and wage levels and employment opportunities.

As in most western European countries, farm servants were a characteristic feature of the social and demographic Flemish landscape. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their share in the total rural population ranged between 5 and 15 per cent (Lambrecht, 2001). In Flanders, as in other regions, variations can be observed in farm service. In the interior of Flanders, a region characterised by small holdings and proto-industry, farm servants appear less frequently in population censuses. In these regions, servants accounted for less than 10 per cent of the total population. In regions with large farms, the share of farm servants was closer to 15 per cent. Data for the late eighteenth century suggest a strong positive relationship between the number of large commercial farms and the number of servants (Jaspers & Stevens, 1985: 131; Gyssels & van der Straeten, 1986: 147-148). Service was also a collective life-cycle experience for the rural youth brought up on small farms. At least 40 per cent of the rural population worked as a servant for longer or shorter periods during their lifetime (Mendels, 1983: 357). Farm service was a typical transitory occupation. For the vast majority of young people who entered service, it was limited in time. Service in husbandry bridged the gap between childhood and marriage. As such, most of the servant population was aged between 15 and 30 years. In late eighteenth-century

Flanders, servants were particularly well represented in the age groups of 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 years (Jaspers & Stevens, 1985: 136-38; Gyssels & van der Straeten, 1986: 153-155). Farm servants sold their labour to households who lacked the necessary labour power to work their holding. In exchange for this labour, servants received a variety of rewards (see Table 4.1). This remuneration system explains why servants could save a part of their earnings.

Table 4.1. Shares of remuneration of farm servants in Eastern Flanders, c. 1810-1815

	<i>Percentage share</i>
(a) cash wages	26
(b) benefits in kind	4
(c) food and drink	60
(d) fuel and lighting	10
Total	100

Source. Calculations from DE LICHTERVELDE (1815: 69-71).

Table 4.1 summarises the annual cost of a farm servant in Flanders at the beginning of the nineteenth century. From the viewpoint of the farmer who employed living-in servants, the data in Table 4.1 represent the structure of the total cost of employing servants at the onset of the nineteenth century. From the perspective of the servant, Table 4.1 represents the total reward or remuneration received from their employer in exchange for their labour. Servants thus received 70 per cent of their wages in the form of food and board (categories c and d). Only 30 per cent of their total earnings was paid in cash and benefits in kind (categories a and b). Remuneration in kind and cash wages most probably operated as communicating barrels. When food prices were high, the maintenance costs of servants were probably compensated by lower cash wages. This remuneration system is one of the basic characteristics of farm servants in western Europe. Because servants did not have to spend their wages to feed and house themselves, they could – at least in theory – save a substantial part of their cash wage. Although this cash wage was relatively low, the total reward for the labour was substantial compared to the earnings of *e.g.* day labourers. The institution of service sheltered unmarried adolescents from the uncertainties and risks of the pre-industrial rural economy. Unlike small farmers and day labourers, *e.g.*, they were protected against harvest failure and sharply rising food prices. Unsurprisingly, many contemporary writers depicted service as a state of relative prosperity for the rural labouring classes. The English author John Howlett described a child's transition from living with his parents to serving in the household of a large farmers as 'a sudden transition from pinching want to affluent plenty' (Howlett, 1788: 28). One

century earlier, Richard Baxter described the living conditions of servants in a similar manner. Compared to small farmers, he stated that servants 'know their work and wages, and are troubled with no cares for paying rents, or making good markets, or for the loss of corn or cattle, the rotting of sheep, or the unfavourable weather, nor for providing for wife and children and paying labourers' and servants' wages' (Powicke, 1926: 183). Richard Cantillon was equally positive about the saving and spending potential of unmarried labourers compared to the married labourer with children (Cantillon, 1755: 46-48). Although contemporary authors, in some cases, perhaps idealised the living and working conditions of servants, we can assume that there was potential to save part of the cash wages.

II. Saving patterns

The importance of service and servanthood for the children of the vast majority of the European rural population has been emphasized many times (Hajnal, 1982: 470-476; Wrigley *et al.*, 1997: 122-124). There is a broad consensus about the role of service in the process of household formation in pre-industrial western Europe. It was during this stage of the life cycle that resources were gathered that enabled adolescents to marry. A review of the literature on service, however – especially farm service – also reveals that few historians have attempted to reconstruct the actual saving patterns and behaviour of these unmarried adolescents (for exceptions, see Kussmaul, 1981a: 38-39, 81-82; Whittle, 2005: 89-110). The lack of interest by historians for the micro-finances of this transitory social group can only be partly explained by the absence of reliable data. Research on servants and their saving behaviour has been influenced by the formal modelling of the different processes and logics of household formation. When discussing the processes that lead up to the formation of a new household, historians and historical demographers tend to start from a bipolar model (see Schofield, 1976: 147-160). Paradoxically, neither of these models attributes an important role to pre-marital saving. In the so-called 'proletarian' or 'real wage' model, the process of household formation is primarily driven by expected future earnings. Such a neo-Malthusian view, which has been advanced for pre-industrial England by Wrigley and Schofield, holds that young men and women ventured upon marriage when real wages of day labourers were high (Wrigley & Schofield, 1989). Conversely, when expected future earnings were low (low real wages), marriage would be delayed or postponed. The niche-model on the other hand states that household formation was driven by the dynamics of mortality and intergenerational transfers of resources especially land. In this view, new couples could only set up a new household if parents handed over some productive resources – land or rights to land in particular – to the next generation. In this model, real wages and expected earnings were only of secondary importance. Only when parents died

or passed on their assets to their children could young unmarried couples acquire the necessary means of production to form a new independent household unit. In neither the niche-model or real wage-model is any specific role assigned to pre-marital saving. Implicitly, and paradoxically, both models suggest that pre-marital saving was only a marginal factor in the process of household formation. Neither of these two Weberian ideal types of household formation completely captures the complex and diverse character of the path to household formation. It is more likely that adolescents built up a marriage fund from the various resources available to them. These consisted of intergenerational transfers from the parents. From their parents, children could receive land, but also tools, household goods, livestock and loans. Savings from service (either in cash or in kind) also contributed to this marriage fund. It was not uncommon for servants to buy pieces of second-hand furniture when they were still in service. Wages earned in service could be used to buy or lease land and to stock a farm. Expected future earnings were undoubtedly also an element that influenced the timing of marriage. Employment prospects, real wages and credit facilities probably mattered as well. Of course, the relative weight of each of these factors will differ across time and space. For an English landless agricultural labourer, the path to household formation would have been different to that of a French peasant who had inherited a small farm. For the former, expected future earnings would have been a more important factor when contemplating marriage. For the French peasant, the timing of the transfer of land would have been more decisive. Both of these rural dwellers, however, would also have had the opportunity to save whilst in service. The opportunity to accumulate resources on the labour market is what links these two types of rural dwellers. From that perspective, pre-marital saving should probably be given more weight in explanations of household formation. Admittedly, this is a task fraught with many difficulties. Servants, especially farm servants, are a notoriously difficult study object. There are few documents that enable historians and historical demographers to reconstruct the working lives and experiences of farm servants. Ego-documents, such as the notebook of Pieter-Jacobus Verkindere, in which he noted the names of his successive employers and his migration patterns during the middle of the eighteenth century, are unfortunately extremely rare (Gezelle, 1898). Moreover, as many servants were unable to write, few of them have left written records. For example, only one male servant of the 62 servants that were employed on a farm in the village of Herzele between 1725 and 1755 was able to place his signature under the labour contract. All other contracts were marked with an X (Bovyn, 1969-1971: 56). The lack of documents and archival records written by servants themselves forces the historian to turn to other sources to reconstruct the lives and working experiences of this important group of the rural workforce. In the past, a vast range of sources has been used by historians to glimpse at farm servants. These sources range from population censuses to wage assessments, from litigation records to farm accounts

books. It is possible to reconstruct how many servants were working in a particular region and what they were earning. Reconstructing to what extent these wages were translated into savings is a task fraught with more difficulties.

How can we measure how much servants were actually saving? Before the late eighteenth century, no financial institutions were operating in the European countryside where servants could deposit their savings. The savings of servants moved around as they changed residence and employer. Some instances can be found wherein servants handed over their savings to their employer for safekeeping. In most cases however, the savings of servants were simply kept in a small chest or purse. Saving thus presented practical difficulties, as there were few alternatives to hoarding cash. It was not until the first half of the nineteenth century that popular saving banks were established. Most of these banks reported high shares of servants among their clients. In Belgium and France, *e.g.*, servants constitute the most important occupational category of saving account holders (De Belder, 1986: 290-291; Christen-Lécuyer, 2004: 359 ff.). These servants with saving accounts are probably not the type of life-cycle farm servants analysed in this paper, but most likely life-long servants working in an urban environment. Even in the second half of the nineteenth century, few farm servants deposited their saving with financial institutions in Flanders. In other regions, popular savings bank managed to attract unmarried adolescents and farm servants as clients (see Bracht & Fertig, 2008). The absence of financial institutions where servants could deposit their savings prior to the early nineteenth century forces historians to turn to other sources to reconstruct their saving patterns. Ideally, we should be able to follow servants from their first employer until they married and trace how resources were accumulated throughout this period. Unfortunately, no such data are currently available for Flanders or other regions prior to the middle of the nineteenth century. Although such detailed evidence and data is lacking, it is nevertheless possible to gain some insight into the personal finances of servants. To achieve this, we can turn to the records of the employers of farm servants. Although few have survived, the vast majority of farmers that employed servants kept an account book of some sort. In these account books, farmers frequently noted the wages and earnings of their resident workforce. The entries relating to servants contain information on various aspects. Most frequently, they contain dates of entry and exit from the farm and a written copy of the labour contract including wages and payments in kind. Some farmers also recorded in detail the expenses of servants (Lambrecht, 2002: 145-163). As most of the servants received advance payment on their wages, it was important for both employer and employee to have a written record of these payments. If these notes are sufficiently detailed and complete, they can be used to reconstruct how much the servant earned, but also how they spent or saved their wages (Lambrecht, 2000 & Delahaye, 2006). For Flanders, four sets of account books belonging to

farmers that hired servants and kept detailed notes on their financial dealings with this type of living-in labourers could be located². From these sources, it is possible to reconstruct how much servants earned and saved. The cash wage of a servant minus the advance payments was roughly equal to the share the servant saved when employed by a farmer. For this purpose, a simple comparison was thus made between the initial cash wage of the servant and the money handed over to the servants at the end of the term. The savings rates are thus equal to the net account receivable by a servant at the end of an annual contract.

Admittedly, this approach is far from perfect. The results obtained through this method only inform us about the savings of servants with one employer. Servants changed employers with great frequency (Lambrecht, 2002: 163-164; Kusssmaul, 1981b). Premarital resource acquisition was a process that spanned many years and different employers. The data used here only allow us to glimpse at the micro-finances of a servant for a short period – usually one or two years – and only with one single employer. As such, they do not provide us with a complete and more dynamic picture of resource acquisition throughout the career in service. For example, young servants might save nothing during the first years of service and then increase their effort as they grew older. Also, we should consider the possibility that the savings with one employer might not have contributed to their marriage fund. It is thus not possible to trace what servants did with their savings if they moved to another employer. Although this approach is far from ideal, it is something that may be worth pursuing. Even if we are only able to momentarily capture the savings of servants, this information can still be valuable to assess the importance and frequency of saving among the majority of the unmarried rural labour force.

Table 4.2 reports the results of these calculations for 80 contracts collected from farm account books that contain this type of information. As the results indicate, most servants could save part of their earnings in eighteenth-century Flanders. Only eleven servants in this sample did not leave their employer with cash in hand. The vast majority, however, was able to take part of their cash wage with them to their next employer or destination. The average saving rates fall somewhat below those suggested by contemporary authors. For example, the eighteenth-century French economist Joachim Faiguet de Villeneuve estimated that servants could save up to 60 per cent of their cash wages (Hecht, 1959: 81-82). A late eighteenth-century English agronomist estimated that farm servants could set aside two thirds of their wages ‘after having first provided themselves with a sufficient stock of clothes’

² Three sets of account books are held in public record offices: State Archives Bruges, Proosdij Hertsberge, nr. 23; State Archives Ghent, Familiefonds, nr. 2314 and State Archives Courtray, Aanwinsten, nr. 7334 and Schepenbankregisters (2de reeks), nr. 537. The account books of Gillis Coucke are part of the private collection of the author. On this account book LAMBRECHT (2003).

(Pitt, 1796: 157). In the budgets collected by David Davies, one budget relates to an unmarried agricultural labourer. This adolescent was able to set approximately half of his wages aside (Davies, 1795: 200). The data for Flanders indicate that these rates could be achieved, but that they were certainly not the norm.

Table 4.2. Saving rates of farm servants in Flanders, 1711-1779

	<i>Male servants</i> (<i>n</i> = 57)	<i>Female servants</i> (<i>n</i> = 23)
< 0 %	1	6
0 – 24 %	23	5
25 – 49 %	10	5
50 – 74 %	11	5
75 – 100 %	12	7
Average %	40.1	29.6

Sources. See Note 2.

Male servants engaged in agriculture saved on average 40 per cent of their wages. With female servants, the saving rates amounted to approximately 30 per cent of their wages. Female servants thus apparently saved less compared to their counterparts. However, if we take the important differences in wages paid to men and women into account, the results suggest that the average saving rate of men and women was nearly identical. The average saving rates for both sexes hide important variations. Breaking down the data in categories indicates that the saving behaviour of servants varied highly. Looking at the extremes, some servants saved their entire cash wage whilst others were in debt with their employer. In the latter case, these servants owed money to their employer and were forced to stay another term to work off these debts. The data indicate that the trajectories of servants could be quite different. Whilst some display extreme examples of frugal living, others were empty-handed when they left their employer. No significant positive or negative relationship could be established between the wage rate and the saving rates. Higher wages did not result automatically in higher or lower saving rates. This could suggest that there was no model trajectory among servants with particular reference to saving. In other words, servants saved more during some years and less during others. Male servants saved on average 40 per cent of their wages, but they probably did not save that portion of their wages continuously during their career. It is not possible to determine which factors influenced the saving behaviour of individual servants. The important lesson to be drawn from this exercise is that there was an opportunity for accumulation during this period. Young adolescents could accumulate cash savings prior to marriage through the institution of service and, in reality, the majority did. Servants were thus placed in

a unique position *vis-à-vis* other categories of labourers in the countryside. It is highly unlikely that day labourers and their families could, on average, save between 30 and 40 per cent of their cash income.

III. Farm servants and filial assistance

The high saving potential of farm servants has been established in the previous section. In theory, servants could also financially and materially assist their kin from the proceeds of their labour. There are clear indications in the account books of farmers that servants did use their cash wages to assist others. The farm account books contain data that enable us to reconstruct how and when servants actually transferred part of their earnings and savings to their kin. Indeed, one of the striking features of the notes of farmers in this region are the recurrent references to the servants' kin and to their parents in particular. The parents of servants appear in the account books on three different occasions. First, when the servant bargained with the employer over wages and work conditions, they were sometimes assisted by their parents. Second, labour contracts also frequently mention the parents of servants as beneficiaries of various benefits in kind. Lastly, farmers also noted that their servants asked advance payments on their wages and that some of these advance payments were used to transfer cash, goods and services back to the parental household. Although servants were physically removed from the household of their parents, their financial and economic ties were not severed.

The role of parents in the hiring of servants by farmers is not very surprising. Regarding young servants in particular, it is fair to assume that they would have lacked the knowledge and the financial skills to successfully strike a bargain with an employer. It is therefore quite logical that parents guided their children in their first steps onto the labour market. It is highly unlikely that young children, unlike their parents, would possess a realistic knowledge of their economic value and, accordingly, the wages they should receive. Thus, as the account book of a farmer in the village of Eke indicates, there is a negative relationship between the wage levels of servants and the presence of parents at the timing of hiring. As the wages of servant progressed with age, the cash wage of servants can be used as a proxy for age. With servants receiving a wage lower than £5 Flemish per annum, parents were present in three quarters of all bargains. As servants earned more and grew older, the parents gradually disappear from the bargaining scene. Only in one in five cases are parents cited as present when servants were hired with a wage exceeding £10 Flemish per annum. This trend can also be traced with individual servants. A servant named Pieter Versele worked on this farm for three consecutive years. In 1769, he earned £5 13 s. 4 d. per annum and the presence of his mother was recorded in the account book.

In 1771, his annual wage had risen to £8 5 s. 0 d. and his mother was now absent. Apparently, assistance and guidance from the direct kin group was no longer required at this stage (Lambrecht, 2009: 638-643).

More importantly, the entry of a child into service was also an opportunity for parents to secure income for themselves. In eighteenth-century Flanders, it was not uncommon for parents to be included in the labour contracts as recipients of various goods and services delivered by the employer of their children. Servants not only received a cash wage and board by their employer. It was common, throughout Europe, for servants to also receive goods in kind in addition to their wages. In most cases, these were textiles and clothes. One farmer in particular noted meticulously the nature and beneficiaries of the payments in kind. From this account book (by an anonymous farmer in the village of Lembeke), we can analyse these benefits in kind in greater detail (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Benefits in kind for servants and their parents: Lembeke, 1786-1800

	Male servants (n = 34)	Female servants (n = 9)
Benefits for servants		
Linen	9.5	10.0
Clothing ^a	2.6	8.9
Footwear	1.2	7.8
Socks	0.6	5.6
Schooling	0.6	0.0
Benefits for parents		
Food	1.5	2.2
Land	1.2	1.1
Fuel (coal)	0.3	1.1
Transport	0.6	0.0

Source. State Archives Ghent, Old Archives Lembeke, nr. 292.

Note. Per 10 contracts. (a) shirts for men and aprons for women.

A close look at the benefits in kind reveal some distinct patterns. First, there is a clear difference in the benefits in kind for male and female servants. Both male and female servants received different types of textiles in addition to the cash wages. The data from this account book indicate that gender differences can be observed. Female servants received textiles as part of their total earnings more frequently than men. This pattern can also be observed in other farm account books. On a farm in the village of Oostkamp, female servants received on average 7.4 el of linen on

top of their wages in the late 1730s. For male servants, this only amounted to 4.8 el of linen³. These differences may reveal different consumer preferences, needs or strategies towards pre-marital resource acquisition. Female servants, *e.g.*, may have accumulated more textiles to use as household textiles after marriage. Secondly, the benefits listed in Table 4.3 indicate that the parents of servants also frequently appear as beneficiaries. In this sample, between 25 and 30 per cent of all contracts contain benefits in kind of some sort for the parents. These benefits in kind mostly consist of basic foodstuffs such as rye and potatoes and, on a rare occasion, meat. Next to food, somewhat surprisingly, land seems to be the second most frequent payment in kind for the parents. Land in this context refers to the right of the parents to grow potatoes on small plots of land belonging to the employer. These plots of land, as the contracts indicate, were rather small. In all cases, they did not exceed one twentieth of a hectare (ranging between 0.026 ha and 0.037 ha). The institution of service thus functioned as a means to temporarily extend the parental holding without having to recur to the expensive land or rental market. The potato land secured this way also created an additional flow of food and calories to the parental household. Fuel and transport services appear less frequently in these accounts. In this example, transport services refer to the free use of a horse and wagon of the employer.

These types of benefits in kind, extending to the parents of the servants, were not unique to this farm in Lembeke. In other account books, similar arrangements also frequently appear. A maid on the farm of Gerard de Wulf in the village of Eke negotiated a wage of £3 Flemish per annum and 2 *meukens* (or 28 litres) of rye to be delivered to her mother. On another farm, the father of maid called Marianne de Mey secured one barrel of rye for himself when he hired out his daughter. The parents of Joannes Neerinck received some pieces of clothing and a dish of pork meat. When Pieter D'Hont hired himself as a servant in 1774, he managed to secure for his mother the free use of a team of horses for one day (Lambrecht, 2009: 638-643). These examples indicate that benefits in kind were regularly recorded in the labour contracts of servants. It is possible that not all benefits in kind were systematically recorded. A government decree from 1740 reports that servants also tried to secure gleaning rights – most likely for their parents – on the fields of their employer when they hired themselves (*Placcaert-boeck van Vlaenderen. Fifth series*, vol. II, 1763: 829-930). Labour contracts in farm account books thus probably underestimate the flows between employers and the parents of their servants.

These benefits in kind, either for the servants or the parents, were part of the total wage of the servant. As such they should also be treated as part of the remuneration

³ Great Seminar Bruges, Accounts of the Abbey of the Dunes, nr. 89: Account book of the farm Meunicken. 1735-1743.

system of servants. Although the value of these benefits in kind was not explicitly stated in the labour contracts, it is highly unlikely that farmers did not take these benefits into account when determining the annual cash wage. As a result, the cash wages of servants were most probably lower when benefits in kind were included. Benefits in kind thus exerted a downward pressure on the cash wage. If no benefits in kind were included in the labour contract, cash wages would likely be higher. In some cases, the effects of the benefits in kind for parents on the cash wage of servants were significant from a financial perspective. From another account book, it was possible to calculate the value of the small plots of potato land for the parents⁴. For one servant, receiving a cash wage of 720 *stuiver* per annum, the value of the 18 rods of potato land secured for his parents amounted to 82 *stuiver* or 11 per cent of his cash wage. For another servant, earning 420 *stuiver* per annum, 25 rods of potato land with a market value of 117 *stuiver*, amounted to 27 per cent of his wages. The use of a horse and cart for one day can be valued at the equivalent of 13 daily wages of an adult day labourer. Securing benefits in kind for parents thus probably reduced the cash wages of a servant and, consequently, their earning and saving potential.

Parents not only appear as beneficiaries of goods and services in the labour contracts of servants. The farm account books analysed in this chapter also contain details about the nature of the advance payments to servants. In theory, servants received their wage at the end of their service term with their employer. Servants hired in May 1736, *e.g.*, would not receive their wages until the following year (May 1737). In reality however, employers frequently allowed their servants to receive advance payment on their wages. In all of the four sets of account books analysed in this chapter, advance payment of wages was a common feature. Some farmers noted in great detail how servants used the money that was advanced to them. From these data it is possible, *e.g.*, to reconstruct consumption patterns of these rural labourers (see Lambrecht, 2000; Delahaye, 2006). But these accounts not only list the consumer items bought by servants; they also contain frequent references to the parents of servants. Here, too, we find that parents of servants appear as the recipients of a range of goods. In the account books, the parents, but also other kin, appear as the recipients of cash, food and clothing. The value of all these goods was deducted from the wages of the servant. To illustrate the nature of these transfers, some examples have been drawn from an account book of a farmer in the village of Zwevegem (See references in Note 2). Marianne Crepeel, *e.g.*, earned £29 parisis per annum in 1720. During the year she worked on that farm, £21 1 s. 0 d. parisis of her wages or some 72 per cent of her total cash wage were handed over to her parents. The value of this transfer is not unimportant, as it was the equivalent of some 35 to 40 daily wages of

⁴ Calculated from the account book of Pieter-Joannes Buyse, farmer at Heldergerm (1788-1797) held at State Archives Beveren, Family Records Buyse, nr. 33.

an adult male day labourer in this region. Particularly regarding younger servants (cow herds), these transfers to parents appear frequently. In some cases, the recipients of the goods purchased by the servant were not specified, but it is apparent that they were destined for the parents. This is the case with the purchase of large quantities of staple food items, such as rye. We may assume that the rye bought from the employers was destined for the parents as the servants themselves were fed on the farm at the expense of the employer. Servants also indirectly financed the proto-industrial activities of their parents. Daniel Spinsemaille, *e.g.*, purchased flax seed from his employer destined to be grown on the fields of his parents. The accounts of servants also indicate that yarn and processed flax were transferred to the parents. Although the vast majority of these transfers were vertical, from children to their parents, some examples can be found where money was transferred to other kin. Jan Soubrie, *e.g.*, transferred approximately one-third of his cash wage to his uncle Jacques Soubrie in 1722. In 1751, a maid named Petronella Vereecke spent one fourth of her cash wage to pay for the burial and funeral expenses of her deceased sister. As was the case with benefits in kind, servants partly financed the household of their parents with the wages earned in service.

Next to these direct transfers from children to parents, the employers of servants in Flanders also bore some of the costs that were traditionally covered by parents. Table 4.3 indicates that some (young) male servants could also attend school at the expenses of the employer. In the account book of the farmer in Lembeke, two young servants could attend the village school for two to three months per year. In other account books, similar arrangement concerning the schooling of young farm servants are recorded (Van Kerschaver, 1939: 108). Service thus also served to transfer the costs of education (and human capital formation) beyond the limits of the household economy of smallholders. Although this was not a direct cash transfer, this type of arrangement directly resulted in lowering the household expenses for educating the children.

It is important to stress that these remittances were not restricted to the younger segment of the servant population. The accounts of young male and female cow herds in particular regularly contain references to parents. However, the more expensive goods and services destined for the parents, such as land or transport services, were predominantly encountered in the accounts of the elderly servants such as ploughmen. Although it is most likely that the relative value of remittances to parents declined as servants grew older, we still encounter this form of kinship solidarity among servants who, as their wage level suggests, would be close to marriage.

These transfers to the parents, either as benefits in kind or subtracted from the cash wages, may not appear that substantial individually. We should, however, take into account that the transfers that can be traced through this source probably underestimate the true extent and value of cash, goods and services that flowed back to the parental household. Servants also frequently received unspecified cash advances on their wages. In these cases, it is not possible to determine what servants did with these cash advances. It is possible that here, too, a portion was remitted to the parents. More importantly, however, parents would likely have more than one child working as a servant. If the transfers of multiple children in service could be cumulated, their importance for the parental household economy would be more substantial. The most important argument pleading for the importance of these transfers for the household economy of the parents can be simply derived from the very existence of these transfers. If parents were able to support themselves without the aid of their offspring in service, we would simply not encounter these remittances in the account books of the employers of farm servants. This strongly suggests that part of the earnings of the servants, either indirectly or directly, constituted a welcome addition to the household income of parents. In some cases, service thus acted as a means for the parents to secure free goods and services from the employers of their children. From this perspective, the institution of service was closely linked to the household economy of the parents. Service enabled parents to gain access to food, cash, textiles, land and capital goods from large farmers. Although servants were physically separated from the parents – they lived with their employer – they nevertheless contributed directly and indirectly to the household economy. This has some important implications. The examples in this section indicate that the unmarried youth of rural Flanders combined kinship solidarity with saving to set up a new household. This was by no means a typical western European pattern. In England, *e.g.*, some authors have argued that these types of remittances were largely absent between parents and their children in service (Kusmaul, 1981a: 75-76; Smith, 1981: 605-606; Smith, 1984: 72). Unlike Early Modern England, Flanders was a region where the institution of service farm was conducive to the transfer of a vast range of resources from servants to their parents. Why farm servants in this region were willing to sacrifice income, and thus delay the process of pre-marital accumulation, is a question that needs to be addressed.

IV. The context of land and welfare



The previous section of this chapter clearly indicates that intense financial links can be observed between parents and their offspring in service. These patterns, however, require further clarification. For servants, we might argue, it was not logical to accept a lower cash wage and be forced to save less of their cash wage because they

assisted their parents financially and materially. Relationships of this kind would only appear and last if they were mutually beneficial to both parties. From the viewpoint of the parents, it is not difficult to see the advantages of this system. The remittances of offspring in service served as an addition to the household income. Within the context of the changes in the household economies of the small peasants in Flanders, this made perfect sense. Throughout the eighteenth century, the household economy of the smallholders in Flanders was subject to serious challenges. To meet these challenges, peasant households mobilised all resources available to them. It appears these resources also included the earnings of children in service. It lies beyond the scope of this paper to analyse in depth the changes taking place in the economic organisation of peasant household in eighteenth-century Flanders. However, the economic pressures peasant households experienced during this period should be stressed, as they explain this specific pattern of kinship solidarity between unmarried children and their children. As in most European regions, real wages declined during the eighteenth century. Especially after 1770, as a result of inflation of basic foodstuffs, real earnings dwindled. Peasants in Flanders only worked occasionally as day labourers on large farms. In most cases, day labouring was restricted to 80 to 100 days on an annual basis. Only a small portion of what households earned was derived from day labouring and selling agricultural labour on the market. But even these small earnings derived from agricultural day labouring declined in the second half of the eighteenth century. Secondly, it should be stressed that, as a result of population growth and inheritance customs, there was tendency for farms to decline in size. This pattern of division of holdings accelerated after 1750 (Thoen, 2001: 132-136). The changes in the structure of agricultural holdings can be illustrated for the village of Markegem (Table 4.4). In this village, remittances from farm servants to parents have been established from the account book of Gillis Coucke.

Table 4.4. Size of agricultural holdings in Markegem, 1742-1846

<i>Size</i>	<i>1742 (%)</i>	<i>1800 (%)</i>	<i>1846 (%)</i>
0-1 ha	20	35	70
1-2 ha	14	11	3
2-4 ha	32	18	8
4-5 ha	15	12	3
5-10 ha	13	18	10
> 10 ha	6	6	4
Number of holdings	80	103	182

Source. LAMBRECHT (2002: 24).

The number of holdings increased in this village from 80 around the middle of the eighteenth century to 103 in 1800. Especially between 1800 and 1850, there was a sharp increase in the number of farms. The sharp rise in the number of holdings resulted in the fragmentation of the land in this community. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the population grew by 49 per cent. As a result of partible inheritance, the number of smallholdings grew in numbers. In 1742, holdings smaller than 5 ha accounted for 80 per cent of all holdings. In this group particularly, holdings were subdivided among heirs. The amount of land households had at their disposal decreased considerably. This had some important effects. After 1750, a growing number of rural households had to make ends meet on smaller farms. With less land at their disposal, rural households were forced to either reorganise their holdings or turn to an alternative means of securing a living. After 1750, smallholders switched from rye cultivation to potato cultivation due to its more favourable yield/calorie ratio (Vandenbroeke, 1992). Additionally, rural industries – especially weaving and spinning – expanded as a source of additional income. There is evidence to suggest that after 1750, the employment of children in the textile sector increased across the Flemish countryside (Mendels, 1975). Faced with a reduction in the size of holdings, these peasants thus reallocated their productive resources. It seems that growing economic pressures on the household economy were partly supported by higher levels of child employment.

The increasing exposure of the majority of smallholders to economic shocks could only be partly mitigated by alternative forms of income supplements. Poor relief structures were in place in the countryside, but the assistance they could offer was limited (see Winter & Lambrecht, 2013). In Flanders, each parish was equipped with a ‘dis’, or poor table. This type of institution for poor relief collected, administered and distributed local welfare resources. In theory, all those that were in need of some kind of material and financial assistance could apply to the local poor table. In reality, however, demand for relief far exceeded supply. Because these poor tables drew the bulk of their income from charitable donations, the supply of poor relief was highly inflexible. These institutions could only meet a fraction of the welfare needs of the rural population (Vanhaute & Lambrecht, 2011). For this purpose, it is very useful to compare the expenditure of these poor tables with the earnings of children in service. For the end of the eighteenth, it is possible to reconstruct rural poor relief in the region of Alost. This region was characterised by small holdings combining intensive cottage agriculture with proto-industrial textile production – that were mostly owned by the peasant households (see Vermoesen, 2011). For this period, reliable data are available on the number of farm servants, their earnings and total expenditure on poor relief⁵. Comparing the value of the cash wages received by farm servants with

⁵ The annual expenditure of poor relief boards has been calculated from the survey carried out in the

the total redistribution of wealth through rural poor relief institutions reveals an interesting pattern. The value of total poor relief expenditure amounted to 7.8 per cent of the wages earned by farm servants in this region. This clearly illustrates the limited importance of poor relief compared to the earnings of children in service. If every servant in this region remitted 10 per cent of his cash wage to his parents or family, this still exceeded the relief offered by public welfare resources⁶. From that perspective, family members – and children in service in particular – were a far more reliable and potentially generous source of additional income than the funds distributed through the welfare system.

In this context, it is no surprise that parents relied on their children in service to make ends meet. The survival strategies adopted by Flemish smallholders also extended beyond the physical boundaries of the household. Even those children working away from their parents were still expected to contribute to the maintenance of their parents and younger siblings. Compared to alternative forms of income support, the earnings of children in service proved to be more important. Risks and shocks were shared and absorbed by all members of the family. Taking into account the growing economic pressures on rural households and the failure of poor relief institutions to provide significant income support, it becomes clear why parents turned to their children for assistance. The data indicate that servants willingly offered this type of assistance to their parents, although it was at first sight harmful to their personal financial interests. What were the motives of servants to remit part of their wages to their parents besides altruism? Did servants also benefit from this arrangement with their parents?

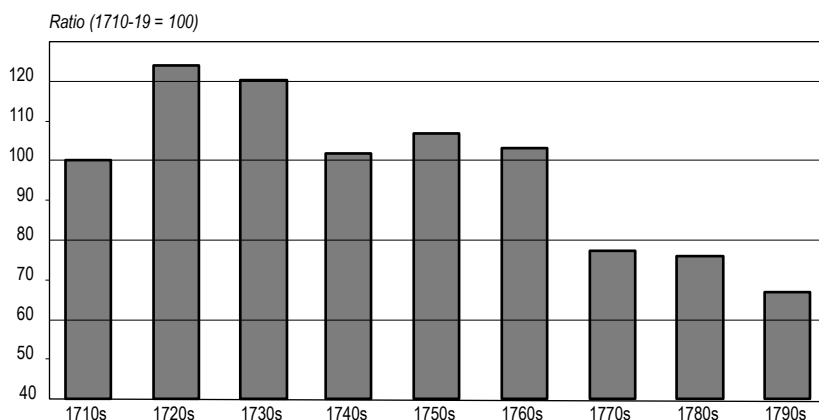
It should first be noted that the material and financial assistance provided by children could be reclaimed when parents died. Customary law in this region clearly stated that children could reclaim what they had given to their parents whilst not sharing the same roof. When the estate of the parents was divided among the children, these remittances could be taken into account (Van Laecke 1759: 144-149). There are indications that small peasants recorded the services rendered to them by their offspring. This secure legal environment may have created the institutional environment for these transfers to take place, but it does not explain why servants assisted their parents. It is fair to assume that servants would be reluctant to assist their parents if they did not receive anything in return. One of the ways to approach

region of Alost in 1795, published in LAMARCQ (1981). These surveys, collected for 105 villages, list the annual fixed income of poor boards from rental properties and investments in annuities. These 105 villages counted 110,838 inhabitants, including 4,461 male and 3,187 female servants with an average annual wage of 110 and 80 Belgian francs respectively. Total cash wages thus amounted to 745,670 Belgian francs. Total welfare expenditure by the welfare institutions amounted to 58,160 Belgian francs.

⁶ Assuming the cash wage accounts for 30 per cent of the total remuneration, poor relief expenditure represents only 2.3 per cent the total wages (cash wage and board) received by servants in this region.

this is to look at the property rights of parents. If parents owned land, then children could expect an inheritance in the future. The assistance offered by children would thus be repaid later in their life cycle by an inheritance. In Flanders, ownership by the smallholders served to neutralise this potential intergenerational conflict. In eighteenth-century Flanders, the vast majority of the peasants still owned the land they worked. Although farms were subdivided, the smallholders were still able to maintain their property rights. It was not until the first half of the nineteenth century that peasants lost their land and had to turn to leasehold (De Kezel, 1988; Vanhaute, 1993). When parents owned land, children were relatively certain that the services they had rendered to their parents whilst in service would be repaid. Moreover, the situation was favourable to parents in the second half of the eighteenth century as the value of their estates grew more rapidly than the wages of their children (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1. Ratio of land prices and wages of servants in Flanders, 1710-1795



Sources. The data presented in Figure 4.1 on wages of servants were obtained from the account books listed above in Note 2, supplemented by individual wage data of servants found in the collections of the State Archives of Bruges, Courtray, Beveren and Ghent and the Grand Seminar in Bruges. In total 662 individual observations of annual wage were collected between 1680 and 1812. These were compared with the prices of land sold in the village of Zele, see DE WEVER (1976).

The early decades of the eighteenth century were clearly favourable to servants. The combined effects of warfare in the countryside, emigration and the mortality crises of 1695-1697 and 1709 had resulted in population losses. As a result, the demand for land declined and labour became scarce. Servants were able to profit in two ways from these developments. First, they could demand high wages for

their services. Allegedly, servants demanded wages so exorbitantly high that the government had to intervene in 1703. Second, as population levels had declined, there was no upward pressure on the price of land. As a result, servants could purchase a small farm relatively cheaply. In other words, the early decades of the eighteenth century offered servants high wages and easy and cheap access to land. After 1730, and especially after 1760, the situation deteriorated rapidly for servants. Population growth now resulted in rising land prices and labour was abundant (Vanhaute, 2001). As a result, the prices for land rose more rapidly than the wages of servants. Servants thus either had to save more assiduously, work longer or content themselves with a smaller holding. There is evidence to suggest that the process of household formation slowed down during this period. Between 1710 and 1740, the crude marriage rate in Flanders oscillated between 10.3 and 13.4 per cent. After 1750, crude rates never reached a higher level than 8.9 per thousand (Vandenbroeke, 1976; Devos, 1999). To what extent the process of household formation slowed as a result of remittances to parents is difficult to determine. In any case, the widespread practice of financing the parental household economy from savings in service would have delayed rather than accelerated the process of household formation. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the tables clearly had turned for the servants. The value of their wages was rapidly declining relative to the price of land. Such a context would create the ideal circumstances for parents to coerce their children into the forms of assistance described in the previous section. For servants with parents that owned land, the value of their future inheritance increased more rapidly than what they could earn or accumulate through labour. Assisting their parents to be able to hold on to their holding and ensure that it could be passed on to the next generation was in fact an investment. In other words, servants in fact saved through the part of their wages they channelled back to their parents. In the second half of the eighteenth century, parents held a strong bargaining position towards their children. If the wages of servants had increased more rapidly than land prices, as was occurring in the first half of the eighteenth century, it would be more difficult to demand these financial sacrifices from their children. As all children enjoyed equal inheritance rights, parents could, in theory, demand this type of assistance from all their children, irrespective of sex or birth rank. Thus, property rights and a favourable land/wage ratio from the viewpoint of the parents probably constitute the underlying mechanism to explain this type of filial assistance. By assisting their parents, servants invested part of their earnings. When the land of the parents was passed on, they could claim these transfers back, and importantly, also receiving interest on top. These considerations also permeated intergenerational relations in other regions. As David Sabeau has illustrated for Neckarhausen, the expected inheritance determined the extent and level of solidarity and exchange between generations (Sabeau, 1990: 35).

Data from probate inventories indicate that the vast majority of the peasantries in Flanders probably came to depend increasingly on the intergenerational transfer of assets. In Flanders, appraisers of the assets of the deceased drew a distinction between immovable goods (land) acquired through inheritance (*gronden van erfven*) and immovable goods bought conjointly by the spouses after marriage (*conqueest*). As such, probate inventories indicate to what extent households were active on the land market immediately upon or after marriage. Research on probate inventories for the village of Waarschoot (near Ghent) shows that the number of households that acquired land after marriage declined during the second half of the eighteenth century. Between 1740 and 1759, almost 40 per cent of all deceased had bought land. From 1780 to 1799, this share had dropped to 31 per cent (De Vos, 1990: 369). At the end of the eighteenth century, approximately one-third of the rural households were active on the land market as buyers. The inability of a growing number of households to purchase land is an important element. This indicates that children came to depend increasingly on the assets passed on by their parents. They were mutually dependent upon each other to secure a livelihood. Such conditions were extremely favourable to the transfer of wages from unmarried children to their parents.

V. Conclusion

In Flanders, farm servants were able to reconcile the conflicting challenges of filial assistance with the material demands neo-locality imposed on them. The relative prosperity of farm servants and their saving potential did not escape their parents. Faced with declining real wages, rising dependency rates and smaller holdings, households were forced to address alternative means of income. Remittances from offspring in service constituted one of the (probably many) means that enabled smallholders to make ends meet. The wages earned by servants were partly transferred back to the kin group, especially the parents. A variety of goods and services were in this way transferred back to the parental household economy. Servants in Flanders were willing to accept a lower wage and use their savings from service to assist their parents. This implied that adolescents in this region had only limited control over their labour income. The Flemish examples indicate that, contrary to what Hajnal claimed, not all adolescents gained financial independence when they began work as a servant (Hajnal, 1982: 475). The conflict between collective – *i.e.*, family – and individual interest sketched at the onset of this chapter probably did not exist in the minds of farm servants. Especially, and most likely only, for servants who had parents that owned land was it easy to reconcile their individual ambitions and interests with those of their parents. Ownership of land seems to be the factor that reconciled the interests of both parties. Landholding patterns in rural Flanders thus gave rise to a specific set of relations between parents and their offspring in service. For parents,

children in service – and the wages they earned – were viewed as part of the household budget. Even though they may have been living under a different roof, they were still connected from a material and financial perspective. When parents were in need of assistance, they turned to their children first and foremost. Compared to the wages of their children, the assistance that could be provided by institutions external to the kin group – such as parochial poor relief – was negligible. Risks inherent to the life cycle and the uncertainties of the pre-industrial economy were shared in the kin group and between generations.

This pattern of parent-child relations is not unique to Flanders. In other regions, similar transfers from farm servants to their parents have been recorded for the eighteenth century (Pollock, 1995: 29-31; Claverie & Lamaison, 1982: 85). In Ireland in particular, such transfers were frequently quoted as an important element of intergenerational relations among the nineteenth-century peasantry. Here, too, the specific context of property rights and limited welfare resources gave rise to a pattern of family assistance (*Selection of parochial examinations*, 1835: 157-60). To what extent these patterns were characteristic of regions where peasants owned land but lacked assistance from public relief institutions constitutes a topic that needs more research. In pursuing these themes, the complex relationship between household formation, poor relief and land ownership will hopefully become clearer. This chapter illustrates that saving patterns of adolescents in service can provide an interesting perspective on these themes.

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