

THE FAMILIAL ORIGINS OF EUROPEAN INDIVIDUALISM

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Abstract: Marriage practices in Northwest Europe are unique among societies with intensive agriculture. Critically, married couples were freely chosen non-relatives who set up their households independently of their parents and their extended families; households typically including non-relatives and were established only after achieving economic viability. This in turn required greater planning and self-control prior to marriage and resulted in greater husband-wife partnership than is typical when marriage is embedded within extended kinship networks (i.e., joint family structure—a form of collectivism paradigmatically occurring in the Middle East). A standard view among historians is that this marriage regime was a response to the unique context after the fall of the Roman Empire in which lords were forced to give incentives to laborers. This hypothesis is rejected for several reasons: 1. there are strong currents of individualism in Indo-European culture long predating the post-Roman period; 2. the manorial system of the post-Roman world was remarkably similar to the prevailing practices of Germanic tribes during the Roman period; 3. individualist families have several disadvantages compared to collectivist families, including later generation time, uncertain inheritance, greater likelihood of sexual assault prior to marriage in households composed of non-relatives—thus making it unlikely to be freely chosen because of incentives provided by lords. This is compatible with a theory that European individualism results from genetically based tendencies resulting in a misfit with medieval environments compared to collectivist family structure. Data are reviewed indicating that the most extreme forms of individualism occur in Scandinavian societies, implying a cline in individualism from southeast to northwest. In conclusion, an ethnically based northwest-southeast gradient is proposed as the main variable in explaining variation in family structure within Western Europe. However, viewed in broader terms—in comparison, say, to the Middle East—all of Europe, including Eastern Europe, is relatively individualistic.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a consensus among historians of the family that the family structure of Northwest Europe is unique. However, there is dispute about exactly when this family pattern can be discerned and about the causes of what Mary S. Hartman has labeled a “strange” and “aberrant” pattern.² A standard view among historians had been that European uniqueness derived from the creation of capitalism and a system of national states³—a blank slate, top-down perspective that posits a central role for elites in creating a unique cultural context. On the other hand, family historians have provided data indicating that this unique family structure long predicated these features of Western modernization and has had a central causal role in creating the contemporary world.⁴ This latter perspective fits well with the biological view developed here because it isolates family structure as a central variable—a variable that is amenable to evolutionary/biological analysis.

The standard marriage model in non-Western societies with intensive agriculture, including Southern and Eastern Europe, was for parental control of marriage, with the woman considerably younger than the man (7–10 years on average). The couple would move into the same residence as parents, resulting in multi-family households in which individuals were enmeshed in patrilineal extended kinship networks. It was unusual for people not to marry.

On the other hand, the family pattern in England, the Low Countries, Scandinavia, northern France, German-speaking areas and northern Italy (settled by the Germanic Lombards) was quite different, at least since the Middle Ages (although dating the origins of this pattern is unclear and will be a major issue discussed here): 1. late marriage was common (except for the aristocracy); 2. the partners were more similar in age; 3. unmarried individuals, especially women, were common; 4. critically, the married couple set up their household independently of their parents and their extended families; 5. again with the exception of elites (which only conformed to this pattern much later), marriage was not arranged by parents but was entered into by individual choice of

² Mary S. Hartman, *The Household and Making of History: A Subversive View of the Western Past* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1, xxx.

³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴ See, e.g., Hartman, *Ibid.*; Michael Mitterauer, *Why Europe? The Medieval Origins of Its Special Path* (trans. by Gerald Chapple) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010; orig. German edition, 2003).

partner.⁵ Because aristocratic families deviated from this pattern in important ways, this marriage regime cannot be seen as a top-down cultural shift.

Both household types tended to have similar numbers of members, but the difference was that in northwest Europe, the additional people were servants who were not relatives.⁶ Thus the northwest European pattern was a family that was cut off from extended kinship networks, quite unlike the pattern in the rest of the world's cultures based on intensive agriculture. Further, since individuals set up their own economically independent households, the northwest European family pattern encouraged saving during the pre-marriage years and planning for the future when marriage would be possible.⁷

The practice of taking in servants merits considerable attention because a simple economic explanation seems inadequate. Between thirty and forty percent of the youth in pre-industrial England were in service, the largest single occupational group until the twentieth century.⁸ The practice of taking in servants went beyond simply providing for one's needs by bringing in outsiders. People would sometimes have their children go to work as servants elsewhere while at the same time taking in unrelated servants.⁹ It was not just the children of the poor and landless who became servants, but even large, successful farmers sent their children to be servants elsewhere. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries individuals often took in servants early in their marriage, before their own children could help out, and then passed their children to others when the children were older and there was more than enough help.¹⁰

This suggests a deeply ingrained cultural practice, which resulted in a high level of non-kinship-based reciprocity. The practice also bespeaks a relative lack of ethnocentrism because people are taking in non-relatives as household members even when relatives are available. These pre-industrial societies are not organized around extended kinship, and it is easy to see that they are pre-adapted to the industrial revolution and modern world generally. In the rest of Eurasia, there was a strong tendency for households to consist of kin.¹¹

Interestingly, in a sexually competitive society such as classical China, the

⁵ For example, Hartman, *The Household and Making of History*, 6; Peter Laslett, "Characteristics of the Western Family Considered Over Time," *Journal of Family History* 2 (Summer, 1977): 89–114, 95.

⁶ Hartman, *The Household and Making of History*, 13.

⁷ John Hajnal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective," D. V. Glass & D. E. Eversle (eds.), *Population in history: essays in historical demography* (Chicago: Aldine, 1965): 101-43, 132.

⁸ Laslett 1977.

⁹ Hajnal 1983.

¹⁰ Stone 1977.

¹¹ Hajnal 1983.

female servants would be concubines of the head of the household,¹² so that the resources of the household could be directly translated into reproduction. Thus in the Western European model wealthy males were supporting far more non-relatives than in the sexually competitive societies of Eurasia. It is intriguing that hunter-gatherer societies living in harsh climates often have very elaborate systems of reciprocity aimed at sharing resources such as meat. I suspect that the system of non-kinship-based reciprocity so typical of pre-industrial Western Europe was another relic of a prolonged evolution in harsh northern climates.

Whereas Hartman and others emphasize late marriage as the key feature of Western families,¹³ perhaps because of a heightened concern for feminist issues, an evolutionary analysis emphasizes the cutting off from the wider kinship group. This implies greater individualism as individuals are to a much greater extent enmeshed with non-relatives and forced to make their own plans for the future. For example, in contemplating marriage, couples had to have an expectation of economic viability and the ability to set up their own households and plan for their own retirement. Therefore, in the following, the contrasting types of family will be labeled individualist and collectivist, with the understanding that there are gradations between these types, ranging from the intensive collectivism typical of the Middle East and much of the non-European world, to the moderate collectivism of much of southern Europe, to what might be termed “moderate individualism” characteristic of Germanic populations, to the extreme individualism found in Scandinavia and among some Scandinavian-descended sub-populations in the British Isles.

However, this cutting off from extended kinship would also naturally lead to a higher position for women in a nuclear family household than in a patrilocal multifamily household dominated by older males and secondarily by mothers-in-law. In general the long term historical trend was that conjugal marriage in absence of extended kinship ties resulted in convergence of men’s and women’s lives, as spouses became partners, and there was also less preference for sons.¹⁴

¹² E.g., Ebrey 1986.

¹³ Hartman, *The Household and Making of History*, 25.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41. It’s interesting that Tacitus portrays marriage among the Germanic tribes as a monogamous partnership: “Almost alone among barbarians they are content with one wife, except a very few among them, and these not from sensuality, but because their noble birth procures for them many offers of alliance. … Lest the woman should think herself to stand apart from aspirations after noble deeds and from the perils of war, she is reminded by the ceremony which inaugurates marriage that she is her husband’s partner in toil and danger, destined to suffer and to dare with him alike both in peace and in war. The

INDIVIDUALIST TENDENCIES AMONG THE INDO-EUROPEANS

The perspective developed here argues that both genetic proclivities toward individualism and particular environmental/cultural contexts were important for the development of individualism in Europe, with genetic tendencies a necessary precondition for the latter. Critically, there were already tendencies toward individualism among the original Indo-European invaders of Europe and in the culture of the Roman Republic and Empire.¹⁵ Indeed, prior to the invasions, Proto-Indo-European culture had well-developed practices surrounding guest-host relationships which were based on reciprocity, not kinship. These reciprocal guest-host relationships “functioned as a bridge between social units (tribes, clans) that had ordinarily restricted these relationships to their kin or co-residents.”¹⁶ Fundamental to Indo-European culture was a free market in establishing the *männerbund* (war band) which was central to Indo-European culture. Ties within the group were maintained by military reputation, not kinship, and in general within Europe, clan-type organizations, to the extent that they occurred at all, were subordinate to reputation-based military organization that regulated kinship-based groupings and formed the highest level of elite control. For example, in Old Norse society, children were often fostered out to families of higher rank, creating ties that were not based on kinship—a practice that is highly reminiscent of the practice of life-cycle service that was typical of the manorial system in the Frankish Empire of the early Middle Ages (see below). However,

the most important of these forces de-emphasizing kinship was the Männerbund itself because it cut across the Sippe [kinship-based groups] and was based, not on kinship ties, but on territorial ties among men of the same age. The Männerbund was superior to the Sippe in the sense that it

yoked oxen, the harnessed steed, the gift of arms, proclaim this fact.”(Tacitus, *Germania* 18)

¹⁵ Kevin MacDonald, “The Indo-European Genetic and Cultural Legacy in Europe,” *The Occidental Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (Spring, 2017): 3–33; Kevin MacDonald, “The Roman Variant of Indo-European Society: Militarization, Aristocratic Government and Openness to Conquered Peoples” (review of Gary Forsythe, *A Critical History of Early Rome: From Prehistory to the First Punic War* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005]), *The Occidental Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (Summer, 2017): 85–100.

¹⁶ David Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007; paperback edition, 2010), 303.

was the upholder of “censorious justice” if the familism of the Sippe got out of control.¹⁷

Moreover, the I-E groups that invaded Europe (the ancient Greeks are somewhat of an exception), whether in the Roman Republic or the Germanic groups of the late Empire and early Middle Ages, did not erect impenetrable barriers between themselves and those they conquered and lived among. Barriers between peoples gradually eroded, and alliances, whether in marriage, business, or attaining status in the *männerbund*, were eventually made more on the basis of individual self-interest rather than anything related to the goals of a kinship group. It might take more than one generation for the entire process to play out, but slaves could become freedmen, and freedman could rise to membership in the elite.¹⁸

Thus, on the basis of these data, I conclude that there were strong trends toward individualism in Europe from the beginning within the main Indo-European groups that shaped European history (Romans and Germanic peoples), implying that the task at hand is not explaining how European individualism originated in the Middle Ages, but how it became modified and became more intensive as we approach the contemporary era. The general thesis here is that the invading I-E groups, already substantially predisposed toward individualism themselves, encountered peoples who were also predisposed toward individualism—likely even more so—stemming from their hunter-gatherer past in the north of Europe.¹⁹ On the other hand, the south of Europe, settled originally by farmers originating in the Middle East, retained its moderate collectivism into the present despite the influences of the main groups shaping European

¹⁷ MacDonald, “The Indo-European Genetic and Cultural Legacy in Europe,” 19.

¹⁸ MacDonald, “The Indo-European Genetic and Cultural Legacy in Europe,” 16.

¹⁹ For example, a genetic analysis of Neolithic European populations suggests that the North-South European height gradient may reflect selection for shorter height in Early Neolithic Middle Eastern migrants into southern Europe and admixture of taller steppe populations of Indo-Europeans with northern Europeans. Iain Mathieson et al., “Genome-Wide Patterns of Selection in 230 Ancient Europeans,” *Nature* 528 (December 24–31, 2015): 499–515. See also: Peter Frost, “The Hajnal Line and Gene-Culture Coevolution in Northwest Europe,” *Advances in Anthropology*, 7 (2017: 154-174; Kevin MacDonald, “What Makes Western Culture Unique?,” *The Occidental Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 9–38.

history—quite possibly due to genetic tendencies inherited from their Middle Eastern ancestors.²⁰

DESCRIPTIVE DATA ON FAMILY PATTERNS IN NORTHWESTERN AND SOUTHERN EUROPE

The strength of extended kinship ties is thus central to this analysis. Patrick Heady divides European kinship patterns into three categories, strong (Croatia, Russia, Italy, Greece, Poland, Spain—here labeled “moderate collectivism”), weak (France, Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Switzerland—“moderate individualism”), and very weak (Sweden, Denmark—“strong individualism”), running in a cline from southeast to northwest.²¹ Families in the moderate collectivism area tend to live near their parents (often residing in the same house), marry people from the same area, help each other more (including financial aid), and have stronger distinctions between male and female roles. Heady labels this pattern “parentally anchored and locally involved,” the extreme opposite being “origin free and locally detached.” Sweden is characterized by the weakest family system.

Thus the fundamental cline in family patterns places the most extreme forms of individualism in the far northwest. This categorization system is essentially a more fine-grained version of the well-known Hajnal line which separates European family types into only two categories, east and west of a line between St. Petersburg and Trieste.²²

The characteristics of the moderately individualist family system of Northwest Europe. Hartman emphasizes that the nuclear family resulted in people having to plan their own lives. Women, for example, would avoid pregnancy before marriage by not having sex. (Despite late marriage, illegitimacy was “extremely low.”²³) This implied a long period of voluntary sexual restraint prior to marriage—likely resulting in selection against those, especially women,²⁴ who had sex outside marriage, although courts stood ready to force

²⁰ Incidentally, from this perspective, one might even claim that the moderate collectivism of much of southern Europe and its persistence into the contemporary period needs explaining at least as much as the individualistic patterns of northern Europe.

²¹ Patrick Heady, “A ‘Cognition and Practice’ Approach to an Aspect of European Kinship,” *Cross-Cultural Research* (May, 2017 preprint), 1–26.

²² Hajnal, “European Marriage Patterns in Perspective.”

²³ Hartman, *The Household and Making of History*, 29.

²⁴ However, in a situation where men faced the prospect of being forced to marry the mother of their illegitimate child, men would also face pressures to control their sexuality.

marriages for women with a child born out of wedlock in order to avoid having to support them. The low level of illegitimacy in a situation where people had significant freedom to plan their own lives implies a strong role for (and likely eugenic selection for) the personality trait of effortful control of impulses (conscientiousness).²⁵ Such eugenic pressures would not exist in a collectivist society where early marriage was the rule and there were strong external controls on female behavior.

Thus nuclear families meant a greater reliance on individual planning and effort. Whereas social roles, marriage partner (often first cousins) and age of women's marriage are largely pre-determined in collectivist cultures, in the individualist areas of Europe, individuals were free to choose a marriage partner, and they had to decide when to get married, the latter decision normatively made only after securing a viable economic niche. By the fourteenth century in England, most people worked for wages paid by non-relatives, and in general children were "expected to leave home, accumulate their own wealth, choose their own marriage partners and locate and occupy their own economic niche."²⁶ There was widespread ownership of land. Even "unfree tenant families by the late medieval era in northwestern Europe had long had effective control over the land they worked. While lords retained ultimate jurisdiction, families kept the land from one generation to the next, making their own arrangements for passing it on to heirs. ... Despite legal developments in Western Europe denying inheritance rights to unfree peasants and setting out more individualized notions of property, manorial courts and the church long upheld older custom."²⁷ Oldest sons inherited land, but younger sons and daughters received moveable goods.

Dating the Origins of the Individualist Family. Separate households "dominate northwestern Europe as far back as medieval records go."²⁸ In other words, this pattern may be primitive among the peoples of northwest Europe—which fits well with the present perspective that the roots of these patterns lie in the evolutionary/biological realm. As Peter Laslett notes, "the further we go back, so it appears at the moment, the more elusive the origins of the interrelated characteristics of the Western family. As of the present state of

²⁵ Kevin MacDonald, "Effortful Control, Explicit Processing and the Regulation of Human Evolved Predispositions," *Psychological Review* 115, no. 4 (2008): 1012–1031.

²⁶ R. S. Schofield, "Family Structure, Demographic Behavior, and Economic Growth," in J. Walter and R. S. Schofield, eds., *Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 279–304, 285.

²⁷ Hartman, *The Household and Making of History*, 74.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 75,

knowledge, we cannot say when ‘the West’ diverged from the other parts of Europe.”²⁹ Hartman, writing in 2004, maintains that this comment “still holds.”³⁰ Further, there is no evidence that the northwest European family pattern is part of a historical progression or that different aspects of the northwest European family pattern or the pattern itself represent a developmental continuum. Importantly, David Herlihy notes that Tacitus had remarked that late marriage was common among the Germanic tribes (i.e., long before the Frankish Empire of early Middle Ages) and speculates that this pattern then became the norm after the fall of the Empire—obviously congruent with the evolutionary/biological influences proposed here. Searching for medieval contextual influences as the sole explanation of the late marriage pattern of northwest Europe seems misguided, particularly given the tendencies toward individualism in Indo-European culture generally, as noted above.

Further, there is some indication that nuclear families were the norm in the western Roman Empire. “On the basis of the tombstone inscriptions we have come to the conclusion that for the populations putting up tombstones throughout the western provinces the nuclear family was the primary focus of certain types of familial obligation. Grandparents, uncles and other extended family members appear too infrequently as commemorators for us to believe that they were regarded as part of the core family unit.”³¹ Tombstone inscriptions indicate that nuclear family inscriptions constitute about 75–90 percent of the total, with little variation chronologically, geographically, or by social class. “The facts that (1) extended family members, especially the paternal avus [uncle], are absolutely few in number in funerary dedications, that (2) paternal grandfathers are relatively few in comparison with the number alive and able to participate in the dedication, and that (3) the paternal avus is not even the most common type in commemorations involving grandparents—all these facts point away from the patriarchal family being a common reality in the population of the western empire erecting tombstones.” Other evidence indicates that the basic family was the mother-father-child triad; among the elite, sons commonly set up their own households rather than remain in their father’s domicile.

On the basis of our evidence, it seems a reasonable hypothesis that the continuity of the nuclear family goes back much further in time and that

²⁹ Laslett, “Characteristics of the Western Family Considered Over Time,” 113.

³⁰ Hartman, *The Household and Making of History*, 76.

³¹ Richard P. Saller and Brent D. Shaw, “Tombstones and Roman Family Relations in the Principate: Civilians, Soldiers and Slaves,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 74 (1984): 124–156, 124.

it was characteristic of many regions of western Europe as early as the Roman empire.³²

Further, another marker of the individualist family is exogamy rather than marrying close kin as is typical in collectivist societies. Exogamy was in fact the rule even in Roman times:

There is strong evidence for continuity of the general practice of exogamy in the western Roman empire from the pre-Christian period (first three centuries after Christ) to the era of the establishment of Christianity as the state religion”; endogamous marriage was rare, if it occurred at all.

In sum, when the Church moved to formalise an extended incest prohibition in the fourth century, it was not acting to disrupt a widespread practice of close-kin endogamy in the western Roman empire. In fact, Augustine, in his discussion in the *City of God* concerning the recent extension of the incest rule, clearly indicates the opposite. He states categorically that marriage between cousins always had been raro per mores ('rare in customary practice'), well before the imposition of the new prohibitions.³³

Finally, the practice of partible inheritance included daughters, with daughters receiving a full share of the patrimony, as revealed by laws on intestate succession.³⁴ Thus the patrilineal extended family was not at all characteristic of Roman society in the Empire in Western Europe.

Disadvantages of the Individualist Family. The late-marriage regime of northwest Europe doesn't really make sense as the ideal form of marriage for an agricultural society—it is a “risky system of postponed marriage.”³⁵ This is compatible with an evolutionary basis for family structure because, if true, there is a lack of fit between this family structure and the context of the early Middle Ages. If one supposes that the otherwise complete dominance of the collectivist, early-marriage pattern in a very wide variety of cultures around the world is an adaptive response or at least a natural consequence of plow agriculture, why should northwest Europe be an exception? The long premarital period prior to marriage, particularly when women were often working outside the home and households typically had non-relatives meant that

³² *Ibid.*, 146.

³³ *Ibid.*, 438–439.

³⁴ Brent D. Shaw and Richard P. Saller, “Close-Kin Marriage in Roman Society?,” *Man* (New Series) 19, no. 3 (September, 1984): 432–444.

³⁵ Hartman, *The Household and Making of History*, 86.

women were more likely to have illegitimate pregnancies and there was greater likelihood of sexual assault, particularly under the common circumstance that young people would go into service in households of non-relatives. Late marriage also means lowered fertility and hence greater likelihood that children will die prior to adulthood, as well as less reliable production of heirs.³⁶

Moreover, the individualist marriage pattern is also not ideal for supporting people in old age, since older people were expected to make their own arrangements for retirement (contracts stipulating separate living quarters for parents or at least a separate room with a private entrance were common³⁷), whereas in collectivist cultures parents continued to live on the family property. If the older generation had used their power as they certainly did in collectivist cultures, they would have likely developed a better system to ensure their interests in old age.

Moreover, Smith claims that the very different patterns seen in the north and south of Europe "remained geographically differentiated over millennia."³⁸ If we assume that the northwest European pattern has a number of critical disadvantages for those practicing it compared to the collectivist model, and if the moderately collectivist pattern persisted in much of Western Christendom in the south and east of Europe, and if the northwest European individualist pattern can be found at the very origins of record keeping, then the possibility that the northwest European pattern has its roots in prehistory must be considered as a strong possibility.

I conclude that the individualist family pattern is unlikely to be freely chosen because of incentives provided by lords. This is compatible with a theory that European individualism results from genetically based tendencies resulting in a misfit with medieval environments compared to collectivist family structure.

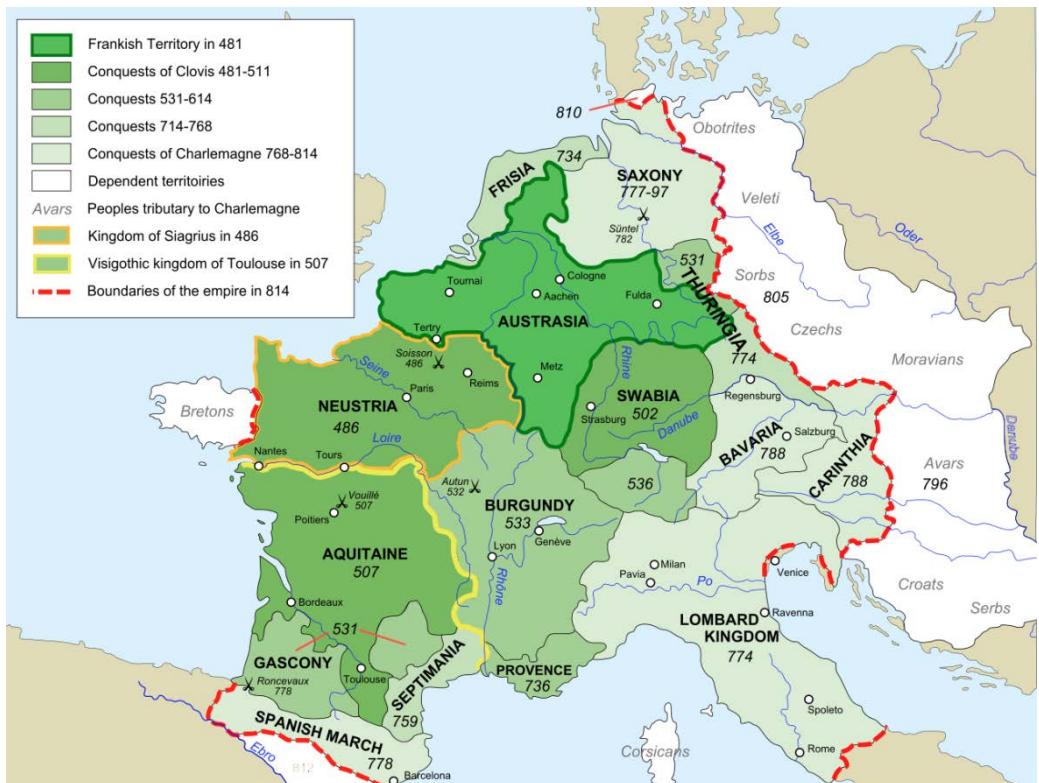
Contextual influences proposed as causing moderate individualism. Mary Hartman follows Michael Mitterauer in proposing to account for the unique pattern in northwest Europe as due to the manorial system which developed after the fall of the Roman Empire. The classic manorial system appeared during the Carolingian period "in the heartland of the Frankish

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁷ Wally Seccombe, *A Millennium of Family Change: Feudalism to Capitalism in Northwestern Europe* (London: Verso, 1992), 43.

³⁸ Richard M. Smith, "Geographical Diversity in the Resort to Marriage in Late Medieval Europe: Work, Reputation, and Unmarried Females in the Household Formation Systems of Northern and Southern Europe," in P.J.P. Goldberg (ed.), *Women in Medieval English Society* (Phoenix Mill, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Pub 1997): 16–59, 17.

Empire.”³⁹ The key word here is “heartland” of the empire, centered in Austrasia in what is now northern France and Germany, established by 481; most of modern-day France was added by the conquests of Clovis in the early sixth century, and the remainder by 536. Charlemagne’s conquests in the late ninth century included Saxony and Bavaria, both part of the northwest European family pattern. Thus, despite being part of the Frankish Empire for longer than Saxony and Bavaria, southern European family structure and land-ownership, including France southwest of a geographical line stretching from Saint Malo to Geneva, continued to strongly diverge from northwestern Europe despite being part of the Frankish Empire relatively early, by 536 (see map below).



Mitterauer notes that the manorial system was “fundamentally novel.”⁴⁰ Whereas in much of southern Europe land ownership remained centered on kinship groups, the classic manorial system was bipartite: the lord’s manor and peasant plots. Peasants owned or leased their plots but had service and corvée obligations. It was a quasi-family arrangement, implying “various social rights

³⁹ Mitterauer, *Why Europe?*, 28

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

and duties extending far beyond economic cooperation.⁴¹ Indeed, the term *familia* was used to refer to the system as a whole, indicating “the high priority given to social relationships within the manorial system.”

A key difference from Roman times is the relative lack of slaves: There were “traces” of the old Roman *villa rustica* system,⁴² but this system was far more dependent on slaves (*servi casati*), although there were also *coloni* who were free but tied to the land and obligated to provide services. The move away from slaves to having peasants own or lease the land benefited owners because they had fewer obligations than toward slaves; peasants gained because they farmed their own land, and were therefore incentivized, but of course, they had obligations to the lord. Gradually, services were replaced by rents and in-kind rents were transformed into payments of money.⁴³

Homans provides detail of the manorial system as it appeared in medieval England. Manorialization, typical of central England, occurred in open-field areas interspersed with “large, compact villages.”⁴⁴ An individual’s holdings were in scattered strips with nearly equal acreage “class by class.” Individuals in the villeinage or socage classes had heavy labor obligations; they normally bequeathed their holdings to a son.

A sociologist ... sees a *slowly* growing population, a weak commercial market in land, and a strong manorial organization with heavy labor services as more compatible with imitable inheritance, an open-field village community, and an original village chieftainship than with partible inheritance, joint families settled in scattered hamlets, and a more remote, territorial chieftainship, indeed any chieftainship at all.⁴⁵

The manorial system featuring single-family inheritance of land is at odds with tribal ownership of land based on clan and kinship. The point of the family was to carry out the tasks that needed performing rather than to serve as “the coresidency of a descent community based on everyone’s being related.”⁴⁶ The basic unit was the conjugal family consisting of wife, husband and children and, as is typical of such families, kinship was traced in both the maternal and

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 30

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁴ George Caspar Homans, “The Rural Sociology of Medieval England,” *Past and Present* 4 (1953): 32–43; reprinted in George Caspar Homans, *Sentiments and Activities* (London: Forgotten Books, 2016): 145–157, 147.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁶ Mitterauer, *Why Europe?*, 59.

paternal line (bilateral kinship) whereas in collectivist cultures, patrilineal kinship (kinship reckoned mainly through the father) predominates.

The critical proposal of this causal model is that with the decline of the Empire and consequent depopulation and lack of slaves, landowners competed to find people willing to work the land and in return granted them considerable autonomy, including the ability to pass land to heirs. As David Herlihy noted, “the slave economy of antiquity was giving away to an agriculture based, at least in part, on incentives.”⁴⁷ Records indicate that this shift coincided with the shift to a later age of marriage which Herlihy proposes is adaptive because it lengthened generation time and thus made it less likely to have three- or four-generation households. However, given the disadvantages of late marriage noted adaptive, it is difficult to see why lengthening the generation time would be adaptive in Northwest Europe but not the south and east of Europe, much less in other areas dominated by the collectivist pattern.

In order to be an adequate explanation of European uniqueness, such conditions as depopulation must have been unique to Europe. Hartman proposes that northwest Europe was the only area on the entire Eurasian continent with unpopulated, underdeveloped land, therefore providing the context in which lords provided incentives such as individual inheritance of land.⁴⁸ And under these circumstances, individuals may have wanted to postpone daughters’ marriages in order to have them work longer on the family land.

However, in response, it seems unlikely that no other area in Eurasia over a 2000-year span had become depopulated due to factors such as war, pestilence, or famine. For example, famines accompanied by depopulation and unused arable land and scarcity of labor occurred in the pre-colonial and early colonial eras in India.⁴⁹ Thus the famine of 1768–1770 resulted in loss of one third of the population of Bengal but this did not result in the development of individualist family structures despite landowners offering incentives, such as reduced rent: “The scarcity of tenants completely transposed the relationship of landlord and tenant in Bengal.” Kenneth Pomeranz notes that “warfare, plague, depression and depopulation” in seventeenth-century China did not alter the fundamentally clan-based social structure.⁵⁰

Moreover, land was inherited in the collectivist cultures of southern and eastern Europe as well, the only difference being that in these areas it remained

⁴⁷ Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 157.

⁴⁸ Hartman, *The Household and Making of History*, 89.

⁴⁹ Binay Bhushan Chaudhury, “Major influences on agriculture, ecology, politics, and economics,” in Binay Bhushan Chaudhury (ed.), *History of Science, Philosophy, and Culture in Indian Civilization*, Vol. III, Part 2, 169–402.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

within the extended patriline rather than ceded to individual heirs. One must explain why laborers would be attracted to individualist inheritance practices rather than be attracted to inheritance by a kinship group—i.e., the phenomenon presupposes the individualist tendencies that need explaining.

Further, contrary to Hartman's contention, the moderately collectivist cultures of southern Europe utilized women's labor as well, so it is difficult to see how families in northwest Europe benefited from having daughters marrying late. After all, although it is true that a daughter's work would be lost to her family if she married at a young age, her natal family would also receive daughters-in-law who then begin working for their new families. And marrying off daughters early avoids all the risk factors associated with late marriage noted above. I conclude that these cannot be the deciding features.

Hartman claims that these risk factors would have been mitigated by “a new capacity for sustained productivity [that] would have reduced pressures for women's early marriage as a means to ensure heirs and workers.”⁵¹ But sustained productivity was also achieved in early marriage cultures under circumstances that better ensured heirs and workers.

Hartman also notes that “exposure of their daughters to sexual assaults would not, initially anyway, have been the problem it would become with the emergence of life-cycle service.”⁵² But then, one wonders why normative life-cycle service in the homes of non-relatives ever developed. Rather than rely on extended kin, families in northwest Europe employed non-relatives, a practice that, according to Hartman “slowly developed into life-cycle service.”⁵³ This means that even prior to when life-cycle service became a norm, families were not organized around extended kinship groups despite the fact that collectivist systems are quite capable of supplying labor needs as seen by their prevalence throughout the rest of the world. Thus one must explain why employing non-relatives and life-cycle service in the households of non-relatives developed at all in northwest Europe given the fact that, from an evolutionary point of view, non-relatives have less confluence of interest with their employer than relatives, not to mention the greater vulnerability of females to unwanted pregnancies and sexual assault in families employing non-relatives.

The idea that simply providing incentives for people working the land would give rise to individualism also runs up against data showing that cultures, particularly Middle Eastern collectivist cultures, are highly resistant to assimilation of Western individualist norms.⁵⁴ Middle Eastern cultures were

⁵¹ Hartman, *The Household and Making of History*, 90.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Hartman, 91.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁵⁴ Muslim attitudes on religion and sexuality are resistant to change after migrating to Western countries.

dominated for centuries by Greek and Roman conquerors but this had no influence on the collectivist, extended kinship social organization that remains typical of the area today. Cousin marriage, an excellent marker of these tendencies because it shows a preference for endogamy within a male kinship lineage (patrilineage), originated in Middle Eastern prehistory and continues into the present era despite centuries of domination by Western powers.⁵⁵ Further, research on attitudes of Muslim immigrants from highly collectivist Middle Eastern cultures shows strong resistance to assimilation to Western individualist norms. This is likely to be a long term problem for Muslim assimilation to Western individualist norms given the recent surge of Muslim immigration to Europe.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERATE COLLECTIVISM IN SOUTHERN EUROPE VERSUS MODERATE INDIVIDUALISM IN NORTHWEST EUROPE.

Southern European families were different from the more extreme collectivist pattern seen elsewhere (e.g., the Middle East or Eastern Europe) in that the basic unit was a nuclear family rather than, e.g., a joint family with brothers and their spouses and children living in the same household. However, in all the other family features, this “mixed family” arrangement was similar to other collectivist cultures. Life-cycle service in the households of non-relatives was not characteristic of medieval Montaillou in southern France, as described in

Although Western Muslims are consistently located between Islamic and Western societies, there is no evidence that generational change, by itself, will transform the situation so that the cultural differences between Muslim migrants and Western publics will disappear: younger Westerners are adopting modern values even more swiftly than their Muslim peers.

Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, “Muslim Integration into Western Cultures: Between Origins and Destinations,” HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP09-007, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2009.

https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/4481625/norris_muslimintegration.pdf?sequence=1

⁵⁵ Ladislav Holy, *Kinship, Honour, and Solidarity: Cousin Marriage in the Middle East* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1989), 12, 13.+

https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=99vBAAAAI-AAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=ancient+middle+east+marriage&ots=ItyHmHm16_&sig=paqmYVvFGZKzsy80Q_PylcEX-qVE#v=onepage&q=ancient&f=false

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's classic study.⁵⁶ If a daughter left in marriage, she would be replaced by an in-marrying daughter-in-law.⁵⁷ Marriage was endogamous within the village, which, in conjunction with arranged marriages, ensured that property remained in the patriline. Age at marriage was early, at puberty, with substantially older men in their mid- to late twenties. This contrasts with the late marriage pattern where it was difficult to keep property in the male line because generations were more separated in age, "automatically" limiting the number of potential male heirs and increasing the likelihood that a widow would inherit the property.

Placing the southern French town of Montaillou in context, it has long been known that there are major differences within France corresponding to the division between the Germanic peoples who predominated northeast of "the eternal line" which connects Saint Malo and Geneva and the rest of France.⁵⁸ The northeast developed large-scale agriculture capable of feeding the growing towns and cities, and did so prior to the agricultural revolution of the eighteenth century. It was supported by a large array of skilled craftsmen in the towns, and a large class of medium-sized ploughmen who "owned horses, copper bowls, glass goblets and often shoes; their children had fat cheeks and broad shoulders, and their babies wore tiny shoes. None of these children had the swollen bellies of the rachitics of the Third World."⁵⁹ The north-east thus became the center of French industrialization and world trade.

Southwest of the St. Malo-Geneva line, however, "rural life became completely de-urbanized. Western and southwestern France became 'wild' with dispersed habitation, by virtue of an antithesis that had long been familiar: poor peasants scattered throughout the countryside, rustic and uncivilized to a degree, living...among their fields and meadows in isolation, outside the community of others."⁶⁰ This area was never fully manorialized despite being under Frankish control since early in the sixth century. "Vassalage and the *seigneurie* appear fully developed only in the big-village, open-field country between the

⁵⁶ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294–1324*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Penguin Books, 1980); orig. publ.: Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1978).

⁵⁷ As noted above, a flaw in Hartman's argument on why the northwest European pattern made sense was that daughters' labor could be exploited. Here we see that daughters-in-law could easily replace daughters, and hiring non-relatives did occur.

⁵⁸ Emanuel LeRoy Ladurie, *The French Peasantry 1450–1660*, trans. A. Sheridan. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. (Originally published in 1977.)

⁵⁹ Ladurie *The French Peasantry 1450–1660*, 340.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 341.

Loire and the borders of Flanders.”⁶¹ This fits with the proposal that the Germanic peoples of the north created a manorial culture long predating the medieval period—a culture that was not exportable to non-Germanic areas despite militarily dominating these areas.

The northeast also differed from the south-west in literacy rates: in the early nineteenth century while literacy rates for France as a whole were approximately 50%, the rate in the northeast was close to 100%, and differences occurred at least from the seventeenth century. Moreover, there was a pronounced difference in stature, with the northerners being taller by almost two centimeters in an eighteenth-century sample of military recruits. Ladurie notes that the difference in the entire population was probably larger because the army would not accept many of the shorter men from the southwest. Finally, in addition to these differences mentioned by Ladurie, Peter Laslett and other family historians have noted that the trend toward the economically independent nuclear family was more prominent in the north, while there was a tendency toward joint families as one moves to the south.⁶²

In colonial Salem, Massachusetts the moderate individualist pattern typical of the areas northeast of the St. Malo-Geneva line prevailed. Whereas in southern France and much of southern Europe all women married, in Salem after the original sex bias in favor of males dissipated, unmarried women became common. Women were under less supervision and more vulnerable to rape in Salem—another drawback of the individualist pattern. We have seen that in Salem, men’s and women’s lives increasingly converged and women had higher status. However, in Montaillou in southern France, people lived in completely different “sexual universes.” In Salem there was “an intense focus on planning for the future,” and inheriting land became less and less important as the capitalist economy took off and men pursued identities in the professions and in business within a contractual social order.⁶³ Whereas in Montaillou, men’s lives were determined by decisions made within the clan involving the only two possible vocations (shepherding or farming), in Salem men entered into the economy by interacting with non-relatives, with over 50 possible

⁶¹ George Caspar Homans, “The Frisians in East Anglia,” *Economic History Review* Second Series 10 (1957), 189–206; reprinted in George Caspar Homans, *Sentiments and Activities* (London: Forgotten Books, 2016): 158–181, 180.

⁶² Peter Laslett, “Family and household as work group and kin group: areas of traditional Europe compared,” in *Family Forms in Historic Europe*, R. Wall, J. Robin, and P. Laslett (eds.). (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁶³ Hartman, *The Household and Making of History*, 127.

occupations.⁶⁴ Women in Salem also had work opportunities outside the home (midwife, school teacher, etc.), but this was not the case in Montaillou.

In Salem, women became “deputy husbands,” often doing “men’s work” and taking a partnership role in family decisions and economic undertakings (e.g., managing family businesses). Men relied more on their wives than on their male kin, and in general sex differences were relatively blurred compared to Montaillou. Marriage was more egalitarian in Salem, with more of a “shared division of power between husbands and wives.”⁶⁵ And corresponding to greater egalitarianism between the sexes, there was less blatant misogyny in Salem, whereas in Montaillou open misogyny and wife beating were common. Whereas in Montaillou the only women who were preyed on did not have a clan to protect them, in Salem women had some legal protection even from husbands, and they could run away and seek a divorce. Women assumed substantial responsibility for their own chastity—necessary because women interacted with more non-relatives than in Montaillou.⁶⁶

In Montaillou the Church often opposed the interests of the clan but never really changed the system, apart from enforcing the ban on marrying first cousins, but ignoring the prohibition on marrying second cousins⁶⁷—indicating the Church cannot be considered the principal cause of family patterns in Europe.

Because of the contemporary importance of an ideology of egalitarianism throughout the West, it is important to trace its origins. “The story here that has only begun to be told is nonetheless one of the emergence of a popular egalitarian movement that was uniquely northwestern European in its origins.”⁶⁸ This is usually explained by elite diffusion, but Hartman argues that “more important for the appearance of equality as a popular political ideal was the shared domestic governance most people had experienced from the Middle Ages.”⁶⁹ Hartman emphasizes that, despite ups and downs in particular historic eras, there was a general trend in northwest Europe for men’s and women’s lives to become more similar—a trend that continues into the present.⁷⁰ Paternal authority, never as strong as in southern Europe, became weaker.

By the end of the seventeenth century, almost half the workers were wage earners in independent nuclear families without extensive kinship ties and were therefore having to rely on themselves rather than kin. This led to increasing

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

influence for women within the family and to ideologies of egalitarianism and individual rights.⁷¹

This freedom from extended kinship ties also unleashed the acquisitive drives of individuals, leading to large individual differences in success in acquiring land and other forms of wealth.⁷² As argued by Gregory Clark in his *Farewell to Alms*, this in turn led to natural selection for industriousness and intelligence in the pre-nineteenth century context where wealth was positively correlated with numbers of children.^{73, 74}

The differences between northwest and southern Europe have been persistent in the contemporary era, although there has been some change in southern Europe. In the south, leaving home typically coincides closely with marriage and finding a job.⁷⁵ Economic distress tends to be shared by the entire family in the south, but only the affected individuals in the north. Older people prefer to live with their family in the south (75%), not the north (25%), and in the US, elderly people who live with children tend to come from southern European family backgrounds. They tend to be more socially conservative than people with northern European backgrounds.

Because of weaker family ties, there are higher levels of homelessness in northern Europe (because people tend to be left to fend for themselves), as well as higher levels of loneliness and suicide. On the other hand, individual initiative and dynamism are much more characteristic of northwestern European societies, traits that are “so important for democracy and civil society in the West.”⁷⁶

As noted, the moderate individualist societies of northwest Europe were conducive to women acting independently and having a more equal

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 239.

⁷³ Gregory Clark, *A Farewell to Alms* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁷⁴ Hartman accepts the idea that the rise of the nation state was not the result of attempts to create lasting institutions (state building) but of elite family strategies. The eldest son inherited the estate, but younger sons could inherit any additions to the estate, “an adaptation to a changing environment of land shortage, population rise, and nuclear residential arrangements. … The motor of conduct remained household interest” at all levels of society. Protestantism was imposed by elites, not the result of popular clamor; Hartman, *The Household and Making of History*, 211.

⁷⁵ David Sven Reher, “Family ties in Western Europe: Persistent Contrasts,” *Population and Development Review* 24, no. 2 (June, 1998), 215.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 217.

relationship with their husbands. Even in the nineteenth century, a time when many historians have said women had lower status and withdrew from work, women were partners and “were required to keep households afloat”⁷⁷ “One irony is that long-range planning, risk-taking, personal responsibility, and independence have yet to be recognized as mass behaviors generated by the demands of life in distinctive sorts of households—in other words, as normative conduct required of everyone in late-marriage, weak-family settings.”⁷⁸

NORTHERN EUROPEAN NON-MANORIALIZED AREAS

Several areas of northwest Europe did not develop the manorial system, and it is a difficult but critical question as to why this happened given that the manorial system has been proposed as the most important causal factor in the development of European individualism. In areas near the North Sea (Friesland), the manorial system did not develop but instead there was a grazing economy, strong associations of peasants, and lords did not have as much power—proposed within the contextualist perspective as due to a marshy topography where open-field agriculture was not possible.⁷⁹ The Irish also did not develop a manorial system despite a varied topography; although there were certainly some similarities, it “did not generate a *familia*.⁸⁰ But in central England dominated by the Germanic Saxons (i.e., but not East Anglia and Kent whose inhabitants had emigrated from Friesland), the manorial system of open-field agriculture developed early. On the other hand, manorialism never developed in Byzantine areas of (southern) Italy or in southern France, but did in Langobardia (settled by the Germanic Lombards).

These points are consistent with an ethnic perspective on family structure of the Germanic and closely related Scandinavian peoples in which the manorial system is an ethnic creation of the northern European peoples, as opposed to a blank slate perspective in which the manorial system—conceptualized as an accident of history—created a context in which individualism flourished.

To elaborate: the implicit theory in the background of the contextualist perspective is a universalist model in which all humans have the same tendencies to embrace individualism if given the opportunity provided uniquely by the manorial system which came into being as a historical accident because of the unique conditions after the decline of the Roman Empire. However, as noted above, there were strong tendencies toward individualism in Europe among prototypical Indo-European groups, certainly including the Germanic groups, that gave rise to the manorial system in the first place.

⁷⁷ Hartman, *The Household and Making of History*, 260.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁷⁹ Mitterauer, *Why Europe?*, 42.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

It is noteworthy that in *Germania* Tacitus describes relationships between masters and slaves in a manner quite consistent with the manorial system of the early Middle Ages:

The other slaves [i.e., those who did not voluntarily become slaves as a result of losing a dangerous game of skill] are not employed after our [i.e., Roman] manner with distinct domestic duties assigned to them, but each one has the management of a house and home of his own. The master requires from the slave a certain quantity of grain, of cattle, and of clothing, as he would from a tenant, and this is the limit of subjection.⁸¹

This embodies the essence of the manorial system, with slaves having substantial autonomy while nevertheless having obligations to the lord; if Tacitus is correct, this system long preceded incorporation of the Germanic tribes into the Empire. This accords with the views of British intellectual historian Sir Larry Siedentrop and nineteenth-century French historian François Guizot.⁸²

As noted above, Tacitus, writing in the first century AD, also notes that the late-marriage pattern was apparent among the German tribes—long before the development of the manorial system of the early Middle Ages. This was quite unlike the practice in the Roman Empire where girls were typically married shortly after menarche.⁸³

The ethnic perspective is also consistent with the fact that in southern Europe, family structure was more based on traditional kinship relations despite being part of the Frankish empire and having a system where lords were due rents and other obligations. In other words, if the essence of the manorialism is a system of rents and obligations to a lord, this system did not vitiate the importance of kinship relations in southern Europe. As Hartman notes, “despite the influence of Church, lord, and monarch, the village leadership on a day-to-day-basis came from the heads of the forty or so ostals” (i.e., land parcels dominated by particular kinship groups)⁸⁴ In Montaillou the lord did impose a variety of taxes and rents on the ostals,⁸⁵ as in the manorial system, but

⁸¹ Tacitus, *Germania*, 25.

⁸² Larry Siedentop, *Inventing Individualism: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015; first published: London: Allen & Lane, 2014).

⁸³ Seccombe, *A Millennium of Family Change: Feudalism to Capitalism in Northwestern Europe*, 47.

⁸⁴ Hartman, *The Household and Making of History*, 117.

⁸⁵ Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294–1324*, 19.

the land remained in the control of the kinship group, whereas in the Frankish heartland, it was owned by individual nuclear families.

Also of interest, given that the manorial system did not appear among the Irish, is David Herlihy's contrast between the Irish and the Germanic areas of Europe. The Irish had what would appear to be a system intermediate between the moderate collectivism of southern Europe and the moderate individualism of the Germanic areas. The Irish were divided into tribes and septs (similar to the Germanic Sippe). Lineage was important: there was strong memory for lineages, typically including the founder within living memory, suggesting instability and continual splitting and reforming.⁸⁶ Septs had recognized boundaries that were defended against outsiders—a marker of collectivism. Nevertheless, within the sept, ownership of land was individual, not communal, so there were differences in wealth. Septs likely consisted of between 120 and 256 households. Marriage was monogamous, and there was considerable emphasis on the avunculate (i.e., the relationship between a brother and his sister's son). Evolutionary anthropologists have explained the avunculate as a means of dealing with paternity certainty in societies where males cannot be certain they are in fact the father, whereas a woman is virtually certain that a child is hers, with the result that kinship traced through the mother is more certain. Congruent with this, Herlihy notes that sexual relationships outside marriage were accepted.⁸⁷

It is particularly interesting that in Germanic areas, the Sippe is “rarely encountered in the early sources,”⁸⁸ indicating a lessened emphasis on extended kinship dating from the earliest periods. The most explicit early references occur in laws and charters of Lombards, Bavarians, and Alamanni but these are in the Christian era. Sippe adjudicated disputes and may have had some “residual rights” to the property of its members.⁸⁹ Herlihy suggests a Sippe included around 50 families and that they were constantly reforming and splitting. Like the Irish sept, the Sippe had a territory but within the territory there was individual ownership.⁹⁰

This last point undercuts the argument that the manorial system gave rise to individual property ownership as a result of incentives provided by lords under conditions of depopulation. Among both the Irish and the Germans, individual

⁸⁶ Herlihy, *Medieval Households*, 33

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 36;

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 44; see also Seccombe, *A Millennium of Family Change: Feudalism to Capitalism in Northwestern Europe*, 51: “by the time Sippe (the Germanic kindred network) appears in historical texts, it is already a structure in decline.”

⁸⁹ Herlihy, *Medieval Households*, 47.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

ownership of land co-existed within the septs and Sippe respectively, indicating that this critical aspect of individualism predated the manorial system.

Indeed, Herlihy claims that Sippe was never of prime importance:

In fact, the larger kin group and households of some type had existed side by side since time immemorial. Moreover, the *Sippe* always played a secondary role in production and reproduction, the two functions which household have classically assumed. And these basic functions, often mentioned in the documentation, lend to households a special visibility. It was not the small household that replaced the Sippe; rather, larger social groupings, based on territory, edged it into the shadows. And the households continued to be centers of production and reproduction, even as the larger society was changing.⁹¹

The Germanic *Sippe* ... was weakening and losing functions and visibility on the Continent very early in the Middle Ages [while Ireland] long clung to its archaic institutions.⁹²

This fits with the general point that Indo-European cultures had institutions above family-based structures, in particular, the *mannerbunde*.⁹³

I conclude that, consistent with Tacitus's remarks, the Germanic peoples had a greater tendency toward individualism than the Irish long before the manorial system, although it may well be the case that the establishment of the manorial system ended whatever vestiges of power the Sippe retained. Nevertheless, the manorial system is an inadequate explanation of Western individualism in general.

Nevertheless, in agreement with Herlihy, Hartman, and Mitterauer, the decline of available slaves and a need for labor may have pushed landowners to grant families more individual autonomy. Under these conditions the natural tendencies of northwest Europeans came to the fore and the power of the wider kinship group declined further. That is, they had already established patterns of individual inheritance that generated differences in family wealth, and they eschewed whatever remained of the ties of the wider kinship group with relative ease. They naturally adopted personal responsibility rather than collectivist familism because it was already ingrained in their culture; the Sippe faded into historical memory.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹³ Kevin MacDonald, "The Indo-European Genetic and Cultural Legacy in Europe."

The importance of incentives provided to laborers in facilitating individualism (but not causing it) can be seen in Holland where lords offered attractive terms to settlers willing to farm newly cultivatable land.

The consequences of this process were significant for large parts of Holland from the tenth century onwards. Both the Bishop of Utrecht and the Count of Holland (but sometimes also local lords) lured colonists to the scarcely inhabited marshes by offering personal freedoms from serfdom and full peasant property rights to the land. The rural people who reclaimed the Holland peat lands between the tenth and fifteenth centuries barely knew of the manor or signorial dues, although admittedly recent archaeological evidence has pointed to the existence of some limited manorial hoven from as early as the ninth century. In fact, many of the colonists in the Holland peat-lands originated from heavily manorialised societies and looked to escape the constrictions of serfdom further inland. Each colonist received a standardised strip of land of their own but also enjoyed favourable jurisdictions over the waste (*recht van opstrek*) which allowed all colonists to reclaim as much of the marshes as they wanted by extending their linear plots until they met up with a natural boundary or were stopped by another property The same process can be traced for the Frisian and German coastal marshes too. Through this reclamation context, there also developed a peasant society characterised by highly egalitarian distribution of property. Landownership was small-scale and in the hands of peasant farmers themselves, with agriculture in the initial phases highly unspecialised. Aristocratic landownership was minimal; only 5–10% of the total area in the late Middle Ages. This free peasant property structure remained in place from the moment that reclamation took off up to the 1500s.⁹⁴

The reclamation of the marshes of medieval Holland created legally free and relatively egalitarian societies, which in turn impacted on the modes of exploitation undertaken there. Land was worked by the people that colonised it and owned it almost outright—the peasants. What emerged from the earliest moments of colonisation all the way through to the 1500s was a proliferation of small to medium-sized farms, which were exploited by the peasant household directly. Even at the end of the sixteenth century, 80% of the land belonging to the remaining peasants was used themselves.

⁹⁴ Daniel R. Curtis and Michelle Compianano, "Medieval Land Reclamation and the Creation of New Societies: Comparing Holland the Po Valley, c.800–c.1500," *Journal of Historical Geography* 44 (2014), 93–108, 98–99.

Medieval Holland was characterised by egalitarian distribution of property, high levels of freedom and autonomy for its inhabitants, secure rights to property and a modern system of property transfer, a wide range of specialised and commercialised (non-agricultural) economic activities, and a flexible and unrestricted market for commodities and capital.⁹⁵

It is noteworthy that Friesland is included in this summary. This is of interest because Frisians emigrated to East Anglia in the fifth century—500 years before the Dutch land reclamation project. However, in East Anglia, they also resisted manorialism. In support of this fifth-century emigration scenario, Homans notes linguistic evidence as well as contemporary written sources (e.g., Bede), and archeology.⁹⁶ In these areas, unlike manorialized areas, there were independent holdings (i.e., without labor obligations to a lord) located near small villages (“hamlets”).⁹⁷ Over time, the holdings became unequal so that by the end of the thirteenth century “irregularity is the rule rather than the exception.”⁹⁸ Such conditions were not conducive to manorialism.

If a man of war in the Dark Ages wished to get support for himself and his followers in the form of heavy work-services on demesne land, how much more easy to exploit the big open-field village whose members were already accustomed to large-scale cooperation in communal agriculture, than the small, independent, loosely organized plowlands of East Anglia, Kent, and Friesland. Indeed we need not postulate any man of war at all. Wessex and Mercia may have known for ages, in England and in the German homeland, a rural social order that more nearly resembled what later came to be thought of as typical of a manor than did ever the society of East Anglia, Kent, and Friesland.”⁹⁹

Homans thus agrees with Tacitus: the essentials of the manorial system may well have existed centuries before the medieval period in Germanic areas.

A critical point, however, that arises from this is that despite living outside the zone of manorialization, the East Anglians, ancestors of the Puritans of Salem, became representative of the northwest European family system—indeed, Puritan Salem is seen as paradigmatic of the individualist Western family

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁹⁶ Homans, “The Frisians in East Anglia,” 159

⁹⁷ Homans, “The Rural Sociology of Medieval England,” 147.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁹⁹ Homans, “The Frisians in East Anglia,” 180.

by Hartman. This further problematizes the theory that the manorial system gave rise to the individualist family.

Nevertheless, this simply deepens the mystery of the origins of individualism because, at least by the time of the Norman Conquest and likely dating from the original fifth-century migrations,¹⁰⁰ there is evidence for a greater role of extended kinship in Kent (settled by the Jutes, a Germanic people, likely from Jutland) and East Anglia (settled by Angles from Friesland) than in the manorialized areas of central England—a pattern that resembled patterns on “the southern shore of the Channel, notably between the Old Saxon area of Germany and the Frankish-Frisian area.”¹⁰¹ Homans finds that Friesland had a joint family structure with partible inheritance, with property left undivided among the heirs (brothers) and worked jointly, or it was divided among the heirs. Land was held by a patrilineal kinship group and inheritance (termed ‘gavelkind’) was partible, divided among heirs (often brothers); if one of the brothers died without issue, then his land returned to the group. This ultimately led to holdings too small to be viable.¹⁰²

Thus, despite giving rise to the Puritans whose family system was definitely within the Western European individualist tradition, East Anglia and Friesland appear to originally have had a system that resembled the family system of southern France: “It looks as if we had to do with joint-family communities like Le Play described as still existing in the Auvergne (south of the St. Malo-Geneva line) in the nineteenth century: groups of men claiming descent from a common patrilineal ancestor, living in one house or a small group of houses and managing in common a compact body of land, under the leadership of the oldest or ablest male of each successive senior generation.”¹⁰³ Marriage was earlier than in the manorialized areas of England, and this area had a higher rate of natural increase,¹⁰⁴ putting pressure on land as plots were subdivided because of partible inheritance. In this system there were very few villeins owing labor services to a lord. Indeed, the free peasants of East Anglia (Norfolk

¹⁰⁰ Homans, “The Rural Sociology of Medieval England,” 149.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁰² Homans (*Ibid.*) suggests that the continuing division of land via partible inheritance may be factors in the Peasants’ Revolt and in the rise of the textile industry, since people unable to make do on small plots sought ways out of their predicament. Partible inheritance would also promote a market in land because people would be willing to sell when their holdings were not viable.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁰⁴ As noted above, a disadvantage of the individualist family pattern is a lower rate of natural increase.

and Suffolk counties) had approximately half the total of freemen in all of England as assessed in the Domesday Book (1086).¹⁰⁵

This suggests a developmental sequence among these groups, originating with a more collectivist family structure than found in the manorial areas, but then developing into an individualist structure, without manorialism ever being part of the picture. This in turn would imply the following:

1. Manorialism is not critical to the development of individualist families in northern Europe, given that the Frisians and their offshoots (e.g., East Anglians) eventually developed individualist families in the absence of manorialism, as well as the evidence for individualist family patterns long pre-dating early medieval manorialization among the Germanic peoples and in the Western Roman Empire.
2. However, it is likely manorialism sped up the rise of the individualist family, given that non-manorialized areas such as East Anglia, and Kent lagged behind manorialized areas in moving away from collectivism but nevertheless became exemplars of individualist families, pace Hartman's work on the New England Puritans.
3. The most likely reason for the persistent differences between northern and southern Europe, which have persisted from time immemorial to the present, is an ethnic cline, which has been documented for height.¹⁰⁶ The non-manorialized areas of southern Europe retained elements of the collectivist family pattern long after its disappearance in non-manorialized areas of northern Europe—indeed, into the contemporary era. Again, the suggestion is that northern Europeans had more of an ethnically based tendency toward individualism than the southern Europeans.

CONCLUSION

A central argument here is that the origins of the unique Northwest European family structure lie in biological influences stemming from a combination of Indo-European peoples originating on the steppes of Southeast Europe and hunter-gatherer peoples whose evolutionary past lies in Northwest Europe.

1. The widespread practice of placing servants in households of non-relatives cannot be explained in purely economic terms but is compatible with elaborate systems of non-kinship-based reciprocity that have been noted in hunter-gatherer culture living in harsh environments.

¹⁰⁵ Homans, “The Frisians in East Anglia,” 169; Homans notes that areas under Danelaw also had a relatively high percentage of freemen (170).

¹⁰⁶ See Mathieson et al., “Genome-Wide Patterns of Selection in 230 Ancient Europeans.”

2. Compatible with promordialist explanations, historians are unable to firmly date the origins of the individualist family. This, combined with Tacitus's observations regarding the differences between Germanic slavery (essentially manorialism) and Roman slavery, monogamy, late marriage and individualist inheritance patterns among Germanic peoples long preceding the early Middle Ages, suggest that this family pattern is rooted in the evolutionary history of these peoples.
3. The individualist family is a poor fit with the manor system because of its lessened ability, compared to collectivist families, for being able to protect females and ensure an adequate retirement for parents. Late marriage for females also results in lower fertility.
4. The very different family forms in northwest versus much of southern Europe persisted in near proximity despite the same religion (until the Reformation which mainly affect Northwest Europe) and despite manorialism in both areas as a result of the Frankish conquests. Similarly, the collectivism of Middle Eastern families persisted despite prolonged occupation by individualist Western cultures.
5. A contextual explanation in terms of depopulation motivating landlords to grant concessions to families fails because of similar conditions in other parts of Eurasia fail to result in individualist families.
6. The cline within Northwest Europe, described below, such that the most individualist family patterns occur in Scandinavia.

The emphasis here is the north-south difference in family patterns. This perspective makes a more fine-grained analysis than suggested by the Hajnal Line which lumps northwestern and southwestern Europe west of a line from Trieste to St. Petersburg into the same category, with the exception of Ireland, southern Iberia, and southern Italy. This division thus includes southern and northern France in the same category despite the very large differences noted here.

The deviation of Ireland from the northwest European pattern and the conformity of the German-speaking areas of early medieval northern Italy to the northwest European pattern were discussed above. This suggests that the northwest European family pattern is fundamentally an ethnic creation of German-speaking peoples and their close relatives, the Scandinavians. These peoples had less of the Middle Eastern farmer genetic ancestry which is highest in southern Europe, and more of the Indo-European and northern hunter-gatherer ancestry—both more common in the north than southern Europe.¹⁰⁷

As noted above, the Scandinavians have the most individualist family patterns in all of Europe. A paper by Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh illustrates the extreme form of individualism in Swedish society. This may seem

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

paradoxical given Sweden's socialist economic policies and powerful tendencies toward conformism. However,

what is unique about Swedish social policy is neither the extent to which the state has intervened in society nor the generous insurance schemes, but the underlying moral logic. Though the path in no way has been straight, one can discern over the course of the twentieth century an overarching ambition to liberate the individual citizen from all forms of subordination and dependency in civil society: the poor from charity, the workers from their employers, wives from their husbands, children from parents (and vice versa when the parents have become elderly).¹⁰⁸

These trends go back at least to the medieval period.

The peasant in medieval Sweden, as the historian Michael Roberts has put it, “retained his social and political freedom to greater degree, played a greater part in the politics of the country, and was altogether a more considerable person, than in any other western European country.” ... When Swedish poet and historian, Erik Gustaf Geijer, rewrote Swedish history in the early 1800’s, he instead made the Swedish peasant into the prime mover of history, a free man who fiercely protected his family and property but voluntarily would rally round the King if the nation was under attack. In poems as well as academic works he described the Swedish Viking and Yeoman as a citizen, who was characterized neither by bourgeois egoism nor by ancient republican virtue, but by a stubborn individual sovereignty. Freedom, said Geijer, meant not be subordinated to any other man, to be without master like the Vikings of old.

The paradox of Sweden, or what has seemed like a paradox to many observers, is that this radical individualism coincides with very high levels of conformity and law abidingness. However, Berggren and Trägårdh explain Swedes’ acceptance of strong state controls supporting egalitarianism as necessary to achieve individual autonomy:

From the perspective of what might be termed the Swedish ideology, active interventionism on the part of the state to promote egalitarian

¹⁰⁸ Henrik Berggren & Lars Trägårdh, “Pippi Longstocking: The Autonomous Child and the Moral Logic of the Swedish Welfare State,” in Helena Mattsson & Sven-Olov Wallenstein (eds.), *Swedish Modernism: Architecture, Consumption, and the Welfare State* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010): 11–22, 13.

conditions is not a threat to individual autonomy but rather the obverse: a necessary prerequisite to free the citizens from demeaning and humbling dependence on one another. As a culture and a political system Sweden cannot simply be described as communitarian, that is, as a society in which the citizens prize their voluntary association with one another above their empowerment as individuals. In fact, the official rhetoric about solidarity and social democracy notwithstanding, Sweden is not first and foremost a warm Gemeinschaft composed of altruists who are exceptionally caring or loving, but a rather hyper modern Gesellschaft of self-realizing individuals who believe that a strong state and stable social norms will keep their neighbor out of both their lives and their backyards.¹⁰⁹

At the level of the family, Berggren and Lars Trägårdh agree with Patrick Heady¹¹⁰ (see above) that Sweden “stands out, according to several family historians” from the Western European family system. As noted above, a key aspect of this system is that young people had to assume individual responsibility for their marriages and for getting on in the world. Berggren and Lars Trägårdh note that

Young people were controlled by internalized systems of self-control, not least the tradition of “night bundling” which, though in no way unique to Sweden, was very widespread and prominent.¹¹¹

Sweden is thus on the extreme end of individualism. “Sweden—and to a somewhat lesser extent the rest of Scandinavia—[became] the least family-oriented and most individualized societies on the face of the earth, scoring at the extreme end of emancipatory self-expression values and secular-rational values.”¹¹² The downside includes high levels of divorce, lack of filial piety, “alarming rates of stress and psychological ill-health,” and an individualist youth culture able to be exploited by commercial interests and much given to sexual promiscuity and drugs.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 14–16. One might note that Sweden’s extreme individualism is a disastrously poor match with Middle Eastern collectivism and the Muslim religion which Sweden is nevertheless energetically importing.

¹¹⁰ Heady, “A ‘Cognition and Practice’ Approach to an Aspect of European Kinship.”

¹¹¹ Berggren & Trägårdh, “Pippi Longstocking, 17.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

In conclusion, an ethnically based northwest-southeast gradient is proposed here as the main variable in explaining variation in family structure within Western Europe. Of course, viewed in broader terms—in comparison, say, to the Middle East—all of Europe, including Eastern Europe, is relatively individualistic. Moreover, this ethnic analysis does not get at another critically important variant within Western individualism: the uniqueness of Britain, its creation of the Industrial Revolution, its rise to unprecedented empire, and its vast cultural influence compared to the Scandinavian societies which, as noted here, seem to be the most prone to individualism.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Alan MacFarlane makes the case for English uniqueness as resulting in the Industrial Revolution. Alan MacFarlane, *Invention of the Modern World* (Les Brouzils, France: Odd Volumes of *The Fortnightly Review*, 2014; originally published serially in *The Fortnightly Review*, 2012).