HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

# THE FAMILY IN WORLD HISTORY

**Course Description**

This course surveys how family has changed in response to major developments in world history. The family is a major institution in virtually every society, arguably the most successful – and resilient – institution in human history. Yet by the same token it changes and varies a great deal, depending on historical period and world region – which is why the history of the family is such a revealing subject. Basic definitions must be somewhat vague, but most families involve some degree of genetic kinship; but co-residence in a household is also a common

**About the Professor**

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**Contents**

# Introduction

**Definition** The family is a major institution in virtually every society, arguably the most successful – and resilient – institution in human history. Yet by the same token it changes and varies a great deal, depending on historical period and world region – which is why the history of the family is such a revealing subject. Basic definitions must be somewhat vague, but most families involve some degree of genetic kinship; but co-residence in a household is also a common feature. However, families defined by household may include non-kin members who perform vital economic services. Kinship families may well not share a single household. Perhaps the most unifying approach sees the family in terms of an interplay between residential and kinship features.

**Family as history** Formal historical work on the family has been a central staple of the field of social history since the 1970s. Social history centered on the exploration of the lives of ordinary people in the past, and on aspects of the human experience in addition to formal political and intellectual life – and the family qualified under both these headings. Early work on the family was often strongly quantitative, centered on topics like household size and composition, but by the 1980s wider cultural topics were added in, including explorations of emotional relationships within the family. Family history has been most extensively explored in European and United States frameworks, but there is now extensive work on other regions as well. Family history has been a particularly important part of United States social history, probably reflecting the unusual instabilities of American family life and the need to develop historical underpinnings.

**Topical approaches** Family history touches base with a number of historical categories. It is particularly closely intertwined with demographic history: exploration of the reasons for changes in demographic behaviors, such as shifts in the birth rate, and of the impact of such shifts on family roles is a central focus for both fields. Cultural history also looms large, as in the results of alterations in the religious framework of a society or group. While current economic historians do not usually pay much attention to the family, the family's economic roles (and their changes over time) constitute a crucial facet of the subject, with wide social consequences. The relationship between family history and political history is arguably complex. Legal structures have both reflected and impacted family relationships since the advent of law codes; but other aspects of state functioning were fairly remote from the family experience of most people until modern times. (Even today, the ability of the state to shape family behaviors is sometimes surprisingly limited.) On the other hand, some societies – as in Confucian China – saw the family as a vital microcosm, and training ground, for larger political structures.

**Variables in family history** A number of key subtopics help organize family history, and also regional comparisons in this field. Basic structure is one, beginning with questions about the balance between nuclear and extended family forms (nuclear emphasizes relationships among parents and their children, while the extended family highlights larger ties among more generations and collateral relationships). As already suggested, differing possible balances between kinship and household provide another focus; in some contemporary societies, to take an unfamiliar but arguably important example, many pet owners explicitly define their pets as family members. Childrearing patterns and marriage patterns are vital subtopics, including in recent times the rise of gay families. Family *functions* are a crucial historical variable, particularly in terms of economic and emotional roles but also changing sexual norms. Family stability is another historical variable; obviously, it looms large in modern family history, with the rise of rates of divorce in some societies, but it factors in earlier as well – for example, in explorations of family reactions to the (not uncommon) death of a spouse.

**Social and gender structure** In any region or historical period (at least, after the decline of hunting and gathering societies), social stratification is a vital variable in family history. In most agricultural societies, family behaviors of the upper class differed substantially from those of ordinary people. In societies that permitted polygamy for example, only the upper classes really had much involvement. Birth rate behaviors have commonly varied from class to class. In many cases, urban-rural differentials form another common complexity. Family history and gender experience are closely intertwined. In patriarchal societies based on male dominance, the family roles and behaviors of women and men were often quite different – though the results sometimes complicate easy generalizations about lived inequalities.

Examination of family history in any region or period must take often massive social and gender variables into account – which inevitably complicates generalizations.

**Regions and time periods** As the following chapters will suggest, it is possible to use a fairly familiar regional roster in world history to discuss family history. Basic cultural systems in places like East Asia or the Middle East help define some distinctive regional patterns. Despite internal variation, the sub-Saharan African approach to family also permits some generalizations. At least from Christianity onward, the same holds true for the West European (and then more broadly Western) family. Chronology can be a bit trickier, if only because aspects of family life may change rather slowly. It is not clear, for example, that the "early modern period (1450-1750)" has much meaning in family history for much of Asia (though it is vitally important in the West, Latin America and parts of Africa). On the other hand, the considerable structural divide in family organization and experience among hunting and gathering, agricultural and then industrial families deserves unusual attention, compared to somewhat lesser periodizations within these three categories.

**Study questions**

1. Why is it difficult to define what the family is?
2. What are some complications in relating family and political history?
3. What are key functions of the family today? How do you think they might compare to functions of the family in the past?
4. Why do many historians believe that changes in family life are a particularly important facet of more general historical change?

**Further reading**

Mary Jo Maynes and Ann Waltner, *The Family, a world history* (Oxford, 2012)

John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: family life in Plymouth Commonwealth* (30th anniversary edition, Oxford University Press, 2000).

Jeremy Greenwood, *Evolving Households: the imprint of technology on life* (MIT Press, 2019)

Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1983)

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# SECTION I ANCIENT PERIOD

## Chapter 1: Families in Hunting and Gathering Societies

**Background** Until about 12,000 years ago, humans lived in various versions of a hunting and gathering economy, in which men specialized in periodic hunts and women were responsible for gathering seeds, nuts and berries (which often contributed over half the calories to the total diet). These societies varied greatly depending on local environmental conditions; for example, where fishing was possible it could lead to somewhat more settled communities. But hunting and gathering groups did share some broadly common features. They were fairly small, usually with about 40-80 people roughly half of whom were children. Again, with some variation they moved around with some frequency, though this might occur within a roughly common area. The long hunting and gathering period – which persisted widely until about 7,000 years ago and still exists in some isolated regions – raises obvious questions for any effort to see the family in a world history context: what precedents did these societies set for family life? How, and how much, would family life change when hunting and gathering yielded to the predominance of an agricultural economy?

**Evidence** Discussions of hunting and gathering societies are constrained by available evidence, particularly on subjects like family. We little relevant record of family conditions in the hunting and gathering groups that existed before agriculture; archeological data are helpful in many ways – for example, on average body size – but they have less bearing on family patterns. Generalizations thus rely heavily on anthropological findings from contemporary groups, whose conditions however might be somewhat different from those in the past. Further, these groups vary greatly from one region to the next, at least in some respects, limiting the credibility of generalizations. Nevertheless, some findings, while well short of a full picture of family life, are useful.

**Basic patterns** A typical hunting and gathering group consists of only a few, multigenerational families. Families are aware, however, of larger kinship ties with relatives in other groups, over a wider area. This kinship knowledge, or a sense of larger families clans, is carefully transmitted through oral stories. It is vital to help families avoid incestuous relationships, which are widely shunned. However in some cases marriage outside the larger clan is also regulated. Marriage partners are frequently selected outside the single group, with the effect not only of avoiding incest but promoting greater genetic diversity and, also, helping to keep the peace among neighboring groups.

**Sexuality** Sexual pleasure is a distinctive part of family life, broadly construed, in many hunting and gathering societies. Children are sometimes encouraged to imitate sex acts. Among some groups, as in Australia, adults actively instruct children in sexuality. Once puberty occurs, sexual experimentation is common. This was anthropologist Margaret Mead's finding in studying Samoa in the 1920s, and while this was later challenged subsequent research has confirmed the main contentions. In some other cases, adults actively initiate teenagers into sexual activity. Sexual latitude continues even after marriage. In Papua New Guinea, groups build special huts for extramarital relations. In some cases, a person is expected to apologize to his or her spouse for such activity, but it is not proscribed. Clearly, at least in many hunting and gathering societies, the family is not defined as clearly in terms of sexual exclusivity as would be the case in agricultural societies; the difference seems particularly marked for women.

**Family size** Rather unexpectedly, birth rates in hunting and gathering societies are relatively low on average. A human couple, if no limitations on procreative sex are introduced from puberty to female menopause, can produce an average of roughly 15 children. The average includes that fact that in some couples, up to 20%, one or both partners will be biologically sterile, which means that many fertile couples exceed the overall average. Hunting and gathering families, however, average about 5-6 over a couple's lifetime. This makes excellent sense in two respects: the group seeks to avoid population increase, which forces some members to leave in order to preserve economic viability or which may require that the whole group seek new territory. And frequent mobility, seeking food, would make the presence of too many young children undesirable. How the desire birth rate is achieved, however, Is not yet clear, but one method definitely involved prolonged lactation (which reduces though does not eliminate the chance of a new conceptions). Women nurse children for up to four years.

**Childrearing** Individual families take less responsibility for childrearing than does the small group as a whole. Children are also encouraged to play with each other without intrusive adult supervision, providing more abundant opportunities for spontaneous play than would exist in many later societies. In some regions, women take young children with them when foraging, though this resulted in lower productivity; in other cases, the children are left to the supervision of older women back in the encampment. It is vital to note that work on average requires relatively little time per day (two and a half hours is a common estimate), giving adults considerable opportunity to play with children or enjoy children's own activities.

**Mortality and the family** Death rates among children before age 15 are relatively high by modern standards – up to 40% in some cases, which helps explain how the average birth rate would not necessarily expand the group's size (though this was a recurrent possibility). Once adulthood was attained, life expectancy could stretch into the early 70s. Different groups have different approaches to the older adults in their midst. Some value elders for their wisdom (including kinship data) in societies dependent on oral transmission of knowledge. Grandmothers, particularly, often play a crucial role in child care, particularly when mothers themselves are dealing with more than one young child. In other cases however the elderly are seen as a dangerous burden to resources and are sometimes abandoned.

**Economic life** A hunting and gathering groups depends much more on overall coordination for successful economic activities, than on specific family operations. This is particularly true in hunting large game, where team work is required. Women's foraging activities also usually involve group efforts, though here division of results by family might be more feasible. Overall, however, the family is less clearly a production unit than would be true in many agricultural societies.

**Gender and stratification** Hunting and gathering societies exhibit little or no social stratification, which as result is not a factor in family life. Gender roles however are clearly differentiated, leading to distinctive training of young adolescents and, sometimes, some gender specific play activities by youngsters. However, the status of women is high, based on their major economic contributions to the viability of the group, and presumably this applies to family life as well as group power structure.

**Evaluation** A fascinating literature has emerged among anthropologists and others, praising the high quality of life in hunting and gathering societies: relatively good diets, lack of much contagious disease or group warfare, social equality, absence of many unfulfilled wants or ambitious. This is worth serious consideration in world history, as against any notion of steady human progress, but interestingly it does not single out the quality of family life (except for the important point about relative gender equality). Family identity was clearly important at the kinship level, but the family had fewer functions overall – as opposed to the wider group – than would be the case with agriculture.

**Study questions**

1. What were the main purposes of the hunting and gathering family?
2. What was distinctive about the demographic patterns of these societies?
3. Why and how did gender roles not lead to major power distinctions in hunting and gathering groups?

**Further reading**

Vicki Cummings, Peter Jordan, and Marek Zvelebil, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Archeology and Anthropology of Hunter-Gatherers* (Oxford University Press, 2014)

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S.B. Hrdy, *Mother Nature: a history of mothers, infants and natural selection* (Pantheon, 1999)

M.E. Lamb, ed., *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (Wiley, 1976)

Christopher Ryan and Cacilda Jathe, *Sex at Dawn: prehistoric origins of modern sexuality* (Harper 2010)

# Chapter 2: The Impact of the Agricultural Revolution on the Family

**Background** Agriculture first developed on the shores of the Black Sea around 9000 BCE, from which it would gradually spread to surrounding areas –ultimately reaching South Asia, Europe, and Africa. Separate centers of agriculture later emerged in southern China (around 7000 BCE) and central America (5000 BCE), based on different staple crops. The spur to the invention of agriculture was some combination of a shift in resources that reduced game supply (over-hunting or climate change) plus overpopulation of some hunter-gatherer groups that forced a turn to a different economic base that could generate a greater food supply. This occurred despite the fact that agriculture also brought a number of disadvantages, including higher disease rates and more demanding work. Agricultural societies varied greatly – as we will see in discussing specific family systems. But they also generated some common patterns, very different from those in hunting and gathering groups – and here too, family loomed large. We lack any direct record of the transition, or the tensions it must have generated. But several broad outcomes would deeply affect family history for many centuries, wherever agriculture spread.

**The family economy** The labor needs of agricultural economies, combined with the capacity for greater food output, converted many agricultural families to basic production units. Family members, sometimes joined by outsiders regarded as part of the household, generated most of the output of peasant agriculture, and also that of most urban artisans in agricultural cities. Wider collaborations contributed as well, as in larger village groups that cooperated at harvest time, but the family unit was essential. Much of the basic history of the agricultural family flowed from the need to organize a satisfactory basis for economic production.

**Demography** This shift from the looser economic arrangement of hunter-gatherers was closely related to a measurably different demographic pattern: agricultural families had, and sought, higher birth rates on average. Family size moved up to a standard of 8-9 children (again, with great variation in individual cases) – still well under the biological maximum but capable of supplying much of the labor, and the legacy, that agricultural families required. (Correspondingly, lactation tended to drop to 12-18 months, meaning that child births were spaced closer together on average than had been the case before.) Between 30-50% of the children born died young, though it was still possible for a family to find itself burdened with more offspring than it could accommodate. Upper class families, wealthier and capable of placing children in various positions of power (or marrying off daughters to promote family alliances) had more children than did ordinary people. The culture of agriculture societies emphasized the importance of abundant children for happiness and as a sign of family (and masculine) success. At the same time many agricultural families faced a challenge in trying to prevent unwanted numbers, sometimes easing off on sexual activity after the initial decade or so of marriage (while often hoping for a final child shortly before menopause, who could help care for a couple in later age).

**Property** Agriculture quickly generated an emphasis on property, particularly of course in land. People wanted to protect the results of their labor in clearing land and digging wells, and also sought ways to transfer resources to later generations: and these criteria created the new desire to define property and to associate it with the family. (Obviously, social class differences affected this feature as well, with the upper classes based on a capacity to seize and maintain unusual amounts of property.) Property in turn would prove to be an important factor in marriage arrangements, which usually involved negotiations (mainly by parents) to make sure that a new couple had adequate property, often through a son's probable inheritance combined with an economic dowry provided by the bride's family. (Specifics here varied with the region.) Inheritance loomed large in agricultural families, and gave parents a clear basis for encouraging obedience, and faithful labor, from their growing children.

**Gender: the patriarchal family** All agricultural societies emphasized huge distinctions in the power and roles attributed to men and women, with men now gaining clear superiority, regarded unquestionably as heads of household. Demography played a role here: women were spending more time in pregnancy and caring for young children; this did not end their economic contributions to the family economy but it tended to make them subsidiary. Women tended household gardens, sometimes cared for livestock, but in most agricultural societies the care for staple high-calorie crops was primarily a male responsibility. Simply stating the primacy of male power conceals a host of specific arrangements in actual family life, as later chapters will suggest, but its presence was inescapable. Gender role division was particularly

marked in upper class families, where women's physical labor was not required so directly; it was somewhat more muted particularly for the peasantry, where shared work continued to be required particularly at peak times in the agricultural cycle.

**Sexuality** Not surprisingly agricultural societies placed a heavy emphasis on procreative sexuality, sometimes looking askance at other purposes in sexuality including mutual pleasure. Equally important was a concerted effort to confine sexual activity, particularly by women, to the family, with disapproval of sex before or outside marriage. It has been plausibly argued that the basis for this approach was a desire (by men) to assure that their offspring, to whom property would be bequeathed, were theirs biologically. Punishments for sexual transgressions, and efforts to assure sexual fidelity, bore disproportionately on women. All agricultural societies displayed these signs of a sexual double standard. Here too the changes from hunting and gathering precedent were striking. Finally, enforcement of family sexual norms, particularly around regulation and protection of women, was strongly associated with family honor, though to a greater extent in some regional cultures than in others; both violence and shaming might factor into this feature of family life.

**Childhood** The primary purpose of childhood in agricultural societies was preparation for work and actual participation in the family economy, with first steps taken at a fairly young age. Correspondingly all agricultural cultures placed heavy emphasis on the importance of children's obedience. This was not the whole story. Children might be valued for other reasons; they were usually given considerable time for play under village supervision; they might also receive some formal schooling. But the relationship between childhood and the family economy was always fundamental, and parental emphasis was shaped accordingly. The presence of frequent deaths in childhood, though not new, was also a major factor: it was the rare family that did not experience the deaths of several children, the rare childhood that did not involve experiencing the deaths of several siblings. Figuring out how the impact of child mortality factored into family emotional life is one of the challenges of evaluating the family in agricultural societies. Finally, gender distinctions among children, with boys valued more because of their future labor value and as heirs to family property, were a common feature of agricultural childhood as well – though individual girls might be deeply cherished.

**Old age** Despite a low average life expectancy, resulting primarily from children's death rates, a fair number of people lived into their sixties or beyond in agricultural societies. They might be valued for their wisdom or their parental service. But there was a tension based on expectations of property inheritance – that might be delayed by undue longevity – and by the fact that older people might no longer be able to contribute necessary labor. Tension applied particularly to older women, since their primary family function ended with menopause. Solutions varied, and widows commanded great power in some agricultural settings, but widowhood was a frequent challenge for all concerned.

**Family stability** Divorce was uncommon in most agricultural societies if only because it was difficult and risky to break up the economic unit, where contributions from both spouses were vital. In some cultures, and in upper class circles, instability was often slightly more common. But if outright divorce was rare, instability frequently resulted from the death of a parent (about one in ten women died because of complications in child birth, meaning that about one in eighty childbirths led to death). Men in these circumstances frequently sought remarriage; hence among other things the frequency of often unflattering stories about stepmothers. The question of what to do with a widowed young mother was a greater dilemma. Family historians urge that the various complexities of family life in agricultural societies warn against undue nostalgia – even in a modern age when family instability is more frequently voluntary.

## Conclusion

These general features of family life in agricultural societies are just that – general. They were translated into quite different specifics in different places and chronological periods. But they were not widely transcended, which is why they deserve emphasis before turning to particular regions. It is also important to remember, of course, that hunting and gathering societies persisted along with agriculture for many centuries, and that a third variant, the nomadic herding economy, would also generate distinctive family forms.

## Study questions

1. What is the sexual double standard and why did it emerge with agricultural society?
2. How did the treatment of children change with agriculture, compared to hunting and gathering patterns.
3. Was the family more important in agricultural societies than it had been before?
4. What were some of the main structural differences between upper-class families and those of the bulk of the population, in agricultural societies?

**Further reading**

A.W. Johnson and Timothy Earle, *Evolution of Human Societies: from foraging group to agrarian state* (Stanford University Press, 1988)

E.A. Wrigley, *Population and History* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969)

Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford University Press, 1986)

# Chapter 3: Early Civilizations

**Background** The emergence of Sumerian city states in the Tigris-Euphrates river valley, about 3500 BCE, marks another major stage in the history of agricultural societies. These more complex social forms, often called civilizations, developed also in several other river-valley centers, including Egypt along the Nile, the Indus river valley, and a bit later northern China along the Yellow River. Civilization as a form of human organization added several important features to the contours of agricultural societies: it involved somewhat larger cities (even as the vast majority of the population remained rural), with more economic, political and religious functions; it generated organized states, as opposed to more informal leadership; and it depended on the introduction of writing. These features were not nearly as decisive in changing the family as the advent of agriculture had been; in some respects, they merely provided better evidence of agricultural characteristics thanks to the generation of written records. But there were some results worth noting, many of which would continue to describe the history of complex societies even after the early, river valley period.

**Law codes** One of the primary functions of early governments involved clarifying social rules, for example in defining the rights associated with property – in hopes of reducing private disputes. This in turn inevitably affected families, though again the results may have largely confirmed existing arrangements. The famous law code of the Babylonian emperor Hammurabi, in the 18th century BCE, thus stipulated that property brought by women into marriage belonged to the husband in most circumstances. It also clarified rules of inheritance for property ultimately passed on to the eldest son.

**Dissolution of marriage and sexual fidelity** The Hammurabic Code also defined conditions in which marriages could be ended, again with pronounced preference to the claims of husbands. Wives were not unprotected. A famous clause thus insisted that if a husband divorced his wife for her failure to bear children, he must return the dowry she had brought from her father – though he then could proceed. Husbands also had full power to decide on punishments for wives caught having sex with another man: they were completely within their rights to throw both of them into the river (where it was assumed they would drown), though he could also decide to forgive her. No such provisions applied to wives whose husbands were adulterers. However, wives could legitimately abandon marriage if their husbands failed to provide for them (though they must also relinquish property in the process, so that the husband could form another family unit). But husbands could also abandon or even kill wives who shamed them by failing to take proper care of the household. Obviously provisions of this sort greatly privileged husbands but they were also clearly aimed at defining and protecting some of the basic purposes of the family. A full quarter of the provisions of the code applied to family life, including the rights of parents.

**Early states** Beyond law codes and other writings that clarified male primacy (common in Egypt as well as Mesopotamia), the key functions of early governments had little direct impact on families, which were largely left to administer their own affairs. However, the emergence of small bureaucracies and military staffs added a further division between men and women – for only men were qualified for service – as would long be the case.

**Literacy** The advent of writing, initially through fairly elaborate systems of characters, required the creation of some formal education; it took several years to learn the scripts. Most families did not participate in the new system, but provision for schooling would affect the family life of some largely upper-class units. Fathers would have to decide if schooling was a sensible option, and if their sons were qualified. Literacy in agricultural civilizations also created yet another division between sons and daughters, for it was always assumed that sons were the primary candidates for schooling – since only they would be eligible for resulting jobs. Here was another distinction that would last throughout the Agricultural Age, from this point forward.

**City life** Cities in early civilizations were small, embracing at most a tenth of the total population. Their existence could generate some changes in family lives, at least in certain cases. One relevant innovation was the advent of formal prostitution—identified as a profession from the first Sumerian lists occupational lists onward. There is no way to know how extensive prostitution was, or whether it mainly attracted unmarried men or men before marriage; it surely reflected the economic difficulties faced by unmarried women. Whatever the specifics it would be a feature of urban life from that point onward.

**Civilizational differences** The river valley civilizations for which the most abundant evidence exists, Mesopotamia and Egypt, exhibited some intriguing differences in family life, particularly relating to gender – despite a number of basic similarities. Egyptians, while emphasizing the importance of male control, took a more benign view of women than was true of their counterparts in the Middle East. A few exceptional wives or daughters wielded political power; women were more frequently represented in Egyptian art. But differences were not just a matter of tone. Travelers to Egypt from the Middle East remarked on another striking distinction: Egyptians apparently did not widely practice infanticide. In early Middle Eastern civilizations (and, as we will see, in many other agricultural civilizations), many families reacted to the problem of unwanted numbers of children by putting some to death, mainly by exposing them to the elements. And in this pattern, girls were far more commonly involved than boys, because of the greater utility of the latter to family work and inheritance. Egypt however, possibly because of the unusual prosperity promoted by Nile river irrigation systems, apparently did not participate in this practice, and indeed infanticide was punishable by law as well as proscribed by religious belief. Here was an early example of the different approaches individual civilizations might take to major features of family life.

**Study questions**

1. Did the advent of more complex societies fundamentally change family life in agricultural regions?
2. Why was it always assumed that schooling was more important for boys than girls?
3. What were the main reasons that might justify divorce, according to early law codes?

**Further reading**

Stephen Bertman, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Oxford University Press, 2003)

Marvin Kohl, ed., *Infanticide and the Value of Life* (Prometheus Books, 1978)

Emily Teeter, *Egypt and the Egyptians* (Cambridge University Press, 1999)

## Chapter 4: Judaism and the family

**Background** Though Jewish tradition posits earlier origins, the Jewish people begin to be identified in the Eastern Mediterranean by 1100 BCE, and Judaism as a distinct religion formed from about 500 CE onward. The religion was noteworthy for its emphasis on monotheism and its intertwining of ethics with religious authority, and of course its characteristics would also strongly shape later Christianity and Islam. Despite geographic dispersion, Jewish peoples and culture demonstrate remarkable continuity ino the present day. From the standpoint of family history, Judaism offered some interesting emphases though its broad outlines fit within the general features of the family in agricultural societies. Several traditional features have been significantly modified during the past two centuries, particularly in the Reform movements.

**Matrilineality** An important feature of Jewish family tradition involves matrilineality, that is, tracing the family descent from mother rather than father. It is not entirely clear when this developed, though

Orthodox tradition assumes early origin. Clear evidence however dates from the early centuries CE, when it was stipulated in Jewish law. Though most large cultures are now patrilineal (including Chiof Native American tribes (Cherokee and Iroquois among others) and some groups in various parts of Asia and Africa. Some 19th-century anthropologists argued that matrilineality was the standard approach of early peoples everywhere, though this is now debated. An extreme of matrilineality involves newly weds taking residence with the groom's mother rather than father – a practice in some African groups – though this is not standard practice. More commonly, as in Jewish tradition, the main function of matrilineality is to identify kinships – including attribution of Jewish identity in cases of offspring of a mixed marriage. While matrilineal cultures sometimes accord greater importance to women than is common in agricultural societies, they can also coexist with strong patriarchal structures, as was the case with Judaism.

**Centrality of the family** As in most societies, the family was held as a basic pillar of society, divinely sanctioned and a supreme human benefit. References in the Torah made the point clear: "the family is the essential cell of human society"; "the family is one of nature's masterpieces"; "when trouble comes, it's your family that supports you". Marriage was a major community event, with a variety of symbolic religious rituals attached. The family was also the core institution in handling death and grief, with a number of special ceremonies and periodic remembrances for family members. It is also important to note that, while social distinctions developed among Jews based on wealth, basic family practices varied less by class than was true of many agricultural societies, in part because of the common emphasis on monogamy.

**Gender balance** Jewish law and wider religious injunctions made it clear that husbands and fathers were heads of household, though mothers deserved esteem as well. Law and custom stipulated strict monogamy. Gender divisions might be enhanced in practice by the importance given to religious education and scholarship, which was a male preserve, and by the fact that men and women worshipped separately. On the other hand, the wife had a central role in weekly Sabbath ceremonies. Divorce was not encouraged but it was possible, however it could only be initiated by the husband, though some interpretations of Jewish law gave women some indirect opportunities as well.

**Sexuality** The importance of sexual pleasure was recognized, but the primary purpose was procreation. A father who did not or could not produce at least two offspring was regarded with disdain (interestingly, no direct onus was placed on women, presumably because they were under the husband's direction). Sexuality outside marriage was strongly reproved, and homosexual behavior was forbidden in principle (as, also in principle, was male masturbation). Strong stigma attached to menstruation, and women were forbidden to have intercourse for at least seven days during their period; and in some versions of Judaism (as in Ethiopia) they were also banished to separate quarters.

**Parental authority** Children owed their parents the same obedience that adults owed to God. Injunctions in this category were very strong. Fathers had extensive rights to punish disobedient sons. As the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy specified, "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother…Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him and bring him to the elders of his city. And they shall say…'This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' And all men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die." On the other hand, belief in individual souls led to strong efforts to prevent infanticide. And Jewish scripture urged the importance of parental attention to the religious and moral guidance of children. It would be misleading to overemphasize the punitive aspect.

**Study questions**

1. What were the most distinctive features of the Jewish approach to the family? Did Judaism introduce major new principles for family life?
2. How did Jewish use of matrilineality mesh with a patriarchal family structure?
3. How did Jewish law and practice emphasize the importance of the family?

**Further reading**

Alice Schlegel, *Male Dominance and Female Autonomy: domestic authority in matrilineal societies* (HRAF Press, 1972)

Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Judaism: history, belief and practice* (Routledge, 2003)

John Cooper, *The Child in Jewish History* (Jason Aronsohn, 1996)

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## Chapter 5: The Family in Classical China

**The classical period** In several key regions of the world – China, South Asia, the Middle East and Mediterranean – larger and more elaborate civilizations took shape in the centuries after roughly 800 BCE, in what is called the classical period of world history. The key theme of this long period – which would last until the fall of the great classical empires after the 2nd century CE – was the elaboration of characteristic social, cultural and political forms in these separate regional holdings. This was the era in which for example Confucianism was established in China, the caste system in India. Regional characteristics very much included some signature family values and institutions. These took shape within the context of agricultural society. They overlapped as a result in many ways – as in patriarchal authority structures. But they also differed, and some of these differences would persist well beyond the classical period itself, inviting ongoing comparative analysis.

**China** It was during the classical period that China unified its core geography and ultimately established its characteristic emphasis on relatively strong central government. The country included many different regions and ethnic groups, and these contributed to diverse family structures; a few ethnicities, for example, were strongly matrilineal in a country that overall emphasized patrilineality. Yet despite diversity, including pronounced social inequality, some generalizations about family forms have considerable validity.

**Confucianism** The Confucian value system, taking shape initially in a period of political instability but later promoted in support of the powerful Han dynasty, strongly emphasized the importance of the family as the essential building block of the social order and a training ground in appropriate political values. In addition to prioritizing families and the importance of procreation, Confucianism stressed hierarchy within the family, with husband and father atop the pyramid and careful gradations not only between males and females, but in terms of birth order. Children were to be trained in elaborate manners that would exemplify family hierarchy, with first-born sons, for example, given a special place to stand in relation to other siblings, in any family gathering.

**The extended family** China was unquestionably among the societies the placed heavy emphasis on kinship relations within the extended family, usually defined in terms of patrilineal relations. Household varied, between patterns based on coresidence of the eldest son (and his family) with the father, or coresidence of all the male progeny, with the household then divided after the father died (sometimes, with eldest son gaining the largest share). Manners stressed the importance of kin position, often more than individual names, with greetings identifying “uncle” or “third brother”; people outside the kin network, in contrast, were accorded far less attention unless they had some visible social rank or were to be treated as formal guests.

**Gender** Confucianism easily blended with the common agricultural emphasis on male authority. Daughters were far less esteemed than sons; one family guide urged that baby boys be placed as the side of the parents’ bed, but girls at the base, to demonstrate their inferior position from the outset. Husbands assumed decision-making power over wives. Marriages might be dissolved; a woman might decide to leave her husband and return to her parents, but this was a clear and shameful failure, to be avoided if at all possible. The position of single women was quite unclear, given the assumptions that all would marry. Yet there were complications to the gender hierarchy. In the first place, in an extended family, if a woman survived her husband and had close relations with her sons (particularly, the eldest son), she might wield considerable power, including authority over her daughters-in-law. Second, it has been suggested that women devoted considerable attention to precisely this close relationship with sons; several stories suggested the obedience that sons continued to profess to elderly mothers despite the fact that, formally, they had the upper hand. Finally, while Confucianism emphasized hierarchy and female deference, it also urged respectful mutuality. A handbook written for women during the Han dynasty by Ban Zhao (an exceptionally well educated woman), that would be republished through the 19th

century, urged the different duties and powers of husbands and wives, but insisted that wives who were diligent and deferential deserved good treatment and even an appropriate access to education.

**Concubinage** Many upper-class men, including government leaders, took one or more concubines in addition to their wives, presumably primarily to assure that they would be able to produce sons. This was not a practice most families could afford to indulge in. However, successful businessmen in addition to the more clearly privileged scholar gentry took up the practice. At various points, Chinese governments sought to regulate concubinage, mainly to protect the position of first wives. Internal family rivalries, and particularly disputes over the treatment of various children, were predictably common. As one statement suggested, "since the mothers have strong feelings, the sons become separate factions".

**Parents and children** The authority of parents was strongly emphasized. A saying was, "Parents are never wrong". Children were urged to ask their parents daily if they were warm or cool enough, depending on the season. In the upper classes (and in exceptional cases beyond this), providing education for sons was unusually important, particularly when the Han dynasty established the beginnings of the examination system for access to bureaucratic positions. The education of girls was unsystematic at best. Gender distinctions also showed strongly in infanticide, which was widely practiced as a means of family population control but also amid the preference for sons; girls were most commonly victim, and it is estimated that up to a quarter of all children born were exposed to death. Fathers expected to arrange marriages for daughters, sometimes in their mid-teens; at the imperial level, daughters might be sent as wives for nomadic leaders, as a diplomatic gesture, to the dismay of the girls themselves. With all this it is important to note moments of warmth, for example with fathers who took a particular shine to an individual daughter, like the man who noted "in the evening when I come home, she would welcome me with a big smile". Or the poet who commented on the death of beloved daughter as he visited her grave: "How I wept over you, I could see your eyes and face. How could I ever forget your words and expressions."

**After the classical period** Many of the key characteristics of Chinese family life persisted well beyond the classical period; some, like the preference for sons, are still operative today. Before the modern period, important changes often carried further values that had already been established. Thus a major shift that began with the Tang dynasty in the 7th century CE was the practice of foot binding, in which the bones in a young girl's foot were broken so that she could only walk with a halting gait, regarded as a particular sign of grace and beauty. This was not a practice that working peasants could afford to indulge in, because they needed women's work, but it spread beyond the upper classes particularly in the cities (some parents did it to girls in hopes of attracting attention for them from upper-class males), into the 19th century. Later Chinese governments also set up elaborate awards to commemorate women who defended their sexual virtue, even at cost of death, or widows who remained faithful to their dead husbands.

**Study questions**

1. How did Confucianism help shape family values and structures in China?
2. What were the main social class differences in family life?
3. How might gender relations in the family in practice prove more complicated than official hierarchies suggested?

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# Chapter 6: South Asia

**Background** The development of Indian society during the classical period highlighted three major characteristics. Religion was strongly emphasized (more than in China), as Hinduism took shape; Buddhism, the other major religion, ultimately had less influence in India itself as opposed to other parts of Asia. The caste system was closely linked to Hinduism, establishing rigid boundaries for social groups that defined what jobs they could do, what their social contacts were; marriage outside the caste was forbidden in principle and usually in fact. Finally, India was often divided by a variety of regional states; while there were two periods featuring larger empires, these did not establish strong traditions for central governments or, indeed, for extensive political life.

**Hinduism** Hinduism strongly emphasized the importance of marriage and procreation as religious duties, as well as obligations to the larger family and ancestors. Family life fulfilled *dharma* appropriate to the relevant phase of life. Having children, particularly male children, was obviously essential to preserve the family line. Husbands and fathers, in fulfilling their functions, paid a debt to the gods, along with appropriate sacrifices and prayers. Most Hindu households had a space for prayer and religious contemplation.

**Extended family: functions** Indian society placed great emphasis on the extended family. Households often combined several generations. Children were often encouraged to develop relationships with aunts and uncles that were as strong as those with their own parents. The economic importance of the extended family loomed large, providing the basic work force in agriculture and business alike. Kinship contacts could help rural migrants to cities find jobs. Many Indian merchants used kin to establish farflung trading links, rather than developing more impersonal business bureaucracies (this would also be true for merchant families in the Middle East).

**Extended family: regulations** Extended families also established prohibited categories for marriage selection, beyond immediate kin. These varied by group and region. At the same time, though again depending on region and linguistic group, marriage of certain cousins was both permissible and in fact common – for example, the children of two brothers (but not perhaps the child of a sister – again the specificity was important). Kinship marriage, subject to specifics, would also be an important part of both Middle Eastern and African traditions.

**Marriage** It is not clear if arranged marriage loomed larger in classical India, for family formation, than in other societies – it certainly does today – but it was certainly the standard basis for mate selection. Fathers took the lead, often consulting informally with their wives. Parental involvement may have been particularly important because of the complex caste and extended family rules about eligible partners. Children were expected to accept parental choice without dispute even though (in the upper classes particularly) they often had never met their bride or groom before the ceremony. (Girls might be married as young as 8, though in these cases they did not take up coresidence until later.) Hindu marriage celebrations themselves were unusually extensive and festive, multi-day affairs aimed at launching the new family with appropriate joy and support.

**Sexuality and emotion** Sexual desire was a category recognized in Hinduism, and it possible that it gained greater emphasis in the Hindu tradition than in some other regions. Certainly the famous sexual manual, the *Kama Sutra,* produced in this period (probably around 200 CE), was an unusually elaborate guide to emotional and sexual fulfillment, with considerable attention to the pleasure of both parties. All literate cultures produced sex guides, but the detail and emphasis in the Indian document were distinctive. Sexuality was also strongly emphasized in much Hindu art. None of this provides direct evidence of sexual practice, but at least the cultural context was somewhat distinctive. On the other hand, early marriage for many girls was clearly designed to impose the institution before any signs of sexual stirrings. Marriage tradition interestingly allowed a get-acquainted period of three days for bride and groom after their ceremony but before undertaking sexual activity, possibly resulting in greater opportunity for sexual and emotional compatibility despite the fact that the marriage itself had been based on other criteria.

**Parents and children** Hindu emphasis on the spiritual potential of each person may have discouraged infanticide, though the data are not conclusive. Certainly both pregnancy and childbirth were widely

celebrated, with special religious rituals at a birth. Young children of both sexes were indulged, with many opportunities for play, though more serious training set in after early childhood (including rigorous religious education for sons in the Brahman class). Mothers were particularly responsible for indulgence, offering breastfeeding as an occasional treat even after a child was largely weaned.

**Later developments** The creation of an Islamic minority in India after the classical period altered family patterns in some respects, particularly in northern India – even among Hindus (see chapter 11). After the classical period also, Hindu families in some regions – not all – adopted the practice of ***sati,*** where a widow would throw herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband, on grounds that she had nothing else to live for. As with foot binding in China, this showed a tendency for heightened gender distinctions in the further evolution of agricultural societies. At the same time, many of the traditions for family life established in the classical period continued with less adjustment.

**Study questions**

1. What were the most distinctive features of the traditional Indian family?
2. What were the differences between Confucian and Hindu endorsements of the family as an institution?
3. What are some obvious complexities in discussing the role of gender in Indian family relationships?

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## Chapter 7: Families in Classical Greece and Rome

**Background** Classical society in the Mediterranean region developed first in Greece and then the Hellenistic states, but was then followed by the rise of Rome and the expansion of the Roman Empire. The society was marked by a rather flexible polytheistic religion, which yielded stories of the often chaotic family life of the gods and goddesses but not the kind of religious endorsement provided by Hinduism. Political life was vital, as in China, but with less emphasis on the family as mirror of the state. In Rome, however, particularly under the early Empire, the government actively promoted the importance of family life and procreation. (The Emperor Augustus was concerned about signs of a decline in the birth rate of the aristocracy, and worked to redress this.) Social structure was marked by the importance of slavery, along with strong emphasis on the importance of an aristocracy at the other end of the social scale.

**Household** Extended families were emphasized both in Greece and Rome, and households often included grandparents, a variety of servants and others – providing a number of adults who might relate to the children involved. Extended families were defined, as in China, by relationship to the father. Families were also responsible for the arrangement of marriage. While very young marriage was rare, women were often committed in their early teens, to males in their mid-20s.

**Family honor** Mediterranean society developed strong notions of family honor, associated particularly with the need to control female sexual behavior and punish deviation or violation. In Roman law, for example, the father of a married woman who committed adultery was authorized to kill her, while the husband was expected to divorce her; failure to do so was a mark of dishonor. Revenge efforts against rape were also prominent. To some extent the famous Trojan War was a demonstration of the power of possessive sexual jealousy.

**Gender patterns** Greek culture held women to be markedly inferior, and in the upper classes there was some effort to seclude them in the family compound. Roman attitudes were more lenient, though early Roman law stipulated the power of husbands to punish deviant wives. Later Roman law provided more protection for women, who also had considerable presence in public gatherings. At the same time,

divorce was not uncommon among the upper classes in Roman society. In cases of divorce, as in all patriarchal families, the children went to the father.

**Homosexuality** Upper-class men widely indulged homosexual relationships with adolescent boys, even when the men themselves were married and heads of household. The practice continued in Rome to a lesser degree, though amid some disapproval. Romanic and sexual attachments often exceeded those involving wives. Lesbian experience was also described, but there is far less information about actual practice.

**Slavery** Slavery in the classical Mediterranean was a diverse state, though always involving the slave as property. Some slaves were assigned to difficult and dangerous work, for example in silver mines, but others served as tutors, operated shops, performed other services. It was not uncommon for slaves to marry, sometimes to freeborn men or women. Roman law devoted a great deal of attention to the legal status of the offspring of such mixed marriages, usually concluding that the children remained slaves though with opportunities for manumission. Mediterranean slavery does not seem to have involved the massive issues of family disruption that would be associated with American slavery in the early modern period.

**Childhood** Infanticide was widely practiced; it has been estimated that up to 20% of all female infants born in ancient Athens were killed, again mainly through exposure to the elements. Roman governments (like their Chinese counterpart) passed laws against the practice, but they had little effect. Again as in China, the Mediterranean provides vivid examples of the tension between grief at the death of an older child, and considerable resignation. Roman writers noted how dangerous it was to form attachments to a child given the uncertainty of its survival. (As one put it, "when you kiss your child, you say to yourself, 'Perhaps it will be dead in the morning'".) The importance of obedience to parental authority was strongly emphasized. On the other hand, classical Mediterranean society also admitted the beauty or energy of youth, and in some cases this may have created a certain degree of latitude. There is interesting evidence, from Rome, of adolescent boys openly complaining that their parents were not indulging them sufficiently.

**Legacy** The collapse of Roman society in the West by the 5th century CE, and the attendant rise of Christianity, differentiated families in the classical Mediterranean from those that would emerge later on in many, often decisive, ways, particularly in Western Europe. This contrasted with the greater continuity in China and India. On the other hand, some features, like the attachment to family honor, clearly persisted at least around the Mediterranean basin itself.

**Conclusion** Comparisons among the major classical societies are understandably complex. Similarities are vital, based particularly on reliance on extended families and patriarchal gender assumptions and on the importance of the family as an economic unit. On the other hand, distinctive features stand out as well. Some. Like the approval for homosexual relationships in classical Greece, would prove transient, but others were more durable. The obvious challenge is to sort out the shared and civilization-specific features, and also to tackle the issue of ongoing legacy after the classical period itself.

**Study questions**

1. What features of family life in the classical Mediterranean were most clearly shared by the other major classical societies?
2. Compare the impacts of Mediterranean slavery and the Indian caste system on family life.
3. One of the great unknowns of early family history is the rate of what today is called domestic abuse or violence. Do you think this kind of abuse was likely to have been widespread? Would it have been equally likely in all the classical societies?
4. Why did women not rebel against the inferior position in classical societies?

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SECTION II POSTCLASSICAL PERIOD

## Chapter 8: Impact of Religious Change

**Background** Three major threads help, very loosely, define the postclassical period in world history from the fall of the great empires until the 15th century. First, more complex societies emerged in additional regions, and some borrowed characteristics from neighboring, more established centers – as Japan did from China. This process could include changes in family organization. Second, interregional trade expanded, providing new spurs to commerce and some manufacturing. This major change had less obvious relationship to family forms, though growing prosperity and some urban growth may have had an impact; additional wealth in some cases was used to support new limits on women's activities, as with Chinese foot binding in the cities. Third, the major missionary religions spread more widely and of course Islam developed anew after 600 CE. Buddhism began to gain influence in China and through it Korea and Japan, while also expanding in southeast Asia. Christianity, gaining converts within the failing Roman empire from the 4th century onward, spread northward in both western and eastern Europe. Islam spread rapidly through the Middle East and North Africa, soon converted much of central Asia, created a new religious minority in India, and reached into southeast Asia and subSaharan Africa.

**Religious impact** Each of the missionary religions had its own approach to family life, as discussed in subsequent chapters. And of course religion had already helped shape family life particularly in India and with Judaism. A few general points can be ventured. First, the missionary religions, like Hinduism previously, created a certain tension with family life at least for some people: was there a higher loyalty, a deeper pull, outside the family for those who wished to maximize their contact with the divine or prepare for later salvation in the next life? In creating major monastic movements, both Christianity and Buddhism provided some people, both men and women, an alternative to family life. The Sufi movement in Islam might inspire a similar higher spirituality. None of this undermined the family for most people, but it did introduce a new factor.

**Gender** All three of the missionary religions argued that men and women were spiritually equal; in the case of Christianity and Islam, they had souls, with Buddhism they shared in participating in the divine essence. This factor was much clearer than had been the case with Hinduism and Judaism, which were more explicitly patriarchal. However none of the religions worked for greater gender equality in most aspects of life, including religious officialdom, though the gender differentials varied. This too was an interesting tension that may not have affected families in general, but it could inspire a certain degree of confusion over more traditional gender distinctions. Certainly for some individuals, and perhaps particularly for women, the existence of institutions that provided opportunities for a life independent from marriage was an important innovation.

**Children** All three of the missionary religions frowned on infanticide, based again on a belief that each individual had spiritual value. The Prophet Muhammed attacked the practice most explicitly, but Christian leaders were also clearly opposed. There is every indication that, as a result, infanticide did decline in the regions where conversions spread most widely. This obviously raised the question of what families were to do if they had more children than they could readily support. Again at least with Christianity and Islam, efforts to expand charity might play some role here, creating religious institutions that might, however reluctantly, receive orphans but also children abandoned by their parents. Finally, the missionary religions might provide new ways for parents to talk to their children about death; evidence from Christian Europe during the postclassical period shows how many children, dealing with their own illness or that of siblings, referred to beliefs in heaven and in joining the family of God.

**Education** The missionary religions all sought to spread their versions of religious truth through some new types of schools. Islam was most energetic here during the postclassical centuries. Most people remained illiterate still; religious training might involve at most memorizing some oral prayers and beliefs. But the need to provide some formal schooling for some children (disproportionately but not exclusively boys) did increase, as did opportunities for fathers to decide whether their sons were talented enough to move into higher levels of education. This was not an entirely novel feature of family life – it had already loomed large in Judaism – but it could have some impact, even though most children remained committed to their duties for the family economy and in-family job training.

**Conclusion** It would be unrealistic to press the general impact of the religious expansion on family life too far; the individual religious trajectories were far more important, creating some major new divisions in family types and patterns. None of the religions, whatever their views in principle about the highest spiritual attainments, seriously weakened family life, and most gave the family new ritual support. Often, as we will see with Islam, they intertwined with earlier regional traditions in their interaction with family life.

**Study questions**

1. What were the three missionary religions and how might they have new kinds of impact on family life?
2. What were the implications of the rise of monasteries and convents for family life? Were they more significant for women than for men?
3. Why did infanticide decline under religious guidance?

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# Chapter 9: Buddhism

**Renunciation** In launching his own spiritual journey, the Buddha, born into a wealthy family, renounced not only riches but family itself, abandoning his wife and children. An early Buddhist writing described the feelings of a renunciant when his family did visit: "He feels no pleasure when she (the wife) comes, no sorrow when she goes; him I would call a true saint released from passion." The notion that family entanglements were a distraction from the goals of personal enlightenment remained an important strain in Buddhism through the classical and postclassical periods and beyond. This was why almost all the Buddhist monastic movements insisted on celibacy.

**Overall approach** Buddhism was the only major religion not to provide an explicit religious endorsement for family, a belief that forming and maintaining families fulfilled a religious duty and formed part of the divine plan for mankind. It contrasted in this respect not only from Christianity and Islam, but also from Hinduism, Judaism, and even Zoroastrianism. Family life could be construed as one of the deceiving miseries of human life. An early Sutra thus intoned, "Leaving behind son and wife, and father and mother, and wealth and grain, and relatives, and sensual pleasures to the limit, one should wander solitary as a rhinoceros horn." Statements about the dangers of family life were common in Buddhist writings, focused not only on the concerns family involvement could generate but also on the desires involved. Women were sometimes warned about the risks of childbirth. Even for the majority of Buddhists who continued to form families, the notion of higher and separate spiritual goals might affect degrees of commitment.

**Impact on family forms** Because Buddhism had no elaborate family policy, it tended to adapt to whatever family forms already prevailed in the regions the religion penetrated – which meant that there was tremendous diversity among Buddhist families. In a few cases, this included acceptance of polygamy, though in general Buddhist families were monogamous. In other cases, Buddhist monks maintained active families alongside their religious commitments (this seems to have been particularly common in postclassical Japan). Monks in monasteries in India often made regular contributions to their parents. In some cases also, whole families made a commitment to spiritual renunciation together. In other instances wives made every effort to support their husbands when the latter decided on a path of renunciation, maintaining some semblance of family contact. Buddhism overall was a very flexible religion, with many specific variants, and family variety was a clear consequence. At the same time, this same flexibility prompted widespread acceptance of patriarchal family structures.

**Relevant principles** This said, some features of Buddhism had more general applicability to family conduct, and these began to be codified in writing during the later phases of the classical period and

beyond. Respect for elders was one such precept. Buddhists urged submission to the wishes of parents, particularly fathers, and in this respect worked to stabilize family life in fairly traditional terms. General precepts of nonviolence, honesty and consideration for others had obvious applicability to family behavior – though we have no decisive evidence of the extent to which these principles affected actual behavior. (One of the really intriguing challenges in comparative family history involves speculation on whether some cultures inhibited, or promoted, family violence more than others; unfortunately clear data only emerge in recent times.) Obviously also, Buddhism could inform family life even when worldly renunciation was not involved, as parents instructed their children in principles ranging from abstemious behavior to the importance of contributing to a local monastery. Mothers played a considerable role in this kind of moral instruction. Finally, as with Hinduism, many Buddhists set up small family shrines, where family members could pray and meditate.

**Childhood** Buddhist parents In practice organized a variety of rituals to protect their children from harm, some of them taken over from Hindu forms. Many children attended Buddhist schools, and certainly were regaled with stories of the religion's saints. Opportunities in Buddhist schools may have been particularly important for girls. Some youngsters, identified as spiritually gifted, were sent into monasteries or convents at an early age. On the whole Buddhists tended to oppose child marriage, believing that parties should be able to offer informed consent.

**Tensions in China** The spread of Buddhism to China raised particular problems, given the contrast with the strong existing Confucian commitment to the primacy of the family and procreation. Many Confucianists actively opposed Buddhist conversions and the establishment of celibate monasteries as inimical to the family and its social obligations. This ultimately played a role in the decisions of the Tang dynasty, by the 9th century, to turn against Buddhist activities, though a strong Buddhist minority survived. At the same time Buddhists themselves offered compromise. Buddhist passages (imported from India) such as "the wife consoles the husband" were shifted to "the wife reveres the husband", along with "the husband controls the wife". References in Indian Buddhist writings to kisses and passion were simply deleted. A Buddhist term for morality was altered to read "filial submission and obedience". A number of stories highlighted the tensions that could erupt when a child (particularly a daughter) defied parental order and joined a Buddhist group. At the same time, some Chinese husbands (not themselves active Buddhists) reported some delight when their wives participated in Buddhist meetings, for it distracted the women from potential contests for power within the family and made paternal control easier. All this tends to highlight Buddhism's flexibility and regional specificity when it came to family life, and the fact that it did not break through traditional patterns in any systematic way.

**Study questions**

1. Why it is difficult to identify a Buddhist family type?
2. What were the main Buddhist concerns about family life?
3. How might Buddhism come to terms, at least in part, with established Chinese family values?

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# Chapter 10: Christianity: Western Europe

**Cultural geography** Christianity spread to many regions, and not all versions of the religion were the same, even before the advent of Protestantism in the West. This first exploration deals with impacts in Western Europe from late Roman days into the 16th century, even though during the first half of this period Orthodox Christianity in Eastern Europe was in many ways more significant. Historians have zeroed in on some particularly interesting, possibly decisive, effects of Catholic Christianity, against which other versions (and, later, Protestantism) can be compared.

**Basic approach** Christianity maintained from Judaism a strong emphasis on the family as a divinely ordained institution, with important collective obligations (not aimed at the happiness of individual members). Priorities showed clearly in the unusually strong opposition to divorce.

**Tensions** Families played a vital role in the early church, often centering religious services. However Jesus offered a somewhat ambivalent view of family, encouraging many initial followers to abandon their families in service of religious truth – an approach reminiscent of Buddhism. The apostle Paul, himself unmarried, also encouraged followers to avoid the distraction of marriage if possible. This ambivalence would be maintained in a sense in Catholic doctrine. On the one hand, marriage was a sacrament, providing divine sanction for the formation of the family. On the other hand, the holiest state, maintained by priests as well as monks and nuns, was one of celibacy. In practice some Christian families experienced the tension themselves, as a husband or wife might pull away to join a religious institution.

**Sexuality** Ambivalence was on full display concerning sexuality. On the one hand, the Christian family was urged to procreate. Jewish regulations aimed at protecting family sexuality were fully installed, including the commandments against adultery and coveting a neighbor's wife. Sexuality before marriage was strongly reproved, and most Christian communities worked hard to discourage it, with group-oriented rather than individual courtship practices as well as parentally-arranged marriage. In principle masturbation was also considered sinful, though there is no way to determine the practical impact of this approach. Sexuality, in other words, was both essential and dangerous. And of course many individual Christians, from ascetics who flourished in the early centuries to members of monastic orders, deliberately shunned sexuality altogether. Christianity also discouraged earlier practices of concubinage in the upper classes, which both expressed the hostility to unregulated sexuality and reinforced the institution of monogamy.

**Homosexuality** Western Christianity was firmly opposed to homosexuality, here too incorporating a Jewish tradition. This dramatically reversed patterns that had prevailed in the classical Mediterranean, forcing most homosexual liaisons underground for many centuries. There is some debate over when this policy was established – early in the Church or a bit later – but it seems to have intensified by the 12th century.

**Gender** Christianity departed from Judaism with regard to the spiritual position of women, granting them equal footing in religious services. And the revered image of Mary, as mother, permeated Christian culture at various points. Yet male superiority was maintained, including a longstanding belief that women were the more likely sources of sin, particularly in their potential for sexual temptation. It is simply not clear whether the Christian approach to gender had any particular impact on ordinary families, in terms of tempering assertions of male superiority. There is considerable evidence concerning the frequency of domestic violence in Christian Europe during the postclassical period. On the other hand, one relevant feature of the religion was a belief, in principle, that marriages should be contracted only with the consent of both parties. This did not inhibit the prevalence of arranged marriages orchestrated with the economic or political interests of the family in mind – with the inevitable result that some women, particularly, were saddled with older or objectionable partners. However the practice of child marriage was probably somewhat less common in Christian societies than in some other cultures. Finally, the position of widows was often precarious, as they frequently were under the control of sons or other male relatives for access to any property and usually discouraged from remarriage.

**Childhood: a debate** One of the first great works in the history of childhood, Philippe Aries' *Centuries of Childhood* (orig. 1960, tr. 1962) contended that childhood was not a formally recognized stage in premodern Europe. Possibly because of the need for diligent child labor, children with adult qualities were

particularly valued. This thesis provoked a considerable backlash, from historians who found varied evidence concerning the care and affection that parents expressed for children in the postclassical period. As the dust settled, it seemed likely that an accurate picture lay somewhat in between. Adults were concerned for children; they enjoyed watching children play and participated directly; they lamented the loss of a child. On the other hand, a certain degree of fatalism, given high levels of mortality, entered in as well. And children were sometimes allowed to make decisions, for example about jobs and apprenticeships, as if they were adults; in England, a 12-year-old was even elected to the medieval parliament at one point. Boundary lines were less sharp than they would become in later periods.

**Children** Images of children were common in Christianity, from the baby Jesus to Christ's reaching out to children. The opposition to infanticide has been noted. At the same time, Christian families maintained many traditional practices, including a preference for sons (though this may have been slightly less pronounced than in some other societies). Belief in original sin was a potential complication: children were seen as born tainted until purified by baptism, and this might encourage unusually strict disciplinary practices. American Indians, for example, noted the unusual reliance on spanking among European colonists. Efforts to encourage Christian education long contended against the widespread need for children's labor.

**Kinship and innovation** Arguably the most important change that Christianity introduced into family life centered on kinship. While Christian families maintained kinship ties, the religion downplayed their importance as part of the effort to change the balance between family loyalties and religious devotion. Furthermore, the Catholic Church imposed some very clear limits on marriage among kin, particularly limiting selection of cousins. Incest taboos, in other words, were extended more widely. Many scholars – particularly, anthropologists – have seen in this a fundamental distinction from "Oriental" family traditions, promoting greater individualism and ultimately the other trappings of modernity. These are big claims that go beyond an assessment of family history, and probably they took shape over an extended period of time. There is little sign of unusual individualism in European personality types during the postclassical centuries. (Note that, discussed above, Christian definition of core family was not really individualistic, an interesting complication.) But the claims deserve serious attention, at least over the longer haul; they may link to more measurable cultural changes in the West later on.

**Kinship and family** Whatever the larger consequences, it is clear that marriage among close relatives fairly quickly declined in Western Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. By the postclassical period reliance on large kinship networks, and even knowledge of extensive kinship ties, had also declined – particularly outside the aristocracy. European families remained patrilineal, but the mother's near relatives might remain important as well. Most important, the reduction of kinship emphasis increased reliance on the nuclear family (and therefore also on husband-wife interaction) or a narrower definition of the extended family. Large family compounds, with many collateral relatives, were uncommon. These changes would generate further redefinitions in the early modern period, with the rise of what is commonly called the "European-type family", discussed in chapter 17.

**Study questions**

1. What aspects of family life were not deeply altered by Christianity?
2. Did Christianity encourage basic redefinitions of gender relations in the family?
3. What were the key complexities in the Christian approach to sexuality?
4. Why does the Christian approach to kinship seem particularly important in introducing wider change in European society?

**Further reading**

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David Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy and Heresy in Ancient Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2007)

Margaret Mitchell, *Early Christian Families in Context* (Erdmans, 2003)

Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: men, women and sexual renunciation in early Christianity* (Columbia University Press, 1988)

Jack Goody, *Family and Kinship in Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1983)

# Chapter 11: Orthodox Christianity

**Research gaps** It is generally conceded that less work is available on family history in Eastern Europe, at least until more recent centuries, than is true for the West. It is not clear as a result, for example, whether distinctive Christian ideas about kinship were as salient in the East. Certainly the Byzantine aristocracy developed elaborate kinship ties by the 11th century, but this was not entirely dissimilar to kinship patterns among Western aristocrats. One scholar however argues that kinship definitions became more rigorous in Byzantium, among other things generating an early use of last names (in the aristocracy).

**Comparative issues** Not surprisingly, Christian practice in Eastern Europe, increasingly separate from those of the West, diverged in several particulars. Divorce was not as rigorously forbidden, though it was frowned upon, as was remarriage. Women had more secure rights to property, and those in the aristocracy might exercise considerable political authority (though this occurred in the West as well). As in the West, brides brought dowries into arranged marriage, but they did not lose all ownership rights in the process. Marriage practices picked up on older regional traditions and involved more elaborate ceremonial parades than was true in Western Europe – though the sacramental quality of marriage was shared between the two branches of Christianity.

**Celibacy** Eastern Christianity insisted just as firmly on celibacy for monks and nuns as did Western practice. Some monasteries in Greece took elaborate precautions to keep women at a distance (in one case, fortifications were strengthened after a band of prostitutes sought entry). But priests were not required to be celibate – this, along with disputes over papal authority, was one of the big divisions that contributed to the Schism between the two churches in the 11th century. Whether this distinction placed less strain on ordinary family life, lessening the tension between family and spiritual goals, is unclear. Certainly the family was deeply cherished as a religious institution, with strong support as well from the Byzantine state. The codification of Roman law early in the Byzantine imperial period helped clarify rights and roles for family members.

**Childbirth** Despite some valuation of celibacy, most married women were eager to have children and, as in many premodern societies, often resorted to magical practices (along with prayer) to promote pregnancy. Punishments for abortion were severe in the Byzantine Empire, and church leaders also condemned any attempts at contraception.

**Childhood** Roman law also set some parameters for childhood, including age of adulthood but also age of sufficient maturity to allow marriage (12 for girls, 14 for boys). Children under 7 were exempt from punishment for certain crimes. Parents were strongly encouraged to provide some education, though social class and urban-rural differentials persisted. Recent work has emphasized the tension between high child mortality and expressions of "anguish" – another common theme for the postclassical centuries generally.

**Gender issues in early Russia** Gender power structures may have been particularly explicit in the Russian aristocracy, though this may have had less to do with religious conversion than regional tradition. Into the time of Peter the Great, fathers carried a small whip to the wedding ceremonies of their daughters, which they ritually handed over to the groom as a symbol of transfer of power. Peter abolished the practice.

**Conclusion** Historical work on families in East European history in the postclassical period suggests that Christianity introduced some less sweeping changes than was true in Western Europe, though many approaches were shared including the religious sanctification of marriage.

**Study questions**

1. How might different policies toward priestly celibacy have affected family life?
2. What are some important questions that might guide further analysis of family history in postclassical Eastern Europe?

**Further reading**

Arietta Papaconstantinou and Alice-Mary Talbot, eds., *Becoming Byzantine: children and childhood in Byzantium* (Dumbarton Oaks, 2009)

Shaun Tougher and Leslie Brubaker, eds., *Approaches to the Byzantine Family* (Ashgate, 2013)

Nathan Leidholm, *Elite Byzantine Kinship* (Arc Humanities Press, 2019)

## Chapter 12: Islam and Family

**Basic features** The family was deeply valued in Islam, with few of the tensions that cropped up in Christianity and especially Buddhism. A variety of the principles and rules specified by Islam were directed at family life, including regulation of sexual behavior. At the same time, Islam adapted to some prior traditions in the Middle Eastern region, though some of these adaptations were not carried into other Islamic domains. Families should encourage individuals to see themselves as part of a wider community, ultimately extended to the whole Islamic faith.

**Extended family** Extended family forms were emphasized, based on patrilineal descent, often with co-residence of many generations. In principle and often in fact, older family members were greatly valued. It was considered a gift of Allah to be able to care for an older parent or relative. Extended families were seen as providing the greatest stability and affection. As the Qur'an said, "Your Lord has commanded that …you be kind to your parents. If one of them or both of them reach old age with you, do not say to them a word of disrespect…and act humbly to them in mercy."

**Children** In contract to Christianity, Islam held that children were born in innocence. (This was the basis for the efforts to prevent infanticide or the sale of children.) The Qur'an emphasized the importance of providing for children if a marriage dissolved or if parents died, insisting on appropriate treatment for orphans ("clothe them, and speak kindly to them"). Young children were considerably indulged, with little gifts and treats and ample opportunity for play. Expressions of grief at the death of a child were common – beginning with the Prophet himself, who wept openly at a funeral. Parents had the responsibility of developing children's spirituality. Mothers launched the inculcation of basic precepts, while fathers would introduce the child to the mosque. During the postclassical period Islam promoted a network of what today would be called primary schools, *Maktabs,* which focused mainly on promoting memorization of passages in the Qur'an. This might or might not include some training in literacy. But there is no question that literacy gained ground during these centuries, possibly reaching the highest levels in the world at that point (some estimates go as high as 30% of the population). While girls had far more limited educational opportunities, and often depended on home tutoring for any instruction, a few clearly benefited and even became teachers in their own right. (One male scholar reported having several dozen, very skilled, female teachers.) Physical discipline was common in the schools, though some Muslim educators cautioned against its negative effects and urged greater attention to children's individual aptitudes. For boys who did well in school, and with paternal support and encouragement, an array of secondary schools, or *madrasas,* existed in the major cities, where further success could lead to jobs as government or religious officials or, more rarely, to further achievements in scholarship. The variety options should not distract from the fact that for most children, particularly in the countryside, participation in the family economy represented the most important obligation.

**Slavery and the family** Slavery remained important in the Islamic Middle East, with many people purchased or captured from various parts of Europe and Africa. At the same time, Islamic authorities struggled with the dilemma of ownership of people, particularly when the slave were themselves Muslims. Manumission was encouraged, and efforts were extended not to disrupt the nuclear family by selling off a parent or child. As in the classical period, slaves themselves did various jobs, even in the bureaucracy and military, which could also provide opportunities for some family life.

**Gender** Muhammed took explicit pride in the reforms he introduced in Arab tradition, toward the greater valuation of women, beyond the efforts against infanticide. Arranged marriage continued to be the norm, with the family of the bride contributing a dowry; but in contrast to many other societies, wives continued to have ownership rights, for example if the marriage dissolved. And girls had property rights as well as boys in any family inheritance – though their portions were only half as large. Still, property considerations gave women a level of security in family life that was arguably absent in Christianity, with particular

implications for widowhood. Divorce was also possible. Here too, however, arrangements were unequal. Men could divorce fairly readily (and sometimes did), while the procedure was far more cumbersome for women. Finally, Islam allowed for polygamy (up to three wives), if a man could support them (this was not a relevant option for most ordinary families). In the wealthiest households, including those of many Islamic rulers, wider networks of concubines often developed. All of this adds up to a mixed picture. The patriarchal family remained clearly intact: as the Qur'an noted, "Man has authority over women because of what god has conferred on the one in preference to the other."

**Veiling** Gender patterns in Islamic families in the Middle East were further complicated by the spread of the practice of veiling and the promotion of considerable family seclusion for respectable women. This was not at base a requirement of the faith itself. Muhammed had urged veiling for his wives, to prevent them from being bothered in public, even as he encouraged considerable independence in other respects. Veiling itself long predated Islam in the Middle East. During the postclassical centuries it unquestionably became increasingly common in many families – though not the peasantry, where women's physical labor remained vital – and was widely associated with piety.

**Sexuality** Islam did not introduce the tensions into sexuality that were so prominent in Western Christianity. There was no special premium placed on chastity, and indeed extensive reproduction was encouraged as a religious obligation. As the Prophet said, "when one of you has sex with your wife, it is a rewarded act of charity". To be sure, individuals might choose to avoid sexual entanglements. A number of pious women, particularly in the more spiritual Sufi movement, chose that path, but there was no wide institutionalization of the practice. Sexual pleasure was a valid enjoyment, and husbands were urged to make sure of their wives' satisfaction (including recommendations of foreplay). Only anal intercourse or sex during menstruation were clearly forbidden. At the same time, Islam was even more explicit than Christianity in its efforts to confine sexuality to marriage. Premarital sex and extramarital sex were both strongly forbidden. Harsh punishments, included stoning, awaited adulterers (both male and female), though in fact Islam urged forgiveness and reconciliation when possible. Rape was frequently handled through efforts to arrange marriage with the rapist. Though in principle Islam insisted on the need for consent to marriage, in fact it accommodated the regional tradition of frequent child marriage, particularly for girls – another way to discourage premarital sexual activity. While some Islamic references cautioned against too much sexual zeal for both husbands and wives, Islamic rules against contraception and abortion were less severe at that point than was true for Christianity. Still, there was no question that the primary purpose for sexual activity should be procreation, within the marriage.

**Conclusion** Islam generated a powerful framework for family life, with many features that proved impressively durable. The framework was different from that of the other missionary religions, though with many features shared particularly with Christianity; and there were important accommodations to some prior traditions.

**Study questions**

1. How did the Islamic approach to kinship compare to that of Western Christianity?
2. Why do many Muslims, and many historians of Islam, argue that Islam provided a far better family framework for women than Christianity did?
3. What were the main complexities in the Islamic approach to sexuality?

**Further reading**

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Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo* (Princeton University Press, 1992)

Judith Tucker, "Gender in Islamic History," in Michael Adas, ed., *Islamic and European Expansion* (Temple University Press, 1993)

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# Chapter 13: Islam in South Asia

**Background** Islam initially spread only gradually into South Asia, and it never displaced Hinduism as majority religion. Over time, however, and particularly when some regional empires were established by Islamic conquerors, a larger Islamic minority developed during the postclassical centuries and beyond. Interactions between Muslims and Hindus, though often tense, could have significant impact on family life, particularly in the northern part of the subcontinent. Some Hindus reportedly objected to some Muslim family practices, for example veiling, and the severity of Muslim costumes for women was not widely adopted even by Islamic families, which continued to prefer more colorful clothing. However, because both Islam and Hinduism were patriarchal at base, while also relying heavily on patrilineal extended families some overlap and sharing proved possible. This occurred over an extensive period of time, but began in the postclassical period.

**Property** One exchange affected many Muslim families: an increasing adoption of the Hindu practice of passing control of the family dowry over to the husband. Both religions featured arranged marriage and provision of dowry by the family of the bride, but obviously Islam had created important protections for wives in the process. These now tended to erode, with the result that many Islamic men in South Asia became – and remain today – as fiercely protective of their claims over dowry as their Hindu counterparts.

**Purdah** At least as important was the gradual assimilation of Islamic habits of women's seclusion into the patterns of many upper-class Hindu families. Here was a dramatic, if very gradual, change resulting from the impact of Islam. The practice of what was called purdah is clear enough: Upper-class homes established a separate room or section for adult women in the family, elaborately decked out so that their activities would be concealed. Women were restricted from venturing outside the home and wore face coverings for any gathering or excursion. While Hindu women did not accept the veil, they draped scarves over parts of their faces to achieve a similar effect. There is real dispute about when and why purdah developed. Some scholars find origins in traditional Hinduism, well before the arrival of Islam. Almost certainly however Islam's arrival extended the process. Some contend it expanded at that point to protect respectable Hindu women from seizure by Muslim conquerors (at least, such was the fear), and there is evidence that Muslim rulers urged it on their women to prevent interaction with Hindus. These factors highlight the rise of the Delhi sultanate, a major regional invader state, in the 13$^{th}$ century as the key turning point, prompting mutual defensiveness. On the other hand, social status considerations entered in quickly, and the practice became a sign of female respectability and upper-class standing for Hindus and Muslims alike in the northern part of the subcontinent. It was on this basis that the practice would gain ground further in the Mughal period, beginning in the 165h century (even though some Mughal rulers, with Muslim concern for women in mind, actually opposed it.

**Differences** Hindu and Muslim families by no means aligned entirely. Hindus did not in the main accept polygamy nor did regional Hindu rulers accumulate large groups of concubines, as occurred in the Middle East. Muslims did not accept special Hindu practices like sati (developed only in some Hindu areas in any event), because it deeply offended the notion of spiritual equality between men and women. The two religions developed separate systems for those children who went to school, though religious sponsorship was involved in both cases. Specific family rituals varied, and on the whole Muslims did not adopt the Hindu preference for particularly elaborate weddings. Nevertheless, Hindu-Muslim interactions (despite mutual suspicion) engendered some real syncretism when it came to family life, and particularly to gender arrangements – with the changes largely to women's detriment.

**Study questions**

1. What are the major issues in interpreting the development of Purdah?
2. What facilitated some Hindu-Muslim agreement on family practices in India from the postclassical period onward?
3. What key differences remained between the two religious sectors, on family patterns?
4. Some authorities argue that, today, families in the Middle East and South Asia are having more trouble adjusting to changes in gender relations than their counterparts in East Asia, despite the fact that East Asia, too, has a deeply patriarchal tradition. Do earlier differences in family structure between the two regions support this argument?

**Further reading**

Zinat Kauser, *Muslim Families in Medieval India* (Samaki Prakashan, 1992)

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## Chapter 14: Family Patterns in sub-Saharan Africa and the impact of Islam

**Basics** Sub-Saharan Africa is a vast region, with many different ecological zones and population groups. The considerable spread of Bantu peoples promoted some more general features, but the fact is that family styles varied considerably on the subcontinent by the postclassical period. In general, however, the African family stressed extended links and the importance of kinship networks. Knowledge of kin formed an important part of the oral education of young people. Extended families served as the basis for the family economy, and provided security for various family members. For example, when an adult brother died leaving a widow (and her children), another brother was frequently expected to marry, and care for, the woman. Larger clusters of kin frequently formed powerful clan ties, sometimes concentrating on a particular economic niche such as merchant activity.

**Patrilineal and matrilineal** Many groups in Africa highlighted matrilineal descent, and followed up by organizing households around maternal kin. In these situations, where husbands migrated to wives' kin, relationships between fathers and sons in law became crucial, to an unusual extent. But other groups were patrilineal. In these cases the kinship groups tended to be more extensive than in matrilineal, though the emphasis on kin was common to both frameworks. In many cases children were taught to use the terms father and mother for uncles and aunts as well as biological parents. In patrilineal families, groupings of several nuclear families under a common father was regarded as the standard form.

**Polygyny** This form of polygamy was more extensive in Africa than in any other region, particularly of course in patrilineal groups. While chieftains took many wives, even commoners often had two or three. The system was tied to a distinctive agricultural economy. While men were responsible for key tasks, such as clearing land, more agricultural work was done by women than was common in other regions. A man with more wives could handle more land. Correspondingly, many wives welcomed additions to their ranks, who could share in the expected labor.

**Marriage** Many African groups emphasized dowries brought by husbands to the wife's family, sometimes involving cattle or other basic agricultural goods. Westerners sometimes criticized this practice as "buying" a wife, but really it was a standard arrangement designed to provide support to families while establishing a firm economic base to a new marriage –only the obligations involved a distinctive gender balance compared to practices in Europe and Asia. The practice does provide another suggestion that women played a somewhat more active role in many African families than was true elsewhere. While patriarchal arrangements predominated, they were often loose enough to give women opportunities to participate in marketing activities and even, in some regions, acquire political power as reigning queens.

**Children** Children were welcomed into African communities with ceremonies such as naming rituals. In one group mothers were expected to bring the umbilical cord to the ceremony, and if it floated when placed in water the child was regarded as legitimate and accepted. In some cases children lived primarily with an aunt or uncle rather than biological parents. This highlighted the unusually serious family roles assigned to members of the extended group. Again, great variety described specific arrangements. While intense emotional ties between parents and children were not emphasized, there were many signs of affection. The extended family was the primary source of education, as most African groups relied primarily on oral instruction rather than formal schooling.

**Islam** As Islam spread to some populations both along the East African coast and in key West African kingdoms during the postclassical period, it long has a rather less significant impact on family arrangements than was true in South Asia – even as Islamic piety increased in other respects. Arab travelers to West Africa, notably the famous Ibn Battuta, noted with dismay that women were freer in their social interactions with men, as well as more brightly clothes, than Middle Eastern standards called for. Strict domestic confinement was largely rejected. Islamic rules on women's rights to property were however more congenial with African patterns, though in some regions the rules were reworked to

provide equal inheritance. Gender patterns in African Muslim families did change with time, though more after 1600 than in the postclassical period itself, as Middle Eastern habits of dress and modesty gained greater purchase.

**Female Circumcision** In parts of northeastern Africa, traditions of female genital mutilation had developed before the rise of Islam, as an extreme method of attempting to assure sexual fidelity by reducing or eliminating the capacity for pleasure. The practice became deeply ingrained as a badge of female respectability, and a precondition for readiness for marriage. For many in the region, the practice also became associated with fidelity to Islam, providing additional religious sanction – a cultural package that would remain powerful in the region into modern times.

**Conclusion** Most sub-Saharan Africans remained polytheist well after the postclassical period, even in West Africa. Islam in that sense simply added to the considerable regional diversity in family forms. And Islam itself was readily compatible with features such as patrilinearity and polygyny. The most obvious new tension it could introduce concerned women's family roles and contexts.

**Study questions**

1. What were the most distinctive features of African polygyny?
2. What were some of the distinctive features and responsibilities of African kinship systems?
3. How did common African gender patterns suggest some modifications of Islamic family practice?

**Further reading**

Cheryl Johnson-Oden, *Women and Gender in the history of Sub-Saharan Africa* (American Historical Association, 2007)

Esther Hicks, *Infibulattion: Female Mutilation in Islamic Northeast Africa* (Transaction, 1996)

Yizenge Chondoka, *Traditional Marriages in Zambia: a study in cultural history* (Mission Press, 1988)

# Chapter 15 Pre-Columbian Americas

**General** Societies in the Americas developed without contact with developments in Afro-Eurasia until 1492, though some of the family forms independently created bore similarities to structures elsewhere. Substantial destruction of pre-Columbian cultures complicate the evidence available concerning family life. However, some striking findings have emerged, offering opportunities for comparison but also a grasp of some of the family traditions that would later be challenged in the European colonial empires. All the major pre-Columbian civilizations relied heavily on family formation, but interesting differences in family styles emerged as well.

**Mayan culture** What we know about families in Mayan societies corresponds to many familiar features of agricultural society: a family had 5-7 children on average, child labor was vital to the family economy; schooling was available only to the noble class. (Interestingly, noble offspring were subjected to a special procedure that elongated their skulls, making their social status quite visible.) Arranged marriage predominated, and there were both nuclear and extended family arrangement. Often, a man was required to live with his wife's parents for a set period, providing labor, later setting up a household near his father and paternal kin. Extended families often shared facilities such as kitchens. Divorce was rare but did occur; widows were expected to wait at least a year before remarriage, but this could then occur.

**Child sacrifice and discipline** Later in Central America, and particularly under Aztec rule, religious rituals sometimes involved child sacrifice. These rituals became common among Mexica people from the 14th to 16th centuries, and in one case (based on recent discovery of remains in Mexico City) involved as many as 140 children. Priests removed the hearts of the vicitims while still beating, offered as a sacrifice to the gods, and then decapitated the body. The whole process was meant to assure the continued existence of humanity. (Child sacrifice also developed in the Andes, though at a lower rate.) Not surprisingly, there is considerable debate about the meaning of these practices. Some argue that they served as population control (much like infanticide, but with far more ritual involvement). Others see them

as helping to provide group identity and/or reinforce social hierarchy; in some cases, prisoners of war may have been used, another facet, as conquering groups sought to demonstrate their power and control. Spanish conquerors professed shock as the evidence they found, usually seeking to conceal it by building over the remains; this formed part of a strong, and often misleading, narrative of Christian superiority. Other traditional disciplinary practices were also singled out, such as exposing children to the smoke of burning chile peppers as a punishment for misbehavior; there is no way to determine the frequency of harsh measures given the tendency to exaggerate "native" cruelty.

**Aztecs** Aztec family forms replicated early patterns in Central America in many respects. Marriage age may have been a bit younger (18 or so for women, 22 for men). Marriages were often conditional, involving a trial period to determine compatibility; a couple could decide to separate after they had a first child (another practice that would shock the Spanish). Children were seen as gifts of the gods, but were expected to be strictly obedient. Most families were monogamous but some polygamy or concubinage occurred in the upper classes. Divorce was not legally recognized, but spouses could petition the courts for legal separation on grounds of domestic abuse, laziness or infertility on the part of the wife, or economic failure. Property would be divided based on what each party brought to the marriage. Both genders could hold property, but inheritance usually (not invariably) favored sons.

**Incas** Andean civilization came to rely heavily on relationships and attachments among extended kin, with some resemblance to patterns developed In Africa. Words for father and uncle, mother and aunt, brother or sister and cousin were the same, with relationships based on patrilineal descent. Many small families units would be part of a common kin group, or *ayllu,* and almost all marriages were arranged within this group. Elders in the kin group helped allocate property to assure economic viability for individual families. Because there was no writing system, formal education was limited even for children of the nobility, but there was some instruction in this group concerning religion and group history (as well as training for warfare and use of the *quipu* record-keeping system).

**Conclusion** The Americas also included many hunting and gathering or other agricultural groups, with varied specific family practices and traditions, many featuring considerable gender equality in family and group governance. The Iroquois emphasized matrilineal kinship, with family groups sharing a longhouse with a Clan Mother at its head. Cherokee families were also based on matrilineal clans. Many indigenous groups identified and valued "second sex" individuals whose sexual identity differed from biology at birth – another custom that would prompt indignant response from European colonists later on.

**Study questions**

1. What are the most plausible explanations for the practice of child sacrifice? How much does the practice reveal about overall attitudes to children?
2. What were the main differences in family structure between the Andes and Central America?
3. What aspects of pre-Columbian family life reflected standard features of agricultural societies?

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# SECTION III EARLY MODERN PERIOD

## Chapter 16: Early Modern Themes, c.1450-1750

**Themes** The early modern period saw a number of crucial developments, from the new contacts with and from the Americas to the formation of a variety of new colonial and Asian empires. It was not, however, a decisive period in family history on a global scale. Significant changes occurred regionally. The West European family changed in a number of ways, though building from previous patterns. European colonial activities had huge impact on families in the Americas, and also, through the slave trade, on key parts of Africa. In Asia and Eastern Europe, however, most trends extended family features that had been established earlier, though there were some interesting specific adjustments and additions. Islamic, Hindu and Confucian approaches to the family were largely confirmed, in their respective regions. This said, some of the major systematic innovations introduced in the early modern period deserve to be considered in terms of family impact.

**Demography** A key set of changes in population structure involved the new biological exchanges with the Americas. Into the Americas came new diseases, domesticated animals, and crops – as well as European and African immigrants whether voluntary or forced. The net result was a significant population decline, though the 18th century saw the beginnings of some recovery. For the rest of the world, access to crops of American origin, notably corn and the potato, added to available food supplies; it is estimated that about 30% of the plant foods consumed today are of American origin. Along with some internal improvements, for example in Chinese rice cultivation, this led to significant population growth in various parts of Asia. Europeans, more conservative about new foods – many American foods were long suspect because they were not mentioned in the Bible and were seen as sources of disease – began to convert to greater use (particularly of the potato) by the late 17th century, leading to very rapid population growth for the next two centuries. For much of the world, then, family life was undoubtedly conditioned by increases in the numbers of children available, plus of course by the fact that numerically there were more families than ever before.

**Commerce** New trade with the Americas, plus improvements in ship design and navigation, led to a major surge in global commerce. Europeans used American silver to pay for a growing array of Asian spices and manufactured goods. China, India (until the 18th century) as well as Western Europe saw major economic growth. Latin America and parts of Africa and Eastern Europe were pressed to produce more foods and raw materials for export. An increasing divide opened up in terms of regional economic prosperity, some symptoms of which have lasted to the present, and this would affect the context for family life. More generally, many historians believe that the commercial surge pressed people in many regions to work harder than they had before, and this too could have family impact. Reliance on child labor may have increased in many areas, though it is also true that commerce provided new incentives to provide some education for children who could benefit from some literacy and numeracy skills.

**Politics** The watchword of the early modern period was empire. Major European countries created colonial empires, particularly in the Americas but including a few coastal areas in western and southern Africa and in Southeast Asia; India would be added to the list beginning in the 18th century. New Islamic empires arose in the Middle East – Ottoman and Safavid – and with the Mughals in India, while the Russian empire surged forward from 1450 onward. China reestablished empire after the expulsion of the Mongols. These were important developments, but the new or reaffirmed governments did not necessarily have major impact on family structures. Asian empires tended to reaffirm older family patterns, seeking to embellish them as a basis for overall social stability.

**Culture** No systematic cultural changes occurred on a global basis during the early modern period. Many regions sought to confirm and protect cultural traditions amid the other changes. Japan, most notably, cut off most global contacts after 1600 in the interests of cultural and social preservation – though within the country the role of Confucianism expanded. Considerable cultural continuity in much of Asia helped confirm family continuity, and vice versa. In contrast, the importation of Christianity to the Americas directly applied to family life, while complex cultural changes in Europe also prompted major family innovations.

**Continuities and adjustments: the Islamic empires** The early modern period did not introduce major new themes in family life or structure in most Muslim-majority societies. The formation of the Mughal Empire in India, particularly during its prosperous initial century, increased Hindu-Muslim interactions, accelerating the adoption of purdah as a common practice in the upper classes. Mughal emperors imported the practice of large harems with literally hundreds of concubines, and some Hindu rulers began to copy the pattern; there was also evidence that divorce and even some polygamy spread in Hindu ranks. But these changes did not affect the masses of the population, where older forms persisted – with the one exception, that urban growth saw an expansion of prostitution. The formation of the Ottoman empire also did not constitute a major new stage in family patterns, though there was some interesting internal regional variation for example around the issue of whether to include or exclude women from family property arrangements.

**Continuities and adjustments: East Asia** Chinese families did not change in fundamental ways, but there were some interesting enhancements, often encouraged by the state under the Ming and early Qing dynasties. Government encouragement of commendations to women who displayed full family loyalty was one example, even as foot binding continued to spread and many women became identified only in terms of their family position. Another interesting effort involved attempts to promote but also regulate identification of ancestors within a family clan, to facilitate ancestor worship but also clarify the family lineage of the clan – again a new move on behalf of older family goals. In Japan, extended families remained the norm though the sprawling family networks of traditional clans – based on elaborate marriage alliances -- tended to recede in favor of more straightforward extended households based on paternal descent; patriarchal power increased in the process. As always, peasant families required extensive labor collaboration between husband and wife, modifying the patriarchal pattern in practice. Alongside these patterns, a noteworthy expansion of education – mainly in Buddhist-derived schools that now emphasized practical skills (the *terakaya* schools) – also affected family life, though particularly in the cities and particularly with regard to boys.

**Conclusion** Regional patterns invite further comparison of family styles during the early modern period, particularly in contrasting the relative stability of Asia with more disruptive changes in Europe and its colonies.

**Study questions**

1. Why is it difficult to venture global generalizations about family history during the early modern period?
2. What were the major changes in global demography? What were the key regional differences?
3. What were some of the ways major Asian societies sought to confirm basic family traditions during the period?

**Further reading**

Beshara Doumani, *Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean: a social history* (Cambridge University Press, 2017)

Maurice Freedman, "The Family in China, Past and Present," *Pacific Affairs* 34 (1961-2)

Conrad Totman, *Early Modern Japan* (University of California Press, 1993)

Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2013)

## Chapter 17: Early Modern Western Europe/British North America

**Main trends** Several factors introduced some fundamental changes into Western family life, some of which were then carried over into the coastal colonies of North America. The rise of what is called the "European-style" family took shape early in the period, with huge implications for family structure and gender roles. Then the rise of Protestantism stimulated further changes, some of which also affected Catholic regions. Growing commerce and the increasing role of cities, even before industrialization, provided a final element from the late 17th century onward, supplemented by other new cultural influences

in the 18th century. Not all of these developments neatly meshed, and there were significant divisions in family behavior between middle and lower classes, and between cities and the countryside.

**European-style family** Catholic kinship rules may have created some of the basis for a further change in family structure, but it was apparently a new concern for protecting access to property that prompted a more decisive shift. Beginning in the 15th-16th centuries, a growing number of West European peasants and artisans began raising their marriage age, to a standard of roughly 25-6 for women, 27-8 for men (an unusually small age gap, as well as a delayed arrangement). This was truly a change from below; the aristocracy did not participate. The goal seems to have been assurance that the new family would have access to property as a nuclear unit (either land or an artisanal shop); concurrently, a growing number of propertyless people simply could not marry. This pattern also helped control the birth rate, which rose slightly in the 16th century but then stabilized during most of the 17th.

**Implications** Beyond the demographic result, this distinctive family pattern highlighted the independent nuclear unit. Late marriage meant that the children of the union would have little contact with grandparents, who would be reaching an age near death. (This has raised interesting questions about the role of grandparents in children's socialization, as a historical variable.) The importance of broader kinship ties declined further. And while nuclear families might locate near other relatives (based still on patrilineal definitions), literally extended households became far less common. The independent nuclear unit, perhaps supplemented by a laborer or two living in the household, also increased the importance of cooperation between husband and wife as workers, probably modifying though not eliminating patriarchal inequality. Late marriage also increased the importance of community controls over the sexuality of young adults. While there was some expansion of the rate of illegitimate births, they remained in check until the 18th century. However, a growing number of couples, once engaged, did begin to have sex, resulting In a rise in "prebridal pregnancies" that led to births about 7 months after actual marriage. Here was an interesting new tension in family and community life.

**Protestantism** From a family standpoint the obvious result of Protestantism was increased emphasis on the importance of marriage and the family; the idea of a spiritual advantage in celibacy was simply removed. Martin Luther thus pointedly married a former nun. In consequence, by the 17th century family manuals in Protestant countries like England began emphasizing the importance of the husband-wife relationship and the importance of mutual happiness, including sexual pleasure. Husbands and fathers, though, were still assigned special responsibility for the moral education of children. Protestant countries, headed by places like Sweden and Scotland, also rapidly expanding schooling, though still particularly for boys, as the literacy rate began to rise rapidly. Here was an interesting change in the experience of childhood and in the obligations of many parents. Some of these changes also began to show up in Catholic countries, though often slightly later. Growing commerce provided new motivations to promote literacy and numeracy regardless of religion.

**New consumerism: the family as haven** By the late 17th century family life was further altered, at least for those with some means, by new consumer opportunities. Overseas trade was bringing products like coffee, tea, sugar, chocolate, and while some of these were consumed in shops, like the burgeoning coffee houses – largely a male preserve – others contributed to new family occasions. This shift was further enhanced by growing interest in chinaware and table settings. Increasingly, many families took an evening meal together, organized and scheduled by the wife and mother – this replaced more slapdash eating patterns. Revealingly, cookbooks, which previously had focused on preparing food for occasional village festivals, now focused on cooking for the family. Interest in better bedding, decorated armoires and other furnishings, similarly demonstrated a desire to make the home a more attractive and comfortable place – indeed, the family was one of the principal foci of rising consumerism in general. All of this further suggested a partial separation between family and the local community. Some historians had argued that, in a more competitive economic environment, men were shifting from strong emotional reliance on male-male friendships, to greater attachment to family members. These changes were clearest for families above the poverty level, but they applied to rural as well as urban settings. And even among the poor, emotional investment in marriage (where it was economically possible) may have risen as well.

**Rise of romantic love** Love was not a new topic for the Western family. In the late postclassical period, troubadours had entertained the aristocracy with tales of chivalric love – intense devotion, often outside

marriage. It as in the 18th century however that romantic love and family began more clearly to intertwine. A new reading genre, the novel, helped promote the notion. The spread of domestic manufacturing gave some young people opportunities to earn some money without waiting for inherited property. Rapid population growth now kicked in as well (British population grew a full 100% between 1750 and 1800), and this meant that parents could no longer provide customary inheritances for all their children anyway, which reduced their authority. The upshot was that a growing number of young people moved away from arranged marriage, forming attachments on their own. By midcentury some law courts in places like Switzerland agreed that if a young person, male or female, objected to a parental choice on grounds that love was impossible, the arrangement was void. Consumerism played a role in this category as well: growing numbers of young people developed new interests in more fashionable and colorful clothing, with courtship appeal in mind. Arranged marriage still occurred; courtship often involved selection of a mate in the same socio-economic category in any event. But the basis for marriage, and perhaps even more the expectations surrounding marriage, were changing for many people.

**A sexual revolution** Among some groups, particularly the lower, less propertied classes in both countryside and city, sexual habits began to change in the 18th century as well. Quite simply, more and more people engaged in sex before marriage – with a considerable resulting increase in the rate of illegitimate births. Here was another demonstration of the declining control of parents and community. In some cases, young men and women both eagerly participated in the new license. In other cases, men undoubtedly took advantage of propertyless women, as some propertyless girls, eager for marriage, sought to substitute sexual willingness for dowry only to be disappointed as the men moved on. Respectable groups deplored this trend (and exaggerated it), and by the 19th century worked to devise an alternative courtship model that would delay sex. But the disruption was considerable, and lasted certainly for several decades among some groups.

**British North America** Most of the features of the early modern European family were brought by the British colonists to the Americas – including some of the internal tensions and contradictions. American experience was altered somewhat by the greater availability of land and the desperate need for labor. This prompted somewhat younger marriage ages particularly for women – 23 instead of 26 – and slightly higher birth rates – but within the basic framework of the European-style family including its emphasis on nuclearity. New interests in romantic love and selective changes in sexual behavior involved 18th-century North America as well, and for essentially the same reasons as applied to Western Europe. American parents may have been somewhat more careful in dealing with their children than was true in Europe, if only because of the need for labor in a situation where older children might simply take off for the frontier. American child-centeredness was more obvious by the 19th century, as noted by European visitors, but it may have had origins earlier on. In some cases, fathers ceded some property to sons even before the full inheritance, in hopes of maintaining good relations – though there were cases (as in Europe) of bitter, even violent disputes between impatient adult sons and their fathers. (The European-style family was not necessarily good for intergenerational relations.) Overall, however, an overlap in basic family patterns would continue to describe transatlantic history from this point onward – bolstered, of course, by frequent travel and contact and shared reading matter.

**Conclusion** The early modern period saw some intriguing and fundamental changes in Western family life. They were not all fully consistent, and important social class differences opened up as well. But the distinctiveness of the Western family, already suggested in features such as kinship patterns, notably increased. Some of the changes may help explain other innovative behaviors, in areas such as economic innovation or political unrest, though the connections are complicated and debatable. One result however was very clear: by the 18th century Europeans boasted family values – including Christian traditions but now more besides – through which they confidently judged and often condemned the family systems of other societies – including their growing colonial holdings. Judgments about marriage, sex and parenting in Asia and Africa became standard fare, into the 19th century and beyond.

**Study questions**

1. What was the European-style family and why did it take shape?
2. What were some of the new social class differences in family life in the West?
3. How did consumerism intertwine with changes in family life and family formation?

4. What were the main similarities and differences between West European and British North American family patterns?

**Further reading**

Mary Hartman, *The Household and the Making of History: a subversive view of the Western past* (Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Marilyn Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood: eighteenth-century cultures and the ideology of domesticity* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013)

Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western History since 1500* (2nd ed., Longman, 2005)

Katherine Lynch, *Individuals, Families and Communities in Western Europe, 1200-1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) (excellent in itself, but also with references to a vast previous historical literature on the subject)

Marilyn Coleman and Lawrence Ganong, eds., *The Social History of the American Family* (4v., Sage, 2014)

# Chapter 18: Latin America

**Disease** The arrival of Europeans in the Caribbean and the Americas, in growing force after 1500, disrupted established family life in many ways. High death rates took their toll; we lack elaborate evidence about family reactions to the new contagious diseases, and of course many whole families were wiped away. But ultimately mortality rates above 80% must have imposed tremendous strain on family survivors, and the process did not end until about 1700 (only to be repeated then in the northwest and Pacific Oceania). Ultimately, disease resistance and the growth of a mixed, or mestizo, population ended the vulnerability, allowing demographic growth that would continue until recently.

**Other disruptions** European arrival also brought intense Christian missionary activity, particularly in Latin America but also in the French holdings in the north (Protestants were long less interested in this effort). Missionaries found many faults with existing family patterns and worked to correct them. In addition, however, European sexual depredations created a high rate of illegitimate births, another ongoing challenge. Family structures rebounded in many ways; it would be misleading to overemphasize the fluidity. But social class differentials, in one of the world's most stratified societies, introduced further complications.

**Christian concerns** Missionaries in Latin America quickly concluded that a number of Native American family practices were immoral, though the specifics varied with the region. Clothing was a concern, and both genders were pushed toward greater concealment – men ultimately adopting loose-fitting pants. Older patterns, like a Mayan willingness to allow boys and girls to swim together naked, were quickly attacked. Other functional practices, such as abortion, were attacked, and locals were urged to replace extended families with more strictly nuclear households. A great deal of attention was paid to regulating contacts between unmarried young people and eliminating the custom of trial marriages. In other words, as one historian has put it, the Spanish worked hard to subvert the normal conduct of Indian family life in the name of Christian values. Many locals withdrew from areas with active missions, to preserve older customs, or found ways to compromise. Some women, for example, lied to authorities about their kinship with a proposed husband, in regions where traditions allowed matches with close relatives. Efforts to convert children, and in a few cases school them, could also be disruptive, but educational systems were not in fact very extensive beyond a portion of the native upper class. On the other hand colonial authorities worked hard, and successfully, to eliminate earlier practices such as child sacrifice.

**Family authority and discipline** Europeans generally strove to promote greater authority for men in the family (this was true among native populations in North America as well). They criticized some customary disciplinary practices with children as cruel – for example, exposure to hot pepper smoke – but they confirmed the importance of parental control and the importance of child labor, pressing whole families to work on colonial estates.

**Illegitimacy** Spanish and Portuguese conquerors, from Christopher Columbus onward, routinely requested access to native women. As one put it, after a military victory, "You are to deliver women with light skins, corn, chickens, eggs and tortillas". The practice was compounded by the fact that, initially, relatively few women came over from Spain. Sexual depredations were profoundly shocking, but resistance was difficult; and some women participated more willingly out of affection or in hopes of preferential treatment. And some matches developed with mutual commitment but simply without the benefit of a formal marriage ceremony. The result was a persistently high rate of illegitimate births, plus a large number of maternally-based families. In one Brazilian parish in 1740, for example, 23% of all births were registered as illegitimate, and percentages would actually rise even higher in many parts of Latin America in the 19th century.

**Results** Consequences were varied. Some fathers recognized illegitimate offspring and tried to provide economic support, even stipulating a share in inheritance; but others bowed out entirely. Mothers raising children on their own received considerable help from other village or neighborhood families; the results for many children were not as unstable as might be imagined. A number of children "circulated" – that is, they were sent to families that were childless or needed some supplementary help – though this sometimes led to harsh treatment. In one Chilean city as late as 1880 17% of all children were living in households with adults who were not their parents. Reliance on Catholic-run orphanages developed as well, with children allocated for labor when they became old enough. (Some orphanages, however, as in Cuba, would not take Indian, Black or mixed-race children.) These patterns contributed as well to a pronounced gap between upper- and middle-class families, disproportionately of European origin and officially hewing to Christian family values, and the real and imagined behaviors of the *mestizo* and native populations. Well into the 20th century condemnations of popular family behavior as "infamous", "leaving an indecent and shameful mark" circulated widely in official circles. Preserving or re-establishing family life in Latin America posed clear challenges, prompting a variety of responses.

**Study questions**

1. What were the main Christian concerns about American family practices?
2. What were the common responses to high illegitimacy rates? How disruptive were they for the children involved?

**Further reading**

Ondina Gonzalez and Bianca Premo, eds., *Raising an Empire: children in early Iberia and colonial Latin America* (University of New **Mexicess**, 2007)

Tobias Hecht, ed., *Minor Omissions: children in Latin American history and society* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2002)

Richard Trexler, *Gendered Violence, Political Order and the European Conquest of the Americas* (Cornell University Press, 1995)

Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood and Robert Haskett, eds., *Indian Women of Early Mexico* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1997)

## Chapter 19: Atlantic Slavery

**Disruptions** The rise of the Atlantic slave trade and American slavery were hugely disruptive of family life. At the same time capacity to form families recovered to an impressive degree, a tribute to the importance of the institution and the persistence of enslaved peoples. Disruption began with the seizure of slaves in Africa by European traders or, more often, African merchants. Young people were snatched, their parents almost always left behind; in some cases, a brother and sister might be captured together but then immediately separated. For Africans accustomed to extensive family ties, the result must have been massive disorientation and grief – as a few who later left written accounts attest.

**Impact on Africa** In many parts of West and southern Africa, so many millions were seized in the three centuries after 1800 that regional demography was seriously affected – both because of outright loss and the deprivation of many people who were just reaching their childbearing years. Further, a marked gender

disparity resulted, because young men were disproportionately valued. The twin results were, first, overall demographic stagnation in the early modern period – compared to growth in Asia and Europe – and, second, greater reliance on polygynous families as a means of accommodating excess women.

**Family law in the Americas** Throughout most of the Americas, slave families, once formed in the new territory, had no status in law. Slaveowners systematically resisted any legal recognition that would limit their ability to sell or move slaves regardless of family status. Owners themselves were somewhat divided concerning the informal families that surfaced: some remained hesitant, but others thought that families might promote greater stability and reduce the risk of flight. But this did not change the legal liability. Colonial law was also quickly applied to the offspring of enslaved women sired by Whites: they were slaves too. Rapes and sexual coercion of women were a common feature of slavery throughout the Americas.

**Further complications** Some enslaved people formed families where husband and wife worked on different, though usually neighboring, estates, with mutual visits once or twice a week (the practice was called "marrying abroad"). The high labor demands on slaves, both male and female, represented another hindrance to full family life, and children were expected to start work at a young age. But the great threat was sales of one or more children or a spouse. In the early 19th century, slaveowners in states like Virginia, in the United States, increasingly took advantage of the end of most transatlantic slave trading by selling slaves to the cotton-growing regions of the deep south, often without regard to family status. It has been estimated that a substantial minority of families were disrupted in this fashion, and of course abolitionist literature, quite understandably, played up this feature of slavery in trying to encourage opposition. Slave owners sometimes required the wife whose husband was sold away to take another partner, for purposes of procreation to increase the labor supply. Finally, slave owners frequently divided their slaves in passing inheritance along to their own children, again without much consistent regard for family status.

**Adjustments** Despite all the barriers, meaningful family life developed for many enslaved people, with deep emotional attachments. Some slave communities were able to identify one woman, usually somewhat older, to assist with care for younger children while parents and siblings were at work. While family ties were often precarious because of the sale of fathers or sons, women were less often at risk and as a result mother-daughter ties often developed particular intensity. In tobacco-growing areas, where few slaves were needed on each plantation and "marrying abroad" was common as a result, slaves families managed to develop larger kinship ties, sometimes over a wide area; this was less possible amid the more concentrated labor demands of cotton or sugar plantations. Kinship ties in some cases revived West African traditions, including matrilineal descent. Families in general, whether nuclear or extended, offered not only economic assistance to family members, but emotional consolation as well amid the many misfortunes that could affect enslaved people.

**Aftermath** Freed or escaped slaves often went to great lengths to try to retrieve enslaved family members. After Emancipation in the United States, former slaves took out newspaper ads and attempted other methods in order to reestablish family ties. Considerable and often bitter debate has addressed the question of the longterm impact of slavery on African American or African Brazilian family structure, into the 20th century.

**Study questions**

1. How did the slave trade affect African family structure?
2. Why did planters quickly move to deprive slave families of legal status?
3. Why were enslaved people often successful in establishing families despite the many impediments?

**Further reading**

Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: slave youth in nineteenth-century America* (Indiana University Press, 2011

Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Vintage, 1977)

H.P. McAdoo, ed., *Black Families* (3rd ed., Sage, 1997)

# Chapter 20: Russia: early modern through 19th century

**Gender roles** By the early modern period Russian families may have been more rigidly patriarchal than their counterparts in the West, even though Russian Christianity, like its Catholic counterpart, sanctified marriage as a sacrament and surrounded it with considerable ritual. Some evidence suggests that religious men were particularly likely to emphasize their authority over wives, even with violence, as part of their sense of appropriate structure. In some cases, bouts of domestic abuse did not preclude a normally friendly spousal relationship, and certainly work cooperation between partners was an essential part of the peasant economy. And it is simply impossible to venture comparisons of domestic violence rates with any certainty. It was revealing, however, that a mid-16th century treatise urged husbands to whip disobedient wives, though this should be done without anger. The symbolic transfer of the whip in marriage, from father to new husband, was accompanied by the phrase, "Should you not behave as you ought toward your husband, he in my stead will admonish you with this whip." In the upper classes, women were kept fairly secluded, and sometimes veiled in public. Russian Christianity allowed a man, twice, to divorce his wife by sending her to a convent, where she would become dead to the outside world while the husband could freely remarry.

**Lamentation** A number of ethnographers have noted a custom, perhaps since preChristian times, of female lamentation before a marriage, that persisted until the 20th century. Women would gather prior to a marriage to cry and tear their hair, mourning the loss of the bride's childhood and the suffering she might endure in marriage.

**Petrine reforms** Peter the Great's reforms at the end of the century intended to cut into the pattern at least for the upper class. Aristocratic women gained much more public freedom, and greater latitude in dress. They could attend a variety of public events, such as concerts. Peter also hoped to improve their educational level, if only to improve the domestic context for the education of sons. Peter also in principle abolished arranged marriage; a decree of 1702 held the all marriage decisions should be voluntary and that prospective partners should meet at least six weeks before any engagement, with full freedom to renounce the match. Catherine the Great furthered the process of change, particularly by extending opportunities for education for upper-class women (as with the Smolenyi Institute for Girls of Noble Birth, in 1764). At one point the empress even argued for educational equality but then pulled back with the claim that :the intent and goal of the rearing of girls should consist most of all in making good homemakers, faithful wives, and caring mothers." These developments were important but they touched only the top level of the social hierarchy; by the later 18th century only 7% of all school students were female.

**Feminist voices** Despite periods of political repression and limitations on contact with the West in the 19th century, a growing number of women writers, particularly later in the century, began denouncing the subordination of women in the family. Some men joined in, as with a doctor who urged more education for women not only for the sake of the home but also to prepare for other professions such as nursing. For a few, opportunities opened up in higher education, even medical schools. On the other hand, for better or worse, there was no large movement in Russia to remove women from the labor force in order to focus on the family; through the 19th century and beyond, most women were expected to combine productive work with primary family responsibilities. While an urban middle class began to emerge in Russia, it did not gain the cultural influence of its Western counterpart.

**Early industrialization** After the Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861, labor mobility improved somewhat, while population growth also reduced access to property for some peasants. Literacy began to increase as well. This led to some developments similar to those in the West a century earlier, and particularly an increase in rates of premarital sex and illegitimacy. Earlier, in a more strictly patriarchal context, women found guilty of premarital sex were severely shamed, and often could not marry. But now things began to loosen up; one observer claimed, with due exaggeration, that it was becoming impossible to find a virgin any more. More young people also defied traditions of arranged marriage, insisting on picking their own partners. Russian family patterns were in flux by the early 20th century.

**Study questions**

1. What were some key differences between Russian and Western family patterns during the early modern and 19th century periods?
2. What was the impact, but also what were the limitations, of Petrine reforms for family life?
3. Why did a Victorian family model not develop in Russia?

**Further reading**

Barbara Clemens, Barbara Engel and Christine Worobec, eds., *Russia's Women: accommodation, resistance, transformation* (University of California Press, 1991)

Barbara Engel, *Breaking the Ties that Bound: the politics of marital strife in fin-de-siecle Russia* (Cornell University Press, 2011)

Barbara Norton and Jehanne Gheith, *An Improper Profession; women, gender and journalism in late imperial Russia* (Duke University Presds, 2001)

SECTION IV 19TH CENTURY

## Chapter 21: Industrial Society

**Background** The industrial revolution first took shape in Britain, then in other parts of the West from the late18th-early 19th centuries onward. It would develop in Japan and Russia beginning in the late 19th century, and then after World War II, and particularly by the 1980s, became the dominant economic form throughout most of the world. The shift from agriculture to industrial base had deep consequences for the family, just as the earlier advent of agriculture had done. This short chapter captures essential features which were then combined with regional traditions and distinctions over the course of the last two centuries.

**Purpose** The most sweeping change involved the virtual elimination of the family as a production unit, aside from some small shops and (declining) family farms. Economic functions remained, but they became somewhat more diffuse. In many cases also, work itself moved outside the home, necessitating difficult decisions about adult family roles and household care. On the other hand, with economic functions shifting, other family purposes might receive greater emphasis, for example as sources of emotional and sexual satisfaction. Over time also, families surfaced an additional role as a consumer unit, for example with the emergence of family vacations or the advent of television as a source of family entertainment.

**Children** Changes in the location and organization of production reduced the economic contributions of children, though child labor might remain a vital resource for some families for some time. New technologies eliminated some children's tasks and also created new safety hazards. Many families also disliked the idea of having their offspring work for total strangers in the new, impersonal settings. To these changes were added laws restricting certain forms of child labor and requiring schooling, though enforcement varied. All of this added up to a redefinition of children from economic assets to liabilities. In turn, this required parents ultimately to move toward a lower birth rate. The typical industrial family ultimately involved 2.5 children or fewer, compared to the earlier 8 or more. Parental expectations had to adjust to this new restriction, which might also encourage much greater attention to the individual child. Birth control methods also gained new importance in marriage, and in some cases the role of marriage as a source of sexual pleasure expanded.

**Child mortality** Industrialization broadly construed also generated the new public health measures and living standards, particularly in the growing cities, that began to cut into traditional levels of child mortality, mainly from the late 19th century onward. Higher survival rates added to the reasons to cut birth rates, as families realized the implications. But they also freed families from the expectation that one or more children were likely to die (and children from the deaths of siblings). This might make the deaths that did still occur even more painful, but it dramatically changed the emotional experience of most families.

**Gender** Industrializing societies have all generated new educational opportunities for women and this along with the birth rate change raises important questions about traditional patriarchal family relations. These questions might be further sharpened when daughters and particularly wives took jobs outside the home. Generally, women continued to be held to special family responsibilities, but their voice in family decisions often increased (particularly when they brought in a wage of their own). Opportunities for dispute might also become more common.

**Extended family** On the whole the importance of the extended family declined. With industry, many young people moved to the cities, which automatically attenuated family ties at least for a generation or two. The same shift resulted from the ability to earn money independently in young adulthood, without waiting for property inheritance. Often these changes also saw a decline in arranged marriage. Extended family relations did not disappear, particularly amid some regional cultures, but the centrality of the nuclear family increased. At the same time, greater life expectancy might increase interactions between grandparents and grandchildren, though it might also produce new pressure on adult children to care for ageing parents.

**Conclusion** Families managed to adjust to the industrial revolution – another sign of the resilience of the institution. But they had to negotiate a number of changes and on the whole their importance probably declined. On the other hand, in many cases the family's role in providing active emotional support and affection may have increased. A number of cultures saw an increase in discussions of the importance of familial love, both in marriage and in parent-child relations. Overall, the industrial family was a considerably different institution from its more traditional counterpart, though some adjustments were and are painful and regional variations on the industrial pattern were (and are) important as well.

**Study questions**

1. Why did industrial societies ultimately require a redefinition of childhood?
2. Why did industrialization ultimately require some shuffling of adult family roles?
3. How did families compensate for the decline of their production functions?

**Further reading**

Peter N. Stearns, *The Industrial Turn in World History* (Routledge, 2016)

Edward Shorter, *Making of the Modern Family* (Basic Books, 1975)

# Chapter 22: The Western Family in the 19th century

**Context** Western European families in the 19th century must be approached from several angles. First, they dealt with some of the trends already emerging in the 18th century, including new interest in romantic love and new sexual patterns. Second, they were the first families to react to the industrial revolution. Third, their patterns revealed new kinds of social divisions, not only urban-rural but also middle-class/working-class. The results were not uncomplicated. They reflected a mix of some standard reactions to industrialization with some distinctive Western features. Finally, basic Western trends now applied not only to Western Europe but to the settler societies: United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, though with some special features attached to high rates of immigration and the treatment of the indigenous minority. (All the settler societies experimented with trying to destroy indigenous cultures by forcing children into boarding schools, with hideous consequences.)

**Middle-class families** Middle-class families, a rapidly-growing minority in the cities, quickly began to set up some distinctive family styles and goals, that are sometimes covered under the heading of the "Victorian" family. They tended to react to early industrialization by defining the family as a place of emotional and moral refuge from the brutishness of business life – a "haven in a heartless world", as one American manual put it. In this vision, women were withdrawn from the workforce; they were held to possess the special qualities needed for nurturing children and maintaining an emotional oasis. Men were the breadwinners – extending an old tradition of male responsibility – but were supposed to be able to control their more aggressive impulses in the family context. No longer a production unit, the family became a consumer center, now adorned with fashionable goods like a family piano, and of course an emotional refuge. The practice of family vacations began to develop, though men often stayed at work at least part of the time.

**Courtship and marriage** Formally arranged marriages declined, though parents still oversaw the courtship process. Courtship itself presumably allowed a couple to get to know each other and fall in love, ultimately leading to marriage. Men could not participate in this process until they were on a sound economic footing, so normally there was an age gap of five years or more with the objects of their initiatives. Men clearly wielded economic power within a marriage, but wives had moral authority as well as the time available for family matters, so the union was seen more as a partnership at least in principle, sustained as well by ongoing affection. Urbanization raised challenges for finding a suitable partner. In most cities, newspapers began to carry marriage want ads, to facilitate matches in an unfamiliar environment; the new messages mixed economic appeals – the practical needs for a partner – with more novel aspirations for love.

**Sexuality** Middle-class families reacted strongly against the sexual revolution of the lower classes, and they also took the lead in reducing the birth rate – in some cases, from the late 18th century onward.

Initially, birth rate reduction required periods of sexual abstinence within a marriage, as well as avoidance of activity during courtship. By mid-century, thanks to the vulcanization of rubber, new devices like condoms and diaphragms (called pessaries) became available, but respectable middle-class people were slow to adopt these, fearing they would encourage sexual license. Victorian respectability involved a belief that women had low levels of sexual desire and thus could appropriately regulate overall sexual behavior in courtship and marriage alike. This did not always work – courtship intensity might go too far – and young men (and doubtless some husbands) also might avail themselves of prostitutes or abuse the family servant. But the culture remained vigorous through the middle decades of the century, including fierce efforts to prevent masturbation. In the final decades of the 19th century interest in sexual pleasure did gain ground, though haltingly, and some use of birth control devices within marriage also took hold.

**Childrearing** The middle-class family ideal emphasized the importance of mutual love between parents – particularly mothers – and children. Smaller family size encouraged more attention to the individual child. A growing interest in assuring children's happiness showed in the new tradition of celebrating their birthdays, a practice that gained ground during the middle decades of the century. The rapid decline of the infant mortality rate between 1880 and 1920, throughout the Western world, further encouraged these patterns. Mothers now assumed a growing responsibility for moral guidance, and middle-class parents also took the lead in promoting education for their offspring, at least through primary school levels and often beyond; children were not expected to hold jobs. In other words, the middle class sponsored a considerable redefinition of childhood and of the role of children in the family.

**Working-class patterns** The working class might be influenced by middle-class family values – and their family habits were often criticized by middle-class observers, but their patterns differed in several ways. They were slower to reduce birth rates, continuing to expect, or hope for, some economic contribution from children. When the class realized that traditional rates were economically damaging, thanks to limited child labor opportunities, they still maintained higher levels than their middle-class counterparts. Achieving lower rates often required difficult periods of sexual abstinence, for birth rate devices were often either unavailable or expensive; levels of abortion rose as well, though illegal. Marriages were not formally arranged, but they were often negotiated within the urban working-class community, sometimes after a girl had become pregnant. The pattern here was not traditional, but it also deviated from the starry-eyed courtship ideals of the middle class. Finally, working-class families typically developed particularly tight bonds between mothers and daughters, which often extended into the adulthood of the latter, even after marriage, as both men and women sought somewhat separate entertainment options.

**Immigrants** The immigrant experience in the settler societies offered special features of its own. Many immigrants were expected to send money to families back home, reflecting older ideals of economic responsibility. Immigrants often brought high birth rates into their new settings. In some cases, as with Jewish immigrants to the United States around 1900, they quickly learned novel birth control goals from co-religionists already in the country; in other cases, it took a generation or more to drop to native working-class levels. Immigrants also had to decide about family control over children, amid new public school requirements and work opportunities. Again in the United States for example, Slavic families were generally willing to let daughters work as domestic servants, but Italians strove to keep daughters engaged in operations within the family.

**Extended families** In all urban families, extended families took a hit with the process of urbanization itself; this was one of the reasons that formally arranged marriages declined. Unexpectedly however extended households actually became more common in the urban environment, in both working- and middle classes. The typical pattern involved an older parent – most commonly, a woman given higher life expectancy rates – moving into the household of an adult daughter, both to seek support but also to provide child care services. This trend would only begin to be reversed from the 1920s onward, as co-residence began to recede.

**Schooling** All Western families were deeply affected by the expansion of school requirements during the 19th century, even though attendance was not yet rigorously enforced. This played a role in birth rate decisions, and it also contributed to changing gender dynamics as the education gap between boys and girls steadily declined. Famously, French peasants began to decide that it was important to let their offspring go to school by the 1860s and 1870s, even as they still hoped to preserve a family-based

economy. Boys now needed literacy and numeracy to facilitate better farming practices and more effective marketing; girls might qualify for jobs as teachers that would provide family resources at least for a while. In the process, of course, the authority of parents over children – after their early years – declined, not infrequently leading to new tensions, particularly around the period now newly defined as "adolescence".

**Divorce** All Western societies displayed an increase in the divorce rate, though levels differed depending on religious framework (lower in Catholic societies) and differing legal provisions. The decline in arranged marriage and extended family controls, in some cases marriage at earlier ages, and new disputes about family goals and achievements fueled this new instability – including complaints about consumer living standards or about the absence of sufficient affection. Divorce was not yet common, though in the United States there was talk of a "crisis" by the 1870s, but it was definitely becoming a new factor in family life. For men particularly, it was now economically possible to do without a family, and this could promote some change as well. In another important shift, when divorce did occur with disputes over child custody, the new culture led to the practice of awarding to mothers, assumed to be the natural custodians of the young child – another sign that traditional patriarchal assumptions were eroding.

**Conclusion** Three points stand out, amid a welter of significant changes and adjustments. First, obviously, no single Western family model emerged; class and gender differences complicate generalizations. Second, some of the changes in family life were distinctively Western, reflecting special cultural features like greater individualism; Western patterns of adjustment to industrial conditions were not necessarily attractive outside this cultural zone. But third, Western attachment to their new family values, including the standards of the Victorian family, provided a new basis for judging the habits of other societies, and often finding them uncivilized. This would affect the family policies of Western colonial administrations, but it would also put cultural pressure on independent regions like the Ottoman Empire or Japan.

**Study questions**

1. What were the main differences between middle- and working-class families?
2. Why did Victorian culture generate new concerns about sexuality, and with what results?
3. What was the impact of new schooling requirements on family life?
4. What were the main functions of the Western industrial family by 1900? How did they compare to more traditional functions?

**Further reading**

Judith Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home: a portrait of domestic family life in Victorian England* (Norton, 2004)

Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World* (Norton, 1995)

Wally Seccombe, *Weathering the Storm: working-class families from the industrial revolution to the fertility decline* (University of Chicago Press, 1993)

Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (Longman, 2005)

# Chapter 23: The Impact of Imperialism

**Context** The 19th century was famously a century of European imperialism despite the recognition of independent nations in the Americas. The British tightened their hold on India, while several European countries divided almost all of Africa, pressed further into Southeast Asia and took over Pacific Oceania (along with the United States). The main goals of the effort involved economic exploitation and power political position, not family life. But imperialist expansion inevitably produced new opportunities to evaluate family practices (whether real or partly imagined) and introduce at least some changes. Where imperialism was accompanied by massive Christian missionary efforts, as in subSaharan Africa and Oceania, efforts at reform were particularly extensive. (Note that now Protestants were just as active as Catholics in missionary outreach.) In India, missionary inroads were limited and changes in family practices more modest as a result.

**Limitations** Even in places like Africa European pressures were sometimes cautious. Again, family reform was not a major goal, and colonial administrators were eager not to provoke local hostility. Thus in northeastern Africa, British and French officials did little to combat the genital mutilation of women, though they disapproved; they simply recognized the depth of the regional tradition and left it alone. Only after World War II were halting efforts ventured. We will see that in India, even when some changes were attempted – for example, in efforts to limit child marriage – they did not always proceed very far. In some ways the imperialist period did more to introduce new themes, very tentatively, that are still in play in the societies involves – more than changing practices directly at the time.

**Rationale** Given the intensity of many specific family values in the 19th-century West, it was hardly surprising that many colonial administrators felt at least some impulse to intervene in some local family practices. Christian missionaries were even more ambitious, now including the Protestant as well as Catholic initiatives. In this case, some interventions were similar to those in Latin America earlier, but some represented more recent emphases – such as a greater urge to promote schooling for children (while usually still utilizing their labor). Finally, historians have emphasized the role of colonial wives. Before the 19th century, and improved medical remedies, male colonial administrators and merchants typically went out on their own, leaving whatever families they had behind; often, they developed new liaisons with local women. Now, however, Western wives often came along, and they were eager to shield their spouses from local temptation. Interactions with local groups became more limited, but disapproval and suspicion mounted – particularly with regard to imagined levels of traditional sexuality.

**Schooling** Given developments in the West itself, educational initiatives were more prominent in this phase of imperialism than before. There was more interest in training lower-level local officials as well as bringing the presumed benefits of literacy (often in a Western language) and some Western culture; some efforts were even extended to girls. Some older children were even sent to Europe for further study. This might significantly affect family life in some cases, though aspiring students – like Gandhi in late-19th century India—might promise to adhere to traditional family values. On the other hand, schools did not reach large numbers of people, particularly in the countryside, so this impetus to family change should not be exaggerated.

**India** English interventions here included strong efforts to ban the practice of *sati,* and in this they were joined by Indian reformers – and the practice did decline (without disappearing). British efforts also sought to provide new protections for widows' property and a right to remarry, and there were also some attempts to limit child marriage (a clearer thrust after 1900). Attacks on widespread female infanticide were sporadic but may have had some effect over time. The British also imposed their own law against homosexuality, against regional tradition, and this was only recently repealed. Overall, probably the greatest British influence involved the creation of a somewhat more Western-oriented group of civil servants – including some Indian nationalists – who accepted the importance of education for children and somewhat less restrictive social interactions between men and women. British authors even ventured a series of manners books directed at facilitating social occasions involving both Indians and Westerners, while some educated Indian women began campaigning on issues such as child marriage.

**Sub-Saharan Africa** Western initiatives in Africa pushed in several, potentially contradictory, directions. On the one hand, missionaries and others pressed to abolish the practice of polygyny, and recorded gradual progress in areas where Christian conversions were extensive. On the other hand, European-led economic initiatives, such as mining, disproportionately recruited male workers, leaving many women with fewer economic resources, often back in the villages. Some colonial laws actually sought to restrict women's work opportunities, sometimes on grounds that these encouraged licentious sexual behavior. A number of programs aimed at making women "purer wives and better mothers", cutting back larger families roles that women had previously maintained. Economic changes could cut into traditional marriage arrangements, as when young men came back to the villages for a visit, flush with money wages and eager to strike up sexual liaisons. While the bulk of the African population remained rural, growing cities created new consumer opportunities for some young people, which in turn might tempt them away from obligations to the extended family. Patterns of change were varied, but not surprisingly some African scholars and feminists have emphasized overall damage to family solidarity as well as the position of women in family and society alike.

**Polynesia** 19th-century missionary work in Polynesia focused strongly on altering traditional sexual practices, beginning with imposing more concealing dress and attempting to curb traditional, presumably provocative dances like the hula. Abortion and infanticide were attacked. As in Africa, women's work roles outside the home were criticized in favor of a more strictly domestic family role. Efforts to limit the extended family also placed more childcare burdens on individual wives.

**Study questions**

1. Why did many customary family practices persist in many imperial holdings?
2. Why did Western efforts to "protect" women have such complex results in family relationships?
3. Overall, did imperialism result in significant changes in family life and structure?

**Further reading**

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Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: gender and sex in an African society* (Zed Books, 1987)

Patty O'Brien, *The Pacific Muse: exotic femininity and the colonial Pacific* (University of Washington Press, 2007)

J. Krishnammurty, *Women in Colonial India* Oxford University Press, 1989)

Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: race, gender and sexuality in the colonial context* (Routledge, 1995)

Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: the making of empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2006)

## Chapter 24: Ottoman Empire

**Background** The 19th century was not a period of major change for family life in the Ottoman Empire. A major reform movement, the Tanzimat reforms, developed in the 1830s, and while it did touch on family life it did not venture too deeply. Vigorous debates occurred between reformers and conservatives, the latter urging more rigorous enforcement of traditions including women's veiling. Reformers were echoed by Western critics, eager to push for more modern education for children and greater freedom for women. Overall, however, the family was substantially off limits in terms of major alterations in this period, even as greater changes were ventured in some other domains.

**Continuities** Patriarchal extended families remained common; many people would spend a part of their lives in a large household centered around an older male. However, when the latter died the family divided on a more nuclear basis, though other relatives often lived nearby and a random uncle or cousin might be included in the household directly. Wider kinship ties provided protection and economic support, as well as powerful identities. Family honor remained a powerful concept, particularly around the preservation of female virtue – including virginity at marriage. "Honor killings" of women who violated the code were not unknown. Islamic rules on property, however, did provide women with some economic protection once married.

**Reform implications** The Tanzimat reforms did include some efforts to expand education for women, with a new school for midwives organized in 1850. Women were also trained as teachers. New laws in 1854 abolished the sale of female slaves and the practice of concubinage—a substantial change in practice and symbolism alike. Attacks on the harem system mounted steadily, from Western and liberal critics. One sultan was forced to disband his harem in 1909, but full abolition of the harem system came only with the establishment of the Turkish republic in 1923. On a larger scale, some expansion of education affected the position and responsibilities of children, but it was noteworthy that schooling spread far more rapidly among the Christian and Jewish minorities than in the Muslim population.

**Study questions**

1. Why, in the eyes of reformers, was some change essential in Middle Eastern family life?
2. What were some of the reasons that actual changes proved limited?

**Further reading**

Margot Badram, *Feminism, Islam and Nation: gender and the making of modern Egypt* (Princeton University Press, 1995)

Nikki Keddie, *Women in the Middle East: past and present* (Princeton University Press, 2007)

# Chapter 25: Changes in Japan

**General** Not surprisingly, Japan's more dramatic embrace of reform in response to Western military and economic threats, from 1868 onward, included substantial changes in family life. These are less well known than efforts in the economic and political sphere, but they merit careful attention. At the same time, the Japanese sought to avoid a fully Western version of the modern family.

**Childhood** Key changes deeply affected the roles of children in the family, including new public health measures that cut into levels of child mortality. The 1872 educational act required primary schooling for both boys and girls. Implementation was somewhat gradual, given resource constraints and continued needs for child labor, but by 1900 a substantial shift had occurred. Some resistance developed among the peasantry, but previous educational traditions and the larger umbrella of Confucianism assured a relatively smooth transition. Some daycare centers emerged as well. For smaller groups, including some women, education began to extend beyond the primary level. As in the West earlier, these changes also began to generate a birth rate decline: parents were adjusting in various ways. Japanese reformers also pressed for wider attention to childhood in other ways, often copying Western expert arguments about the importance of more careful parenting. Children "will become learned and virtuous if the training methods are appropriate, stupid and bigoted if they are not," as one authority noted in 1874. Advice manuals proliferated after 1900 along with new periodicals such as the *Family Magazine,* which urged adults to convert to the realization of the "child as treasure". Finally, and somewhat unexpectedly, Japan became a world leader in the production of child-centered toys, by the 1920s.

**Distinctiveness** With all this, Japanese authorities also sought to differentiate Japanese children from their Western counterparts by insisting on the importance of group and family solidarity (along with nationalism and loyalty to the emperor). After brief flirtation in the 1870s, the government came down hard against individualism. An 1879 Memorandum insisted on "the virtues of loyalty, filial piety, honor and duty, which have been cultivated for several centuries." This approach influenced parental goals and tactics, including strong reliance on shaming wayward children, and also the ties Japanese youngsters developed with their parents and peers. Similar conservatism dictated a domestic emphasis for women despite their educational advances (though this was not entirely dissimilar from patterns in the West). Even upper-class girls in secondary schools were urged to develop their capacities to become a "good wife, wise mother". Feminist initiatives developed but they were constrained.

**Marriage** Japanese law unabashedly supported patriarchal authority, deep into the reform decades. The legal code of 1898 required a husband's consent for a wife to sign a contract. Women's adultery might be punished as a criminal offense, but the same did not apply to men. Marriage required a father's consent (this for both men and women, until age 30 for men, 25 for women). In a divorce, custody of the children rested with the father. More than laws were involved. As contacts with Westerners increased, the Japanese upper classes resisted the tradition of the mixed-gender dinner party, after a brief flirtation: the Japanese did not like to have their wives along (but valued geisha company, which disconcerted Westerners); and they definitely wanted daughters to stay home, lest paternal authority to arrange marriage be disputed. Japanese of all social classes, and not just the elite, began to be urged to maintain greater control over sexuality.

**Adjustments** Here too, however, there were important changes. At the legal level, concubinage was outlawed, a huge redefinition of family at the upper-class level. More broadly, industrialization increasingly took Japanese men out of the home, giving mothers huge new authority and responsibility. Some new family activities were encouraged, even by the government: for example, dinners at home with

husband and wife together. Dining tables became a popular new furniture item. By the 1920s, discussions of the importance of love as a basis for marriage increased, with some widely-publicized cases (including at least one suicide) where young women resisted parental arrangements in favor of the inclinations of the heart. Not surprisingly, the modern Japanese family as of the turn of the century was a complex mix of tradition and genuine innovation. Here, clearly, was an industrial style family with a distinctive link to earlier patterns.

**Further reading**

Mark Jones, *Children as Treasures: childhood and the middle class in early twentieth century Japan* (Harvard University Press, 2010)

Michael Kinski, *Kinderheit/Childhood In Japanese History* (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016)

Marnie Anderson, *A Place in Public: women's rights in Meiji Japan* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2010)

# SECTION V CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

## Chapter 26: The Contemporary Period, 1920s-present

**Basic Trends** World historians approach the past century (roughly, World War I-present) in various ways, but some attempt to see some very general themes running through the whole period. This works for family patterns at least to some extent. The most important underlying developments resulted from the spread of some degree of industrialization, plus reforms intended to promote industrialization, throughout much of the world. Most regions have thus participated in birth rate reduction (though to varying degrees) and have seen a striking decline in infant and maternal mortality levels, both obviously fundamental to family life. Schooling has spread more widely, again a major reorientation for children and parents alike. On the whole, thanks to urbanization, extended families have weakened as well, though again there are important regional variations.

**Gender** Patriarchal family structures have been widely modified, though particularly in the cities and in regions where the hold of religion has loosened somewhat. The percentage of women working outside the home has risen, and this always generates a modification of the family power structure (the same occurs when older daughters work even while remaining in the family). Rates of child marriage have dropped – though the phenomenon remains important. Reduced educational gaps and the decline of the birth rate both contribute to shifts in family gender dynamics, and result from them. These trends have also provoked resistance, even new forms of domestic violence in some cases, but they have largely persisted.

**Latin America** Changes in Latin American family structure illustrate some of the common dynamics. By the 1970s the birth rate began to drop rapidly, soon leading to rates of 2.1 or so per family. Anthropologists documented the process in which women, now literate, began to use new birth control methods, often against opposition of both husbands and priests (both of whom sometimes accused them of seeking extramarital sex). The goal, as the women put it, was to be able to provide better lives and more education for children, only possible if there were fewer of them.

**Disruptions** The contemporary period has also brought huge disruptions to family life in many regions. New methods of warfare, including the bombing of civilian areas (a trend that began in the 1920s and 1930s) caused many family casualties and in some cases prompted efforts to send children away from their urban parents. The sheer magnitude of contemporary conflicts, plus new ethnic tensions and "cleansings", led to massive refugee populations, often with a disproportionate number of women and children and leading to huge challenges in maintaining or reestablishing family life. By the 21st century disruptions also included droughts and climate disasters due to global warming. At an extreme, disasters could reverse gains such as declining child mortality.

**Globalization** Increasing global contacts affected family life in many regions, though again particularly in urban areas. Human rights campaigns, often associated with the United Nations after World War II, pressed for more education for children and better treatment of women, in the family as well as in society at large; many programs targeted practices like child marriage or, in northeastern Africa, the genital mutilation of women. Expert advice to parents spread widely as well. Pediatrician Benjamin Spock's late 1940s book on *Baby and Child Care,* a massive best seller in the United States for half a century, was translated into at least 39 languages; a Japanese edition thus appeared with great fanfare in 1964, and versions in Hindi, Arabic as well as many European languages were issued as well. Finally the spread of Hollywood movies (from the 1920s onward) and television shows after 1970 extended awareness of Western family images, such as dating or an extensive youth culture. This too could increase interest in a quest for love-based marriages.

**Global Consumerism** Global consumer forms also deeply affected family life. More and more parents felt an obligation to buy standard toys for their children, often made in the United States (like the ubiquitous Barbie doll) but increasingly coming from Japan as well (as with Hello Kitty). Amusement parks and other global attractions encouraged family vacations – a visit to Disneyland in Florida became a goal for many successful parents in Latin America, for example. Celebrations of children's birthdays extended as well, complete with translations of the song "happy birthday"; by 2000, services were available in the

Middle East, China and elsewhere promising to organize appropriate festivities. Valentine's Day also gained global purchase, celebrating romantic love (though, interestingly, in some places such as India, traditionalists sometimes violently disrupted Valentine's day dinners, claiming that romantic emphasis risked reducing the appropriate power of parents in family formation). Consumerism could also place strain on family traditions, with urban, nuclear families for example resenting kinship obligations such as the expectation of hospitality when rural relatives came visiting; or with young people preferring to hang out in a fast-food restaurant than to go home for a family meal.

**Regional variables: economic development** General trends played against a number of regional differentials. Areas such as much of Africa, where industrialization lagged at least until the 21st century, retained higher than average birth rates and other signs of family traditionalism. Urban-rural divisions within countries like India generated similar differentials, obviously complicating generalizations even around basic features such as parental willingness to send children to school.

**Regional variables: religion** Religious regions, again including cultural differentials within countries, were slower to generate changes such as birth rate reductions (and use of artificial devices), rates of women working outside the home and so on. Patterns in many Islamic regions; among Orthodox Jews in Israel; In Christian fundamentalist areas thus differed from their counterparts in more secular areas such as Western Europe, most of East Asia, the coastal United States and so on. By the 21st century religious-political combinations were generating some interestingly divergent trends. In Iran, for example, birth rates were dropping rapidly, while women outnumbered men in the universities; but rates of women working outside the home (at 22% of the labor force) lagged well behind patterns in more secular societies.

**Regional variables: political systems** Worldwide, governments played a greater role in family life in the contemporary period than ever before. Promotion of schooling; efforts to encourage birth control (for example, in 1970s Mexico, against the urgings of the Church); welfare measures; new laws on marriage and divorce – the range of state action was varied. Obviously, some governments pushed harder than others: the Chinese government's campaign against large families from the late 1970s was thus unprecedented, in contrast to the substantial failure of a much more modest campaign in India. At the same time, many state efforts failed to counter family dynamics. A number of governments in the 1930s thus sought to promote a birth rate increase with various incentives, and the same began to occur after 2000 – but most families, bent on their own goals, largely ignored the pressure.

**Experiments or throwbacks** Any contemporary survey must also note some special political efforts claiming to restore older family values. Thus European fascism, and especially German Nazism, between the world wars touted the importance of the traditional family (including of course higher birth rates). Women were officially encouraged to stay home to have and raise children; efforts to punish sexual deviance expanded and contraceptive devices were discouraged, while marriage was actively promoted (though actual rates did not rise much). Financial incentives were involved in many of these campaigns, and a 1938 law made it easier for men to divorce so they might remarry to have more children. After 1990 several extremist Islamic regimes – the Taliban government in Afghanistan, later the so-called "Islamic State" (ISIS) in parts of Syria and Iraq fiercely limited opportunities for women outside the home, including schooling, while often forcing young girls to marry and bear children. Most of these extremes were short-lived, though the return of the Taliban in 2021 raised questions anew; but they certainly demonstrated some of the basic tensions that changes in family life could generate.

**Conclusion** World historians dealing with the contemporary period emphasize the complex balance between the local and the global, and this certainly applies to family history. Regional variants remain vital, but they should not be pressed to the point of ignoring some underlying common dynamics.

**Study questions**

1. Why have modern governments on the whole had better results when they tried to encourage smaller families than when they sought to promote birth rate increase?
2. Did global consumerism come to play a significant role in family life?
3. Did differences among family forms and goals increase or decrease overall in the century after World War I?

**Further reading**

Heinrich Hartmann and Corinna Unger, eds., *A World of Populations: transnational perspectives on demography in the 20th century* (Berghahn Books, 2016)

Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese toys and the global imagination* (University of California Press, 2006)

Marilyn Coleman and Lawrence Ganong, eds., *Handbook of Contemporary Families: considering the past, contemplating the future* (Sage, 2003)

## Chapter 27: The Soviet Union and Russia

**General trends** With surprising speed after their revolutionary victory in 1917, communist leaders worked to expand the educational system – at all levels, while also improving maternal and infant health conditions. Schooling soon became the normal childhood experience, and child labor below the age of 14 was abolished at least in principle, while infant death rates fell rapidly. Over time, the acceleration of industrialization and the growth of cities enhanced the emphasis on nuclear families. (Because of housing limitations, many newly-married couples at first lived with parents, but then moved out when children arrived.) Many parents began to reduce the birth rate, another standard feature of industrial family structure. However, a shortage of rubber constrained the availability of contraceptive devices, forcing considerable reliance on *coitus interruptus* or abortion for birth control.

**Marxism and the family** Many Marxists harbored some suspicious of the family as a "bourgeois" institution that might hold back the achievement of a revolutionary society – particularly because of its roots in private property and inheritance. Many revolutionaries assumed that in a revolutionary society the family would "wither away". These concerns help explain a fascinating experimental period in the 1920s, before Stalinist policy actually emphasized a rather conservative family structure. Even over the longer term, the Soviet state, in expanding youth organizations – notably, the Young Pioneers and *Komsomsld* -- as well as formal schooling, sought to modify parents' hold over their children, and occasionally sought to use children to report on potentially subversive parental views and activities. "The child is the product of state upbringing", one official declared. Extensive efforts to reduce the hold of religion could also create tensions in family life.

**The 1920s** A dramatic 1918 Family Code greatly expanded opportunities for divorce – "no-grounds" divorces required no rationale. Each spouse would retain property in case of divorce. The category of illegitimate children was abolished: all children were entitled to parental support. Women were recognized as equals under the law and no longer had to obtain a husband's permission to earn a wage or seek education. A variety of discussions and experiments followed in the effort to loosen the hold of family traditions. Ideas of free loves circulated widely in some circles. In a dramatic move for the time, abortion was legalized. However, a new law in 1926 largely ended this open period, establishing clearer rules for divorce (mainly to provide greater protection for women) while also setting up stricter criteria for paternity and child support.

**The 1936 Code** Under Stalinism, the experimental mood was replaced by a clearer effort to stabilize the family. Abortions were limited by law, with fines and jail time for those who performed the service. Efforts to promote procreation stepped up – though with limited effect – with payments and child care services for large families. Motherhood was praised. Divorce became more difficult.

**Gender** The Soviet system generated fascinating tensions for women and the family. On the one hand, the Soviets avoided the Western impulse to remove married women from the labor force: both ideology and the need for labor, often cheap labor, worked against this. The Soviets pointed with great pride to the roles women took on as doctors, factory workers and so on, contrasting this with the narrower opportunities in the West. On the other hand, women unquestionably retained primary responsibility for the family; this could include extensive amounts of time devoted to shopping for necessities, in what was still a limited consumer economy. For many women the dual role proved extremely difficult – one reason,

of course, for cutting back the birth rate. Despite propaganda, patriarchal traditions held firm in many ways. As family policy became more conservative, emphasis on the authority of the husband increased; feminist strivings were rigorously suppressed as counterrevolutionary.

**Rural-urban** Rapid change opened up new regional distinctions in family. Rural families were on the whole larger than those in the city. Extensive kinship networks survived easily, particularly in areas like Central Asia. Ideas of romantic love were downplayed in favor of emphasis on parental responsibility and tradition. Over time, however, some newer motives did begin to affect family life even in the countryside.

**After Stalin** Conservative family policies eased by the 1960s to some degree. In keeping with what was happening by that point in Western Europe, restrictions on abortions were loosened, though policy continued to oscillate. Another important government focus, from the Stalilnist era onward, involved the organization of annual family vacations for workers, at mass resorts created on the Black Sea coast and elsewhere.

**Under Putin** After the fall of communism and under President Vladimir Putin, by the early 21st century Russian policy in many ways reaffirmed family conservatism, though without some of the radical restrictions of the Stalinist era. Officials held Russia up as an alternative to the looser family values of the West, for example by opposing homosexual rights and gay marriage. Most dramatically, a new law severely limited opportunities to prosecute domestic abuse. More generally, the trend toward low birth rates and emphasis on nuclear family structures continued, while at the same time the country generated unusually high divorce rates – confirming some of the most fundamental trends in family life in Russia during the contemporary era.

**Study questions**

1. Why did Marxists harbor suspicions about the family, and did these lead to significant changes?
2. Why and how did family policy change under Stalin?
3. How did women's family roles in the Soviet Union compare to those in other regional societies?

**Further reading**

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## Chapter 28: The Western Family in the Contemporary Period

**General** The past century has seen a number of important changes in the Western family and, overall, probably a weakening of family structure. At the same time a number of basic modern trends continued to intensify. This was the period after all when the very low child death rate was confirmed and extended; when birth rates continued to drop overall, with increasing reliance on various artificial birth control devices. The continued expansion of schooling, and growing importance of school success in advanced industrial economies, affected parents and children alike. The idea of love-based marriages continued to flourish, even amid the rise of online matchmaking services in the early 21st century: references to finding a "soul mate", a term first coined in 1832 in the Victorian era, actually expanded.

**Class structure** Family trends continued to be conditioned by social and economic differences, though middle-class patterns gained greatest attention given the position and size of the class. Birth rates still varied a bit, with middle-class families smaller except during the baby boom. Parental expectations and behaviors varied. A study in 1970s Britain showed that both middle-class and working-class parents hoped for professional jobs for their children (doctors, lawyers etc), but middle class parents put far more emphasis into supervision of their children's schooling efforts. Even dating and marriage patterns varied,

with higher marriages ages and more “shopping around” for middle-class families during most of the period.

**The Baby Boom** For two decades after World War II the Western birth rate unexpectedly increased, particularly in the middle classes and particularly in the affluent United States. Some observers thought a new commitment to larger families would prove a durable choice. What happened was a catch-up effort, after the birth rate reduction forced by Depression and World War II, that then maintained momentum for two decades (often with children very closely spaced together). It was an interesting development, producing a pronounced demographic bulge, but it was temporary. Birth rate reduction resumed in the 1960s and then accelerated.

**Role of the state** Government impact on families increased, particularly with the development of the welfare state (more pronounced in Western Europe, Canada, New Zealand and Australia than in the US). Government-provided housing was an important resource for many families. Pensions measurably reduced the reliance of older people on younger kin. State regulations also increased: governments might intervene against parents found deficient, even, by the 21st century, to protect children against excessive obesity. Battles in 2020-21 over government-mandated masks and vaccines, in dealing with the Covid pandemic, showed the recurrent possibility of tensions between the state and parental autonomy.

**Extended family** Structurally the extended family continued to decline. From the 1920s onward co-residence of an older person with an adult child, a common pattern in the 19th century, began to drop away, and no one seemed particularly concerned. Greater resources allowed older people to live on their own or in group facilities. At the same time, informal contacts remained important. Mother-adult daughter bonds continued strong, particularly in the working class. Telephones and, later, social media contacts allowed intergenerational interactions. The role of the loving grandparents gained new attention.

**Sexuality** Probably the biggest shifts in the Western family involved sexuality and gender. Interest in sexual pleasure grew steadily, at least into the early 21st century. In Britain experts like Marie Stopes urged women to seek enjoyment, and in general the Victorian notion of the passionless female declined notably (aided by a variety of sex manuals). Dating began to replace courtship, and while dating did not necessarily involve sex it did decrease parental supervision. In families, growing use of artificial contraception helped promote recreational sex – and expectations for pleasure and performance. Even Catholic families participated despite the official opposition of the Church. Among young people on both sides of the Atlantic, a “sexual revolution” in the 1950s and 1960s made premarital sex increasingly common, accepted, and even expected; assumptions of virginity at marriage declined markedly, and sexual jealousy was also discouraged. By the same token, sexual dissatisfaction undoubtedly became an increasing cause of marital infidelity and also divorce.

**Abortion** After World War II all Western societies faced increasing controversy over abortion. On the one hand, advocates of sexual pleasure and women’s rights urged latitude, along with citing the importance of avoiding unwanted children as a basis for good parenting. But religious conservatives, some of them deeply concerned about overall sexual license, firmly resisted. In most European countries some consensus was reached, often with latitude for abortions in the first three months of pregnancy, stiffer approval requirements thereafter. But the debate remained unresolved in the United States despite a 1970s court ruling that allowed the procedure.

**Gender** Married women increasingly sought work outside the home, during both World Wars and then from the 1960s onward. A desire for higher family living standards and greater personal fulfillment combined, amid a second wave of feminism. This was not an easy change. For several decades German wives continued to argue that mothers should stay home – even though they themselves were working. Care facilities for children became crucial, and in the United States considerable reluctance to turn young children over to others, plus inadequate state support, created ongoing tension. Other patterns, like carefully prepared evening meals, had to shift. The change obviously contributed to birth rate decline and a growing increase in deliberately childless marriages or acceptance of a single child.

**Parenting** Smaller family size obviously affected parenting, and sibling relations. Increased emphasis on schooling prompted many parents to devote greater supervision to this aspect of their children’s lives. The rise of childrearing expertise, deriving now from pediatricians and psychologists, might assist parents

but could also create new pressure and concerns, reducing parental confidence. Anxiety also increased when mothers were working, generating some often frantic efforts to maintain contact and supervision over children. In some countries like Britain and the United States what was called the helicopter parent emerged by the early 21st century, with hovering attention to children's activities and emotional as well as cognitive development. While child death rates dropped, concern over health issues might actually increase. Some people – parents and experts alike – believed that parenting was becoming more difficult and stressful, particularly in the middle classes. At the same time, parents in Western culture were united over one point: they wanted their offspring to be happy. An early 21st century poll showed surprising uniformity here, in contrast to several nonWestern societies were children's health or achievement were rated more important; 86% of French parents, 75% or so of parents in most other Western countries agreed that happiness was the main point.

**Household tasks** The issue of responsibility for household tasks had existed since the industrial revolution but it now took on new dimensions. New appliances cut into the labor needed, but in some cases heightened standards of cleanliness balanced the gains. When women began more commonly to take jobs outside the home, husbands on average increased their responsibilities but not to equal levels; women still bore disproportionate responsibility, including child care. At the same time, children's chores around the house dropped steadily, thanks to school work and recreational interests. The result was some obvious potential tension. Men sometimes felt that their extra contributions were not recognized, while women even more reasonably might resent their fuller load – a latterday reminder of older inequalities.

**Divorce and marriage** Through most of the 20th century divorce rates tended to rise in Western society, though there were important national variations based on religious tradition and specific law. Cultural acceptability of divorce expanded steadily. By the later 20th century almost half of all American marriages were ending in divorce, and about a third of those in the United Kingdom Remarriage often occurred, and the complications of stepparenting contributed a new or renewed element to modern family life. The trend also caused an understandable flurry of concern about the basic stability of the family itself. By the 21st century, marriage age was increasing, and marriage rates were dropping – leading to a significant decline in the divorce rate in places like the United States, though perhaps not, overall, to a real improvement in family stability given the rise of single parenting and unmarried couples.

**Consumerism** Though not a new trend, family life in the West was increasingly enveloped with consumer expectations. The family vacation became a common ideal (though beyond the reach of poorer families). Extended family trips marked the rise of vacation time in Western Europe. Institutions like the Disney worlds cropped up to lure families in the United States, and ultimately Europe as well (EuroDisney, after some growing pains, became the top vacation destination in France). At home, the rise of television placed a new premium on home-based entertainments, though some affluent families, buying separate televisions for children, reduced the solidarity impact. Increased expenditure on family-based holidays like birthdays and Christmases was another sign of change. Some authorities argued that, with the decline of the birth rate, shared consumerism was becoming the chief purpose of Western families above the poverty line –with shared spousal decision making from partners both working outside the home. Another term frequently applied to many Western marriages from the 1920s onward was "companionate", with spouses developing primary emotional as well as recreational relationships with each other.

**Gay marriage** A vital change in the contemporary history of the Western family involved the rise of demands for legalization of gay marriage, and the increasing acceptance by the Western public. The dramatic shift in attitudes occurred throughout the West from the 1960s onward, leading to legalization in most societies, beginning with steps in Denmark in the 1970s. The rate of gay marriages and gay parenting soared, and the result was a clear if unexpected conformation of the importance of the family in Western life.

**Study questions**

1. Why did the baby boom prove to be an anomaly in the contemporary history of the Western family?
2. Should the history of the contemporary Western family be considered mainly as a story of decline?

3. What were the main changes and issues in parenting during the contemporary period?
4. Why and how did Western marriage become more sexualized, and with what main results?

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## Chapter 29: East Asia

**General** National patterns of family life within East Asia have differed considerably over the past century. Most obviously, the communist revolution in China brought huge and distinctive changes between 1949 and the late 1970s, including some experiments, on rural collective farms, to replace aspects of family life with community facilities. Since then, however, some common trends can be noted across borders, including a rapidly declining birth rate, increasing emphasis on love-based marriage, and growing interest in family consumerism. At the same time, traditional values continue to play a role, often derived from Confucianism, leading to greater stability among families than is true in the West – at least in terms of legal status. East Asian divorce rates average at about 5% of all marriages, a distinctive figure worldwide; divorce still draws considerable social stigma. Overall, family patterns in East Asia may demonstrate the most dramatic combination of tradition and change of any world region during the past century, though the comparison should be debated.

**Family size** Overall, birth rates have declined fairly steadily in the region, though Chinese policy stands out. In Japan, the postwar government began to encourage birth control in the interests of population balance, accelerating the earlier trend and ultimately leading to one of the lowest birth rates in the world. Revolutionary China touted large families as a national resource for several decades, but then changed course in the 1970s. The famous decree limiting most families to a single child occurred in 1979, though it was later modified to allow a second child if the first born was female, an interesting testimony to the continued preference for male children. The government forcibly intervened in some cases, imposing abortions or sterilization. (The gender preference also showed in a pronounced overall gender imbalance, as some families consigned girls to orphanages or, as some speculate, practiced infanticide.) At the same time, infant deaths declined dramatically, thanks to better public health measures and greater prosperity. The Chinese communist regime quickly moved to improve conditions in this area, as the Soviet Union had done earlier

**Extended families** Here too, change occurred in favor of the nuclear family, particularly amid rapid urbanization and housing constraints. In revolutionary China, the regime worked to reduce parental authority in marriage in favor of decisions by individual children. However, informally, extended families continued to count for a lot. Arranged marriage remained fairly common in Japan. In China, many families, seeking work in the cities, left children with older parents back in the village, visiting on annual holidays such as Chinese New Year. Kinship ties, and the special politeness due to relatives depending on their family rank, retained great importance, in contrast to the looser family manners and the greater acceptance of strangers in the West.

**Education** The growing importance of schooling played a vital role in family life – more, arguably, than in the West. China's revolutionary regime quickly expanded education at all levels, and the trend continued into the 20th century. Japan and South Korea, in the modernized Confucian tradition, emphasized school

performance strongly. In all cases, challenging examinations, that determined among other things eligibility for university entrance but also the prestige level of the university available, drew great attention. Parents, particularly mothers, in East Asia carefully arranged extra tutoring (particularly prominent in South Korea), and at the same time tried to give children an opportunity to blow off steam in compensation. Expectations of household duties for children, in the cities, were very limited.

**Discipline and emotion** Until the 1970s the Chinese communist regime actively disapproved of Western emphasis on love and romance, which might distract from revolutionary devotion. And in general, public demonstrations of affection were not common in the region; severe, unisex costumes also prevailed. However, and in China particularly from the 1970s when foreign cultural influence increased, romantic expectations and dating clearly increased (frequently along with sexual activity). Parenting styles remained fairly strict, though again with periods of indulgence and organized entertainment. Some observers compared Asian
tiger moms" or *jiwa* parents to Western helicopter parents in their careful organization of children's lives, but the former were probably more focused on achievement and less on easing stress. Shaming continued to be quite acceptable to bring children in line, both within the family and in school – another clear traditional remnant – and physical punishments were accepted also. (Many Chinese parents expected physical discipline in the schools.) Family and community loyalty, rather than individualism, predominated as a childrearing goal, though individualism gained some ground nevertheless. One study of a Chinese village in the later 20th century revealed a striking interest in pursuing individual goals rather than hewing to family traditions and solidarity. Growing consumerism among youth also pulled them away from families to some extent, as in their interest in separate entertainment, fast food dining and so on. Obviously, some complex balancing was involved in the individual-family relationship overall.

**Gender** Women unquestionably gained new freedoms in communist China, as in Japan from the American occupation onward. In China a steady reform pressure from the late 19th century finally did away with foot binding, a process completed by the communists. However, though this was particularly obvious in Japan and South Korea, gender relations in the family remained markedly unequal. Extraordinary working hours kept many men away from home for long stretches of the day, and at the same time separate male entertainment, including sexual affairs plus widespread consumption of pornography, persisted as well (at least in Japan and South Korea), without at least officially disrupting the marriage. (Overall, sexuality was a less fraught issue in East Asia than in the West.) Family-based entertainments were more limited, though in Japan the tradition of public baths with family members, including children, retained popularity. Work outside the home was common in China, but far more limited in Japan, where gender discrimination and long hours of work made it hard for women to combine occupations with family. (Lest all this seem dire, polls suggested that Japanese women were happier than their male counterparts; and Japanese girls seemed to enjoy greater freedom and self-confidence than their male counterparts.) By the 21st century women's labor force participation began rising, but in some cases only because the women involved were no longer marrying at all.

**The elderly** East Asian tradition urged respect and care for older members of the family. As one result, social security support for old age was lower than in the West, on the assumption that the family would provide. However by the 21st century, the low birth rate, the rapid improvement in adult life expectancy (among the highest in the world in Japan), plus crowded and expensive housing cut into traditional solidarity. Many old people lived and also died alone, raising new issues for family and society alike.

**Study questions**

1. What were the most striking signs of the persistence of tradition in East Asian family life?
2. In what ways did the Japanese family retain a patriarchal base?
3. How did the revolution alter family life in communist China?

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# Chapter 30: South Asia

**General** South Asia participated in many of the basic family trends of the contemporary period. Family size declined. To be sure, an Indian government campaign in the 1970s to promote vasectomies failed to catch on, and Muslim birth rates remained higher than Hindu (a source of real concern in the Hindu-Nationalist mood of the 21st century). The region also saw a slower decline in child labor than was common globally. But family size did drop; infant mortality figures improved; education began to replace work for more children. While child marriage was still common, rates here also declined. The age of parents at the birth of a first child rose steadily as part of the process of change. Overall, traditions retained a greater role in South Asia than in East Asia, partly because the percentage of population in the countryside remained higher, but there was a clear patterns of adjustment to new conditions.

**Variety** Regional and religious variety create important differences in family patterns within South Asia. Indian law leaves a good bit of family regulation up to individual groups. Matrilineal traditions remain in a few regions. In many cases, intermarriage is frowned up; this is an important part of Hindu-Muslim tensions in India. In the 21st century Hindu nationalists began warning of a so-called marriage jihad, claiming that Muslim men were wooing Hindu women in order to convert them. Education is another variable. While schooling has gained ground, a large rural minority remains largely untouched; on the other hand, in many urban families attention to the school performance of children, including the use of shaming to promote greater achievement, has become an important parental function.

**Gender** Considerable tension has surrounded gender family issues in South Asia. Violence against girls appearing in public or seeking to attend school was high; many motives were involved, but a desire to seclude women was among them. The custom of purdah declined, but it clearly still left a mark. Honor killings of daughters or sisters accused of misbehavior remained an issue. Violent disputes over the adequacy of bridal dowries was another sign of friction. Protest against male violence became an important feminist rallying cry by the early 21st century, with some success in courts of law. Finally, as In China, South Asian families retained a preference for boys. By the 1980s, when ultrasound procedures allowed determination of the sex of an embryo, ensuing abortions disproportionately targeted girls. The result, again as in China, was an excess of males surviving to maturity, leading to concerns about finding partners plus efforts to recruit spouses from Southeast Asia. Indian law provides some protection for the property of women in the family, but confirms patriarchal power overall.

**Extended family and marriage** The most striking feature of modern South Asian family structure was the preservation of extended family ties and the deep respect for older parents. Urbanization did create more nuclear families; no single pattern prevailed. But an overwhelming majority of South Asians expressed a preference for arranged marriage (2/3, in early 21st-century polls). Interviews among upper-caste Indians showed a huge desire to please the adult father, as the most important factor in marriage selection -- plus the preservation of a marriage even when little affection developed between husband and wife. India featured one of the lowest divorce rates in the world, at under 1% of all marriages. Some Indian feminists argued that arranged marriage spared women from the competition for sexual attractiveness and artificial good looks that plagued their sisters in the West. India also retained the tradition of elaborate, multi-day wedding ceremonies, a high point in family ritual. Many of these family patterns continued to involve South Asians even when they emigrated to other areas.

**Study questions**

1. Why did arranged marriage remain particularly popular in South Asia?
2. How might traditions of purdah continue to affect gender relations in the family and community?
3. What standard modern family trends developed in South Asia during the contemporary period?

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## Chapter 31: The Middle East

**Childrearing** Many Middle Eastern families, particularly in the cities, sought to combine some new messages about the importance of individual children with older values. A study of postwar Lebanon for example showed the impact of messages from United Nations agencies and other sources about dealing with children as individuals; the growing importance of schooling might promote similar emphasis. But family also taught children the value of the family as a collective entity, the necessity of honoring elders and other kin, the need to subsume personal inclinations in favor of family service. While Middle Eastern families continued to indulge small children, discipline for older children often stiffened; corporal punishments remained common in schools, without parental objection.

**Gender** Considerable division developed over gender issues In Middle Eastern families, in part because of the variety of official policies. Ataurk's Turkey, in the 1920s, while firming up male authority in family law ("Man is the head of the union of marriage", with the right also to determine where the family lived), also gave women equal rights to divorce and abolished polygamy. Saudi Arabia, in contrast, long upheld requirements for concealing clothing and the necessity of obtaining permission of a male relative to travel and make other public decisions; this pattern began to ease only in the 21st century when, among other things, women were famously finally allowed to drive. The Iranian revolutionary regime also imposed many restrictions on women after 1979, arguing that a woman "should be the preserver of tradition, the family". But family decisions were equally important. Rural families, in places like Egypt, continued to insist on veiling in public, and some urban women decided on veiling as a demonstration of cultural solidarity; but others opted for more Western style clothing. The steady spread of female education – even in Saudi Arabia, allowing many women to study abroad – was a persistent source of change. Many women also became adept at using traditional Islamic law to argue for protection of certain rights. On the other hand, relatively low regional rates of female participation in work outside the home showed the continuing hand of tradition.

**Marriage** Changes in marriage were gradual, but they picked up speed, overall, from the late 20th century onward. Marriage age rose on average, as more women acquired education and joined the labor force at least for a time. Polygamy also declined – in part because of high urban housing costs. Arranged marriage also waned, even in conservative societies like Saudi Arabia, though parental authority and kinship ties remained important. Inevitably, gaps in family types increased between city and countryside, but urban populations grew rapidly. Divorce rates were low, particularly because women faced legal barriers (often, despite Islamic law). In Egypt women could petition with divorce only with a husband's permission until 2000, except in cases of abuse of alcoholism. But there was a perceptible increase in divorce rates after 1980, while they remained well below Western levels.

**Conclusion** Overall, family patterns evolved noticeably, despite the important role of traditions including Islamic law. The balance was somewhat similar to that of South Asia, though with different specifics; but in some respects, as in the continued reliance on child labor, Middle Eastern families changed more substantially.

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## Chapter 32: Sub-Saharan Africa

**General** Sub-Saharan Africans participated in many of the standard family trends in the contemporary period, though often at a slight lag in time thanks to a slower pace of industrialization and urbanization. Thus birth rates fell, and the average age of marriage rose: but the subcontinent still had the highest birth rates of any world region by the early 21st century, with the most rapid pace of population growth (levels expected to double by 2022). Family patterns in the region were also partly defined by some distinctive crises, including various war-induced migrations and the particularly severe impact of the AIDs epidemic. Finally, continued adpatatin of earlier traditions, such as polygyny, also continued to affect family styles. By the 21st century many African cities housed nuclear families very similar to those in other parts of the world, but many rural areas differed considerably and the rise of an unusually important sector of single-parent households also marked parts of the subcontinent.

**Birth rate** High fertility was promoted by continued reliance on child labor in the countryside and by a desire to assure the perpetuation of the family line as child mortality, though declining, remained high. But the diminishing economic utility of children in the cities, plus costs of living factors, began to cut into traditional assumptions. Rapidly rising interest in education promoted the notion that family size should be limited (even in the countryside), while use of contraceptive devices was also encouraged in response to the AIDs epidemic. Fertility changes began to emerge particularly from the mid-1970s onward (again, later than in most other regions).

**Marriage and kinship** Marriage at a fairly young age remained common, but the number of women marrying before age 20 declined noticeably. On the other hand, polygyny persisted strongly in the countryside, despite expectations of more rapid change, primarily because of the continued importance of wives' labor in the maintenance of landholdings. Polygyny was even adapted to the cities, with "matricentric" households of women and children visited periodically by the husband/father. Because of polygyny also, men were more likely to retain at least one spouse during the AIDs epidemic than was true of women. Similarly, while increasing numbers of couples make their own decisions about marriage, kinship ties remain strong and constrained women's autonomy in many cases. On the other hand, women often gained more education than men by the later 20th century, another factor that might affect relationships within the family. In some cases women have also been able to take advantage of new national human rights legislation that provides greater protection for their property in cases of family dissolution or inheritance disputes. Some law codes, as in the Ivory Coast in the 1980s, specifically limited the authority of the husband, even requiring (in principle) greater collaboration in household chores. And while the practice persists, international and local agitation began to reduce the incidence of genital mutilation of women in the northeast.

**Feminism** Important feminist movements developed in Africa after decolonization, sometimes following United Nations initiatives. They worked for a variety of changes in women's family position and well as wider social issues. Some feminist intellectuals urged an approach different from Western feminism, arguing that imperialism had reduced vital family supports for women. Their goal was a less individualist feminism, with more attention to mutual protections within the family.

**Single parent households** The rise of single-parent households was a clear sign that kinship traditions were weakening. As women gained more education and a greater role in the urban economy, single parenting became more common – though it was over-represented among the urban poor. In South Africa the results of the Apartheid system added to the disruptions of urban life, creating an unusually high incidence of single parenting. Single parenting has also, however, increased the importance of grandparents in providing child care in many cases (including guidance in educational decisions), promoting some stability in the rates of multi-generational households. Here was another case where changes generated imaginative adaptations of older family traditions. On the other hand, there was a marked decline in the practice of fosterage, in which urban families had often provided care for the offspring of rural relatives. Economic problems in the cities but also growing consumer aspirations

disrupted older rural-urban ties, to the disadvantage of the countryside. Finally, the AIDs epidemic, far more severe in Africa than elsewhere given more limited public health systems, generated a growing number of households headed by a single parent or even an adolescent.

**Migration and gender** The late 19th century had already seen a pattern of male migration to jobs in urban and mining areas, leaving women and families in the countryside. This persisted into the later 20th century. Rural families received money transmissions from absent husbands, but they were also confined to subsistence labor in the villages themselves – and there were frequent cases of family abandonment. Poverty and migration have also encouraged trafficking in children, seized for use in labor or sexual service; one estimate calculated about 200,000 cases in year in which African children were effectively enslaved.

**Ageing** Rising life expectancy has increased the percentage of the elderly in the population. Surviving extended family and kinship traditions make this a less severe problem in Africa than in some other societies, with more reciprocal assistance among generations. In some cases, of course, older people provide child care even when they can no longer work. But the trend does put strain on some families, and poverty among the elderly was increasing by the early 21st century.

**Study questions**

1. What were the most distinctive features of African family life by the end of the 20th century?
2. What traditions have proved particularly resilient amid social and economic changes?
3. In what ways do contemporary African families reflect more standard global trends?

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# Chapter 33: 21st-Century Trends

**General** Given the regional diversity of family forms, and the recency of the 21st century, it would be foolish to project many new basic trends. In many ways the main point is the persistence of 20th-century patterns, toward lower birth rates, more (though varied) emphasis on nuclear families, the growing importance of the family as a consumer and emotional unit. However, a few developments are worth noting, even if their results push into an unknown future.

**New disputes** The wide acceptance of gay marriage in the West after 2000 prompted vivid disagreements internationally. A growing number of societies joined in, at least to an extent. The Indian Supreme Court abolished an old British law outlawing homosexuality. A few Latin American societies made concessions, against the disapproval of the Catholic Church and Evangelical Protestants. South Africa stood out in the Nelson Mandela tradition of tolerance. Taiwan and Hong Kong became more tolerant (but the Chinese government worked to pull back in Hong Kong). But most Islamic societies became resolutely opposed. So did most of Africa: Nigeria and Uganda in fact threatened new penalties against homosexuals/. In Brunei the Sultan decreed the death penalty (but under Western pressure agreed not to implement). Russia and key countries in East-Central Europe also tightened prohibitions, portraying themselves as defenders of the Christian family, in the latter case creating a significant rift in the European Union. The divergence was intriguing.

**Marriage and sexuality** In most Western countries and in japan, marriage rates began to fall, as many people expressed a preference for living alone (or with pets) while lamenting the burdens and compromises of married life. Rates of sexual activity also declined, a notable development. Again, some people argued against entanglements. The increasing availability of pornography played a role. In Japan (where pornography was more widespread and, in the case of men, more open than anywhere else in world) a surprisingly large minority of people had no active sexual experience into their mid-30s. This was

not, to be sure, a global trend, but it was possible it would gain ground. It modified a number of 20th-century trends.

**Demography** More widespread still was the decline of the birth rate below rates of national population maintenance. Globally, the birth rate average per family in 2017 stood at 2.5 per family, half the level of 50 years before: but the figure masked huge regional disparities. Europe, including Russia, East Asia and the United States led the way in lowering birth rates, though to varying degrees. Housing costs, new adult interests and women's commitments, possibly a concern about the emotional burdens as well as expenses of parenting, in some cases worries about the world's troubled state – all contributed. Many governments made moves to reverse the trend, including a new family size policy in China, but it was not at all clear if these would have much impact. In one sense all this simply continued a modern trend, but the difference of degree, and potential impact, were striking. Historically, societies incapable of demographic reproduction have almost always been in serious trouble, often both reflecting and causing new problems for families. It was not clear if the new conditions of industrial society would create different outcomes.

**Ageing** Rising life expectancy brought the growth of an old age sector everywhere, even in places like Morocco where birth rates remained fairly high. Where birth rates were low, the burdens of the elderly posed new responsibilities for families and societies alike. Many women (the so-called sandwich generation) found themselves caring both for their children and for one or more older parents (including parents of the husband; there was a gender division of responsibility here).

**Pets** Affluent societies in the West and East Asia, increasingly including China, showed a growing attachment to pets, often expressly viewing them as family members and giving them family names. Grief at the death of a pet became an important part of family life. This was a trend that had begun in the 19th century but by the 21st century it was reaching measurably new proportions. In the United States a strong minority noted that they preferred pets over human family members; in disasters like hurricanes, authorities found that if they did not move pets as well as people, many people would simply refuse to leave a threatened area.

**Covid-19 and other challenges** The pandemic of 2020-21 (and counting) brought several important changes to family life, though it was not clear if they would prove durable. Forced isolation made many people more appreciative of the emotional contacts of extended families. Many workers, required to work online, planned to maintain the pattern even when conditions eased, so that they had more time with family. On the other hand, reports of domestic abuse rose as well, Further, the family lives of many women were deeply disrupted (more than men, another sign of ongoing family-gender disparity). Over 350 million women, worldwide, lost their jobs, partly because they were in vulnerable employment sectors, like tourism, but partly because they had primary responsibilities for child care, home schooling, household maintenance. A further concern: given economic collapse, more families may feel pressed to push some daughters into child marriage, to relive resource constraints. Some authorities have speculated that it might take a generation to restore earlier trends toward greater gender parity. Birth rates, of course, were further disrupted. One cautionary note: the last great pandemic, Spanish flu in 1918-9, did not produce many permanent changes, as -people rushed to forget about the episode. And of course, separate from Covid, the growing rate of climate-change-induced natural disaster has been raising new complications for families as well, in many different parts of the world.

**Study questions**

1. Does the rise in emotional attachment to pets signal a major change in family history?
2. Will the pandemic generate durable changes in family life, or will people be eager to return to prior patterns?
3. Is the family declining, on the whole, as an institution around the world?
4. Besides the developments noted in this section, are there other recent changes that should be taken into account?

**Further reading**

Frank Whittington, Suzanne Kunkel, and Kate de Medeiros, eds., *Global Aging: comparative perspectives on aging and the life course* (2nd ed., Springer, 2019)

Max Roser, "Fertility Rate," *Our World in Data,* December 2, 2017