



**39th Annual Meeting of
Social Science History Association (SSHA), Toronto,
Ontario, CA,
6-9 November, 2014**

General topic: **“Inequalities: Politics, Policy, and the Past”**

<http://www.ssha.org/>
Family/demography network

CALL FOR PAPERS

Panel session:

ARE CRISES CHANGING THE VALUE OF CHILDREN INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE FAMILY?

The conference will take place at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Organisers:

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PANEL: ARE CRISES CHANGING THE VALUE OF CHILDREN INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE FAMILY?

Session abstract:

The 2014 SSHA Program Committee encourages panel proposals that speak to the theme of “Inequalities: Politics, Policy, and the Past” (but it also welcomes papers and discussions that would take account of the impact of main crises that affected societies worldwide as the outbreak of World War I in 1914. The present session intends to put together studies showing to what extent the value of children was impacted by demographic, socio-economic and/or political changes and various catastrophes (corresponding to war, famine, diseases and all tragic disasters that Malthus called “positive checks”, this expression including various causes of death).

In his first book, entitled “*The Crisis*” (written in 1796) which remained unpublished, Thomas Robert Malthus already suggested the dilemma (developed two years later in his first *Essay on the Principle of Population* 1798 – published anonymously) that population growth may be the consequence of economic prosperity but that the effects of population increase would impair or even destroy this prosperity, given scarcity of subsistence. Actually, the inverse relation between the financial ability of parents to rear children and the number of children could be found in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), by Adam Smith (Book 1, chapter 8). Malthus proposed the solution of “preventive checks”, including late marriage and celibacy, resulting in having fewer children through the virtuous practice of “moral restraint”. But we can consider that Malthus was “a prophet of the past” (as Le Roy Ladurie put it). When travelling to Scandinavia (1799), Malthus discovered that getting married in Norway was not easy and traditionally strictly regulated: farmers and farm workers had to provide income or land ownership certificate. Engaging in legal marriage may have been difficult for economic reasons. Some women servants had illegitimate children, babies that they were not often able to keep with them.

Beginning late 18th c., many illegitimate children were abandoned to charity in Europe, particularly in urban context (mostly from migrant rural mothers) and their mortality was terrible. Studies on France and Italy have shown that mothers used to put something specific in their clothes that could later serve as a mark of identification, or they wrote, in a short message of apologies, that they were doing it out of necessity, being working, unmarried and too poor to pay for a wet-nurse. In Paris, after the 1789 French Revolution, many single mothers inquired about their child, but many had died.

In 1962, a French historian, Philippe Aries published a seminal study (in English, under the title *Centuries of Childhood: a Social History of Family Life* (original version, in French, 1960). Aries argued that parents' interest in investing in their children individual care, education and well-being developed with Renaissance movement in Europe. Research developed further in many directions, with multi-disciplinary approaches, about age at marriage, co-residence patterns, illegitimacy and domestic service. In Europe, John Hajnal (1965, 1983), Peter Laslett (1965,1978), Goody (1976, 1996), Michael Mitterauer (1982, 1990), among others, proposed models which became popular among social historians, tentatively tested in Western as in Eastern societies, and finally heavily criticized.

Main questions remain today as:

- How did a shift from a proto-industrial mostly rural world to an industrialized urbanized world change reactions facing crises and large scale changes (as for example the French Revolution of 1789, wars of independence, collapse of Communism etc.) ?
- How did they affect parents individual and family strategies, concerning family size, the care of children, child participation in labor force, their mobility - according to age and gender -, and family economy?
- When was a child representing a higher value?
- Was there a permanent gender difference of treatment between boys and girls?
- Was there a concept of child (boy or/and girl) "utility"?
- At what age was a son or daughter expected to work in or outside home?
- Was child labor remunerated or evaluated on an exchange basis?
- To what extent was female celibacy encouraged in order to keep female hands at home in reserve for extra work, baby-sitting, care for sick members of the family and at the same time money saving?
- To what extent family transmission system affected the circulation of children (young and adults) within society?
- Did dowry system vs bride-price system affect the financial and symbolic value of children?

In this session, we would like to take opportunity of fresh testimonies, new experiences and quantitative sources (as for example large databases nowadays available, with thousands of historical life-course studies), expecting new light on these old questions, in order to clarify long-term trends and model variations, in comparative and precise gender perspective.