

■ From Joint Family to Nuclear Family

The Family in eastern Finland in the Eighteenth Century

Over the last three centuries, the family in eastern Finland has undergone a rapid and radical change: from the joint family system at the end of the eighteenth century to the present individualistic society at the turn of the millennium, in which the concept of family embraces a vast variety of relationships and forms of household. At the end of the eighteenth century there began a particular period of transition in which the landless population started to establish smaller households alongside the larger establishments of the land-owning peasants. The concepts of family and household reflected the social and economic processes of change. At the same time, the concept of family, closely linked as it was to culture, laid down the lines for social differentiation, and, by defining what was private and what was common, it also reinforced strategies for the transfer of property and became incorporated into different forms of household. In the eighteenth century, Finland straddled the major divide in both the geographical divisions and the chronological changes in European family systems.

John Hajnal's theory of European and non-European marriage patterns has held a central place in research into the formation of the family. In his article, which is in the broad Malthusian tradition, he describes the special features of the European marital model in relation to those of other regions. From the late Middle Ages at the latest, there prevailed in Europe a unique marriage model characterised by a high average age at marriage (over twenty-five years for women), and a large proportion of unwed persons. The western European family system was typified by certain characteristics which distinguished it from those of many other pre-industrial societies. These included late marriage, the establishment of separate households after marriage and usually a period of paid employment before marriage. The non-European joint family tradition, on the other hand, was characterised by early marriage, an initial period of wedlock, usually patrilocal, and the division of the household between several families after the death of its head. A line running from St. Petersburg to Trieste constituted the border between the western and eastern models of marriage and family formation. Hajnal's conceptual division between east and west is based on nineteenth and twentieth-century data. The division has obtained further

historical depth from the researches of Michael Mitterauer, which take it back to the colonisation of eastern Europe in the ninth century.

Peter Laslett further refined Hajnal's division with his theory that there were four typical European family organizations: West, Middle, Mediterranean and East. In his definition of family systems, Laslett used not only the criteria of family composition and demography but also the organization of work and social welfare.¹ Laslett considered that the eastern family system was characterised by the large proportion of resident kin in households and the prevalence of extended-family, multiple family and joint-family households. The kin provided the labour in eastern households, and thus the proportion of servants was small. The average size of the household was large, and the number of adults in it was high. Correspondingly, the number of households established by cottagers or paupers was practically non-existent. In addition to a low average marrying age and the universality of the institution of marriage in eastern Europe, Laslett noted that the proportion of wives older than husbands was high, but that the age gap between spouses in their first marriage was low.

Hajnal and Alan Macfarlane have underlined the central significance of the western family system in the early, and unique, development of western European societies. Hajnal considered that Finland lay on the border between the two patterns of marriage and family formation. The idea of eastern Finland as a "frontier area between family systems" will be dealt with in the light of John Hajnal's and Peter Laslett's theories of family systems and recent research on eastern Europe, China and India. The dichotomy between European and non-European has recently been called in question (Jack Goody, Monica Das Gupta, James Lee & Wang Feng). Jack Goody and Emmanuel Todd have urged scholars to direct their research to the major difference in family systems that seems to exist between Africa and Eurasia.

The concept of the eastern family

The eastern family has taken a backseat in the discussion on the history of the family, serving mainly as a counter to the unique western model. This has affected the approach to the research, the typological classification and the research results. While the opposition of the two systems has revealed special features, differences and developmental trends, it has also held up research into the eastern family. The family formation models of both Hajnal and Laslett are based on the western model. The opposition between the European and non-European models of family formation merely provides a basis for a study of the western European marriage and nuclear family.

The application of Laslett's classification to areas of eastern Europe and Asia has revealed numerous family systems which differ from the European model, and which are to a great extent separate from each other. It may be justified to ask

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1 Laslett 1983, pp. 526-527. Table 17.5. Sets of tendencies in domestic group organization in traditional Europe.

how far the setting up of different eastern family patterns has been influenced by the typological model itself. Has an indispensable tool partly become an obstruction that prevents us from perceiving deeper correspondences?

The eastern family cannot be defined as a homogeneous, clearly delineated concept. Nor can we talk of a geographically and culturally homogenous eastern Europe. The family structures of eastern Europe have more frequently been compared to the western model than to each other. The "zadruga" of the Balkans have been considered a completely different family system from the extensive households of Russia and the Baltic countries. The existence of large families has been explained by various ecological and socio-economic conditions and factors relating to land ownership. Serfdom has often been offered as an explanation for the Russian and Baltic family structures, while in the Balkans the explanation has been located in the patriarchy and economic factors. Naturally, the fundamental influence of these factors on the formation of the family should not be underestimated; people are born into a particular ecological environment with land ownership norms and economic resources and access to these. Each individual family is defined by demographic factors: how many children are born, how many of them reach adulthood and how many of them marry. The demographic behaviour of a larger community is affected by factors like a high mortality rate and the age and sex structure of the population.

Although it is not possible to speak of a homogeneous eastern Europe, I would nevertheless venture to use the concept of an "eastern family system" to mean a family ideology that was common over a wide area. The large size of the household, the presence of several conjugal pairs, the division of property between the sons living in the household, the prohibition against women inheriting land, and their early age at marriage were typical structural features of the eastern family model, resulting from the way in which people understood the concepts of kin, family and family formation.

The opportunities and limitations that the eastern conception of the family has encountered, and which it has had to adapt to in different areas over the centuries, have been created by economic, institutional and demographic factors. From the economic point of view, one can discern a wide variety of strategies employed to ensure the productive function of the family. However, economic factors alone cannot explain the composition of the eastern family. It is even more difficult to approach the eastern family through institutional factors, for differences in legislation, language, religion and sect were considerable. Nor, as Karl Kaser has noted, did the eastern family system correspond to national or state borders. Forms of agriculture or judicial systems are equally incapable of explaining the eastern family. Rather it was a unit created by a combination of economic, cultural, administrative, legal and demographic factors. Kaser also links the eastern family to the feudal system, but the material from eastern Finland refutes this.

One might say the concept of the eastern family was reflected in both the spiritual and the material culture of eastern Europe. The traditional customs and values of the people have been preserved in both, and through these the people of eastern Finland have organized their life cycle. Culture, customs and traditions

are the factors that change least rapidly in passing from one generation to another. In approaching the "eastern family" through these factors, we must, however, remember that they were intimately interconnected and interdependent. The concept of the family and the kinship structures created and supported particular customs and rules of inheritance and transformed the culture into one that favoured the joint-family system. The material from eastern Finland clearly demonstrates the tradition of family formation, even in the face of adverse economic realities.

Research on the family in eastern Finland

This study, *From Joint to Nuclear Family*, investigates the family in eastern Finland in the eighteenth century by way of three basic concepts of the family: the household, kinship and marriage. These also constitute the main three chapters of the work. The chapter on the household takes the family as a production and consumption unit, exploring the ways in which the households of pre-industrial eastern Finland organized production, the proportion of labour from outside the kin that was used, and the average size of the household in different sections of the population. The chapter on kinship offers an in-depth view of kinship relations within the household. The concept of the eastern Finnish family is investigated by means of a longitudinal examination of family forms, and the proportions of group families and peasant families. In the theory of family formation, marriage constituted the basic difference between the European and non-European family models. The significance of marriage for the society of eastern Finland has been investigated by linking east Finnish nuptial traditions to demographic factors: the age at which people married, and the proportions of married and unmarried persons in the population.

The economic and cultural area in which household and kinship relation and marriage have been studied consisted of the Province of Kymmene. Throughout the latter part of the eighteenth century, the Province of Kymmene, which embraced eastern Finland, constituted the eastern part of the Kingdom of Sweden, to which Finland at that time belonged. Ten per cent (85,000) of the total population of Finland lived in the province. Between 1766 and 1800 the number of households in the province increased from 7000 to 12,000. The region dealt with in this study has been divided into three economic areas on the basis of land ownership, different forms of cultivation and socio-economic structures: the burnbeating cultivation area of Savo, the small-holdings of eastern Uusimaa and the country estates area of eastern Häme. In the Province of Kymmene east and west Finnish cultural traditions met. The division into cultural areas has been based on research in ethnology and cultural anthropology which has divided Finland into east Finnish and west Finnish cultural areas. The concept of culture is used to cover both spiritual and material culture. The tax and church registers that were kept from an early date in the Kingdom of Sweden have provided an extensive source of material for the research. The main sources used in the study have been census lists, population statistics, marriage, baptism and burial registers and confirmation records.

The family in eastern Finland was a large kinship unit. Economic production and consumption, social life, land ownership, as well as the transfer of property and the transmission of the culture to succeeding generations were all intimately bound up with the family. The responsibilities and obligations of each member of the collective household were defined by the position she or he held. Security was based on the family hierarchy and kinship ties.

The eastern Finnish family confirms many of the typical characteristics of the eastern household proposed in Laslett's theory. The size of the kin group was large in the households of both land-owning peasants and crofters. Almost without exception the household contained not only the head of the family and his spouse but also their children and their families together with the families of the brothers of the family head. Most of the households consisted of extended or joint families of over eight persons. The number of nuclear families among the landed population was low, but the households of those without land were smaller and simpler in structure.

Since the kin provided the work force for most families, very few in eastern Finland experienced employment as a stage in their lives. The proportion of employed persons was clearly lower than in the households of western Finland. It was mainly the gentry that employed labour to till their estates. However, there were also some married wage labourers or casual labourers employed on the farms of the peasants. Households in eastern Finland came into being through a process of division and integration, and the significance of marriage for the formation of a new household was not crucial. When the old family head died, his heir inherited the household and became the new head of the family, and the brothers who remained on the farm might well continue to live in the same household.

Some of the criteria used in Laslett's model turned out to be irrelevant in the case of eastern Finland. These included the claims that one characteristic of the eastern family was the high proportion of wives who were older than their husbands and that unmarried women were the heads of households. Moreover, in the life cycle of the eastern family a considerable number of farm households went through the stem and nuclear family stages.

Both the family formation system outlined by Hajnal and the organizational criteria of Laslett are linked to the Malthusian concept of "preventive check". The eastern family, with its firm basis in a hierarchy defined according to age, sex and generation, became the mere hand-maiden of the western family. Hajnal and Laslett ignore the inequality between the generations, and they also *underestimate* the dominant status of the head of the family in relation to the other members. The eastern family was a patriarchal family, in which the main bond was a blood relationship on the father's side. The relationships between fathers, sons and brothers were primary. Even the birth rate was controlled by postponing the marriage of the males.

Kinship and the whole hierarchy of the eastern family system was biologically based. This is apparent particularly in the position of women, which was affected by their age and the number of children they bore. On reaching fecundity, a woman married into her husband's household. The birth rate was also affected by biological factors: unlike in the west, the child-bearing period of the female was of almost maximal length. Child-bearing might be delayed to suit the situation of the household, but it was not done by postponing the marrying age of females in order to curtail the span of their child-bearing.

The marrying age for women was low, and marriage was regulated. A strong marriage bond was a threat to the eastern family. Marriage was not a central factor in the creation of households, nor was it in their division. Decisions concerning the household were taken in accordance with its interests, and they placed limits on the roles of individuals within the family. Changes took place slowly in the eastern household, with responsibility gradually shifting from one generation to another. The sons worked alongside the father and assumed more and more authority as the latter grew older. During this time they might leave to farm independently, but the actual division of the land usually did not take place until the father had died. The system of inheritance was also part of the union between the father and his sons. Girls were disbarred from owning land. Their lot was a dowery taken from their mother's property and sometimes their mother's legacy.

However, it is not possible to speak of a homogeneous east Finnish family. From the seventeenth century on, the division between the nobility and the commons had begun to change into a split between the those who owned land and those who did not. At the end of the eighteenth century, the households of the landless, which had grown rapidly, were dependent on the land-owning gentry and peasantry. Changes in land ownership reflected the decay of the eastern family system. Burnbeating cultivation favoured the collective land-ownership of kinship groups rather than the field-ownership of individuals. The establishment of crofts and cottages was linked with the ideologies of the stem family and the nuclear family, and these were reflected in the legislation of the Swedish state. A piece of land and day labour provided a livelihood for a crofter and his family, but it made the expansion of production almost impossible. The size of the population could be increased by allowing servants to marry. The laws on marriage and inheritance were also dictated by the western concept of marriage.

A process of increasing social heterogeneity broke the significance of the kin. The society of eastern Finland changed from a community of peasant clans to one composed of the landed and the landless. The landed protected their position by excluding marriage outside their own class and by altering the inheritance system. Economic differences between the two social groups increased the cultural alienation of the peasants from the landless population, and this was reflected in the concept of the family. The landless, even the poorest, moved out of the hearths of the peasants to live in their own cottages.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the household structures of eastern Finland were beginning more and more to resemble the western and central

European model. Nevertheless, the majority of households remained those of extended families. These together with joint families constituted the households of the land-owning population. However, the growth in the size of the landless population was reflected in an increase in the number of nuclear families of the western type. Generally speaking, the poorer the social group, the simpler were their family forms.

The direction of the shift was from south to north and from west to east. The forms of household and the changes that took place in them were connected to economic areas. In the country estates areas of eastern Uusimaa and eastern Häme, the family forms of both the landed and the landless became simpler and decreased in size. An opposite development took place in the burnbeating cultivation regions of Savo, where the family forms of almost all social groups extended at the end of the eighteenth century. That the landless also felt the existence of a large kin to be important is shown by the considerable number of relations living in their small households. A number of factors contributed to an increased emphasis on private property and changed the concept of land ownership: the clearance of large areas of land for cultivation, the purchase of land for inheritance and the Redistribution of Land Decree of 1757. The older right to own land, which was based on use, changed into the private ownership of land. In areas where there were large estates or peasant farms, the Redistribution of Land Decree came into effect at the end of the eighteenth century, and at the same time the purchase of land for inheritance became more common. In the regions where burnbeating cultivation was practised, this did not happen till the beginning of the nineteenth century.

It was no longer unusual for cottagers and poor members of society to have separate households. The exclusion of persons outside the kin from households not only took the form of expelling soldiers and casual labourers from the family hearths, but it also resulted in a change in the position of hired labour. Hired hands were no longer allowed to marry into the household because they were to an ever increasing extent children of the landless population. The concept of private ownership which formed around the nuclear family also had the effect of excluding other relatives, and this separated the concept of the family from that of the household. The number of relatives in the household decreased in the regions of country estates and farms at the end of the century, and correspondingly the employment of servants increased.

There were both chronological and local differences in marriage customs in eastern Finland. At the end of the eighteenth century, the marrying age rose, and at the same time the proportion of unmarried persons increased. This chronological change affected the whole country, but it was more evident in western Finland. Although the marriage tradition emphasized biological age as the major factor, the people of eastern Finland also took the social position of the future spouse into consideration. The more diverse was the social structure of the community, the more carefully was the spouse chosen from within the same social group. The landed population married younger than the landless, although the crofters married at almost the same age as the land-owning peasants. Almost

all social groups in eastern Finland married at an earlier age than in western Finland. The economic and social realities relating to marriage in eastern Finland are intimately bound up with the cultural tradition. Marriage customs are reflected in demographic factors: the marrying age, the marriage rate and the proportion of unmarried persons correlate with the engagement and nuptial traditions of eastern and western Finland. The border between the eastern and western Finnish marriage and family systems follows the east and west Finnish cultural division. In an area where the two different traditions met, the particular features of both cultural areas became emphasized and reinforced the cultural divide even further.

The roots of the change in the Finnish concept of the family went back centuries earlier, and the change continued into the nineteenth century. The following quotation from a newspaper illustrates the change in atmosphere and attitudes towards the joint family system: "Joint families are institutions that destroy all initiative and spirit of enterprise, turning people into machines that are pushed around and directed wherever the patriarch indicates. People's horizons have broadened, the old dependency has begun to seem a burden, and the desire for independence has started to grow. This has led to joint families breaking up, one after another."

In the west of Finland, private ownership was part of the nuclear and stem family system. The transfer of the land was a central event in the cycle of the stem family. This usually took place when the oldest son married. An agreement was made to pay the parents a life annuity to ensure their livelihood. Where in the eastern family the parents were at the summit of the family hierarchy, in the west the former master of the household was forced to secure an income for himself in his old age by means of a contract.

People began to obtain security by way of private ownership and collective institutions. The more common nuclear families became, the more important became the role of collective institutions. Correspondingly, the increased strength of the position of the church and the state decreased the power of the kin. Christianity brought in a broader concept than natural kinship: that of spiritual kinship. The church opposed ancestor worship, the kinship clans and the commercial nature of marriage. It has been suggested that the roots of modern individualism are firmly planted in the Christian tradition. Christianity favoured the spiritual development of the individual rather than that of the group. Differences between the east and west Finnish marriage and family systems also reflected the strength of Christian traditions and conceptions. The border between Russian Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism (later Lutheranism), also reinforced the division between east Finnish and west Finnish cultures. *In the west religion was organized and rational, in the east it was mystical.* The Orthodox religion was *thus* far more tolerant of the old pagan cults, and for example it absorbed into itself the worship of the dead.

The nuclear family with its concentration on social factors offered an opportunity for intimate and loving interaction between children and parents and also between married couples. The later marrying age and a period of service when young increased people's mobility and encouraged them to save money.

Love, mobility and savings were important factors in the development of the modern family and its economic relations. The ideology of the nuclear family also gave more power to the individual in terms of both choice of spouse and decision-making within the family. At the same time, the more independent position of individuals and the enablement of women to inherit brought greater material security and weakened the dependence on the kin.¹

In the eastern family system, security was based on kinship, and this permitted a means of production that required greater freedom. Thus the relationships and order of the eastern family system allowed for the mobility needed to clear new land from the forests by burnbeating. The continued survival of the family and the kin was more important than division of the property. At the same time, the right of the family and the kin to ownership of the land was emphasized. In the concepts of marriage and the family and the inheritance system of eastern Finland, therefore, the kinship system, the prioritizing of patrilineality over the marriage bond, the weak position of women and the clear differentiation of the sexes in the inheritance order prevailed for longer than in the west.

In asserting the elements of inequality in the eastern family system, we must however be careful not to exaggerate the supremacy of the western model. In many ways, the change from the eastern family system to the western also meant a shift from a biologically determined hierarchy and the power of the kin to a material form of security. While individual selflessness can be exploited for the purposes of communal selfishness, so too can individual selfishness thrive in the freedom accorded to it by the community. We must beware of "The west against the rest" kind of thinking that Goody warned against in any future comparisons of the African and Eurasian family systems and avoid the subject-object stance that has shackled research into the eastern family system. Rather we must regard all family systems as equal. All are equally valid subjects of research.

Translated by Gerard McAlester

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1 Macfarlane 1986.