

# Family strategies, wage labour and the family lifecycle in the Groningen countryside, ca. 1850-1910

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WORK IN PROGRESS

## 1. Introduction

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of rapid change in economic and social respect in The Netherlands. The Groningen countryside was no exception. On the one hand the production per capita began to rise structurally, which resulted in a persistent increase in real wages, in economic well-being and eventually in a fall in mortality.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand bourgeois ideas about the role of married men and women and also of adolescent children began to penetrate all parts of society. Lower class political and social movements became important. Partly as a reaction, the different religious denominations began to organise their members of lower and higher class increasingly in strictly segmented pillars, with their own schools, clubs and societies. All these more or less interrelated developments make the second half of the nineteenth century an extremely interesting period to study.

In this paper I will concentrate on agricultural labourer families and the ways they tried to earn a living using the labour of the different family members in the second half of the nineteenth century. The data mainly refer to Nieuw-Scheemda, a little village in the eastern part of the Groningen clay soil region. The labourers comprised 40-50% of the families in northern Groningen in the second half of the 19th century. For most of these labourer families wage work on large farms was the most important source of income. However, it is quite difficult to get an exact grasp on this kind of paid labour, for example, because it was done on numerous different farms. Census and population registers only state occupations, but do not supply information on (seasonal) unemployment and the number of working days. The information on paid work of married women is very unreliable, reflecting mainly cultural opinions of civil servants, instead of actual situations.

Luckily a number of farm accounts concerning Nieuw-Scheemda, sometimes stretching over several decades, have survived in personal archives. By intensive reworking of these accounts it is possible to derive more precise information on the number of working days of the farm labourer families employed. Also, statements can be made on the incidence of seasonal unemployment in a period before official

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<sup>1</sup> R.F.J. Paping and G.A. Collenteur, 'The economic development of the clay area of Groningen 1770-1910: Income and socio-economic groups', in: P. Kooij ed. *Where the twain meet. Dutch and Russian regional demographic development in a comparative perspective 1800-1917* (Groningen/Wageningen 1998) 43; R.F.J. Paping, 'Groei of stagnatie. De bevolkingsontwikkeling van Groningen', in: *Gronings Historisch Jaarboek*, 7 (2000) 44-48; G.A. Collenteur en R.F.J. Paping, 'De arbeidsmarkt voor inwonend boerenpersoneel in het Groningse kleigebied 1830-1920' in: *NEHA-Jaarboek voor economische, bedrijfs- en techniekgeschiedenis*, 60 (1997) 119-120.

unemployment statistics started. Farm accounts also give insight in the number of days different members of labourer families worked on the farm and the amount of money they earned. In this way more insight can be given into the possibilities and strategies related to the internal allocation of paid labour of the labourer families.

The different family strategies labourers developed were strongly influenced by the phase in the family lifecycle in which they lived. In first instance, the changes accompanying the family lifecycle created problems by increasing the number of mouths to feed over time, until children start to leave the parental home. After some years of marriage the rising age of children also shaped economic chances for the family by augmenting the possibilities to work of the children and also of the mother who needed less time to care for the children. However, the economic and social developments just sketched also played a role in determining the strategies of labourer families, changing their goals and their possibilities.

Recently, the term strategy has become very popular in scientific social historic research. Choices of people and even social developments are explained by referring to strategic behaviour. Nonetheless, family strategy is a rather problematic and complicated concept in empirical research. Two problems I will shortly touch upon.<sup>2</sup>

**Firstly**, the term strategy is not easy to operationalise in historical research. This becomes clear if you use the definition of strategy as **the conscious use of means to reach a certain goal**. However, historical databanks only give insight in the behaviour of people, in the actual actions of persons, but not in the considerations they had for acting that way. So in most instances we only know something about the used means of the people's strategies, but we do not know the exact goals they had. Because of this we of course do not know the relation between the used means and those goals either. In other words, it is quite easy to reconstruct what had happened, but nearly not why it happened in each case. We can find a lot about the outcomes of decision-making processes, but it is difficult to reconstruct the underlying conscious strategies of the people.

**Secondly**, the problems even become bigger if the notion of strategy is connected to the family. Family strategy means that there is not one decision-maker, but that there is a joint strategy of the whole family. How such a joint strategy comes into being is not easy to imagine. A weighing between the different interests of the different members of the family must take place. It will be clear that not all the members of the same family have the same goals, although the family acts most of the time as one unit.

These two theoretical notions suggest that in the practice of historical research, the actual reconstruction of family strategies will be very difficult, and we can only make hypotheses about these strategies. However, it seems a very safe proposition that most human behaviour had been purposeful,

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<sup>2</sup> See also: A. Knotter, 'Inleiding', in: J. Kok e.a. ed. *Levensloop en levenslot. Arbeidsstrategieën van gezinnen in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Groningen/Wageningen 1999) 1-10; R.F.J. Paping, 'Gezinnen en cohorten: arbeidsstrategieën in een marktgerichte agrarische economie: de Groningse kleigebieden 1830-1920', in: J. Kok e.a. ed. *Levensloop en levenslot. Arbeidsstrategieën van gezinnen in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Groningen/Wageningen 1999) 17-19.

aiming at certain goals. For this reason we can not do without the concept of strategy if we want to explain human behaviour, although it is difficult to get a complete clear picture of these strategies.

## 2. The municipality of Scheemda (province of Groningen)

Nieuw-Scheemda is one of the five villages in the municipality of Scheemda, which is situated in the eastern part of the Groningen clay area. The working class, or with a better word the labourers, were the single biggest occupational group in the Groningen clay area (table 1). Their share in population was rising in the second half of the nineteenth century. Most of the labourers were active in agriculture. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, some employment arose in large agriculture related factories (agro-industry) as a result of the start of industrialisation in The Netherlands. For Nieuw-Scheemda it is important that around 1900 two huge strawboard factories were established in nearby Midwolda (just on the frontier with Nieuw-Scheemda) with 155 employees (mainly unskilled labourers) in 1911.

*Table 1: Estimated occupational structure of heads of households in the Groningen clay area, 1850-1910 (percentages).*

	farmers	labourers	'middle class'
1850	17%	41%	42%
1870	18%	45%	37%
1890	15%	48%	37%
1910	13%	53%	34%

Note: Labourers comprise also unskilled and skilled labourers in services and industry. 'Middle class' comprises all other occupations, including civil servants and preachers. Heads of households without occupation were not taken into account.

Source: R.F.J. Paping and G.A. Collenteur, 'The economic development of the clay soil area of Groningen 1770-1910: income and socio-economic groups', P. Kooij ed. *Where the twain meet. Dutch and Russian regional development in a comparative perspective 1800-1917* (Groningen 1998) 39.

In 1850 the municipality of Scheemda counted 3.733 inhabitants, a number which rose to 6.215 in 1910.<sup>3</sup> During the whole period far more people left than settled in the municipality. In the period 1900-1910 the total nett loss of departure was even some 14% of the population. In most parts of the Groningen clay area this emigration was stimulated by the agricultural depression with falling prices of cereals and accompanying rising unemployment. However, in the municipality of Scheemda leaving the region was already an even older phenomenon, dating from the fifties of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the population of Scheemda was growing, as becomes clear from table 2. Despite the migration losses, the

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<sup>3</sup> CD-ROM, CBS and NIWI, Publicaties Volkstellingen 1795-1971.

population growth was not tempered. The high and rising natural population growth in the period 1870-1910 signified that Scheemda had come in the first phase of the demographic transition with a stagnant or even rising number of births combined with steeply falling death rates.<sup>4</sup>

*Table 2: Average annual population development of the municipality of Scheemda, 1850-1910 (numbers per 1.000 inhabitants).*

	annual migration surplus	natural population growth	real population growth
1850-1860	-3	+12	+9
1860-1870	-8	+13	+5
1870-1880	-7	+16	+9
1880-1890	-6	+17	+11
1890-1900	-7	+19	+12
1900-1910	-14	+19	+5

Sources: Rijksarchief Groningen, Provincieverslagen Groningen; CD-ROM, CBS and NIWI, Publicaties Volkstellingen 1795-1971.

In the agricultural census of 1862 Scheemda counted around 842 families among them 389 families of agricultural labourers (46%) and 118 families of farmers (14%).<sup>5</sup> On average, every farmer employed three to four labourer families. Around 1910, there were still 118 farmers, the number of labourers, however, had risen to at least 463, but probably to considerably more.<sup>6</sup> The village of Nieuw-Scheemda had more or less the same occupational pattern as the municipality of Scheemda as a whole, possibly the percentage of labourers and farmers combined was a little bit higher.

### 3. Farm labourers and agricultural wage work in Groningen

As already memorised the group of unskilled labourers comprised mainly of farm labourers.<sup>7</sup> Although

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<sup>4</sup> Paping, 'Groei of stagnatie'.

<sup>5</sup> *Bijdragen tot de kennis van den tegenwoordigen staat der provincie Groningen vijfde deel: Landbouw-statistiek*, 2 parts (Groningen 1870).

<sup>6</sup> Enquete 1910....

<sup>7</sup> See for agricultural wage work also: P.R. Priester en H. De Raad. *'De iezeren kette van d'armoude'. Aspecten van de sociaal-economische geschiedenis van Beerta, 1800-1870* (Groningen 1982); P.R. Priester, 'Agrarische produktie en werkgelegenheid in een Groninger gemeente: Beerta 1800-1870', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale*

work on the farm formed their most important activities, labourers sometimes also did other physical work, for example digging canals, dikes and roads. While the family head was depending on wage for its income, there were only few possibilities for other family members to earn an income or to perform economic labour within the household. Most of the labourer families in the Groningen clay area had only very small plots of land at their disposal, mainly for growing potatoes and vegetables. The area around Scheemda is in that sense a little exceptional, because most of the labourers cultivated also relatively large plots of land on their own account. In 1862, 55% of all the families in the municipality of Scheemda owned one or more cows, 52% had some poultry walking around, 63% fattened one or more pigs, and even 68% were breeding sheep.<sup>8</sup> The percentages are so high that it is clear that some of the labourers also must have owned cattle. In that respect it is not surprising that in 1910 nearly three hundred labourers in Scheemda cultivated more than one quarter of a hectare. This was made possible by the short working days in the Oldambt region where Nieuw-Scheemda was a part of.<sup>9</sup> If it wasn't harvest-time the working day of the labourers on the farm was over around one or two o'clock in the afternoon, and afterwards the labourers worked in their own gardens and fields. So labourers in Scheemda combined their wage income with the home production of food, and a part of this production of food could even be sold: for example some potatoes and also a part of the bacon from a fattened pig. In a sense farm labourers in Scheemda resembled cottagers. However, wage income remained their most important source of income. They needed money to pay house and land rent, and also to buy bread, flour, peat, soap, tobacco and other grocery products.

Because the pieces of land and the wage income of the male family head were insufficient to reach a reasonable living, other members of the labourer families also had to go out to work for wages. The unskilled nature of the work of the labourers resulted in quite low wages for the family heads. The profession of labourer offered nearly no perspectives for the future. Occupational mobility was a quite rare phenomenon. You could say that everybody who was once a labourer, had a big chance to stay a labourer its whole life. Most of the labourers were also children of labourers (table 3). During the second half of the nineteenth century it seems that the labouring class in the Groningen clay area even became more closed. The percentage labourers with parents from other occupational groups fell significantly.

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*Geschiedenis*, XI (1985) 51-86; P.R. Priester, *De economische ontwikkeling van de landbouw in Groningen, 1800-1910; Een kwalitatieve en kwantitatieve analyse* (Wageningen 1991) 135-206; R.F.J. Paping, 'Voor een handvol stuivers'; *Werken, verdienen en besteden: de levensstandaard van boeren, arbeiders en middenstanders op de Groninger klei, 1770-1860 [Historia Agriculturae XXVII]* (Groningen 1995) 99-117.

<sup>8</sup> *Bijdragen tot de kennis: Landbouw-statistiek*.

<sup>9</sup> O.S. Knottnerus, 'Het Land Kanaän aan de Noordzee: een vergeten hoofdstuk', *Historia Agriculturae*, XXII (1991) 48-52.

Table 3: The occupations of parents by birth of cohort members (born 1830, 1850 and 1870 in the Groningen clay area) who later became labourers after marriage (percentages).<sup>10</sup>

	born 1830	born 1850	born 1870
unskilled labourers	64 %	73 %	78 %
farmers	8 %	3 %	4 %
middle class	23 %	15 %	15 %
other occupations and none	6 %	9 %	4 %
N	226	188	130

Around 1850, the labour strategies presumably were still mainly aimed at generating enough income to survive in the short run and in the long run. However other motives could also be already of importance for labour market choices of labourers in this period. Especially one can think of the preservation of a social network (a reason not to migrate to unknown places). Another motive can be the creation of pleasant domestic circumstances by keeping the children at home. The rise in real wages after 1860 made such new goals more and more attainable.<sup>11</sup>

However, for most children living at home it was only possible to find paid work during the summer half of the year, when the demand for labour on the farms was very large (see also part 5). Even for the family heads it was difficult to find work the whole year through. Taking this into account the Groningen labourers were split into three groups.<sup>12</sup> Group 1 consisted of regular workers who had concluded a fixed contract with a farmer, and who were assured of work the whole year through (regular labourers). Group 2 consisted of so-called semi-regular labourers, who just as group 1 always were working for the same farmer, but were dismissed a part of the year. This was especially the case in winter when there was not so much work available on the farms. A third group was formed by casual labourers who continuously changed from employer. During a year they worked for several farmers and also for other kind of employers. They were heavily hit by winter unemployment. Casual labourers also participated into the seasonal labour migration movement. Some of them went to the neighbouring province of Friesland to harvest the hay, to the nearby Dutch peat districts to dig peat, and also for unskilled labour to Germany (especially between around 1895 and 1914).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Source: Cohort-analysis Integral History project Groningen.

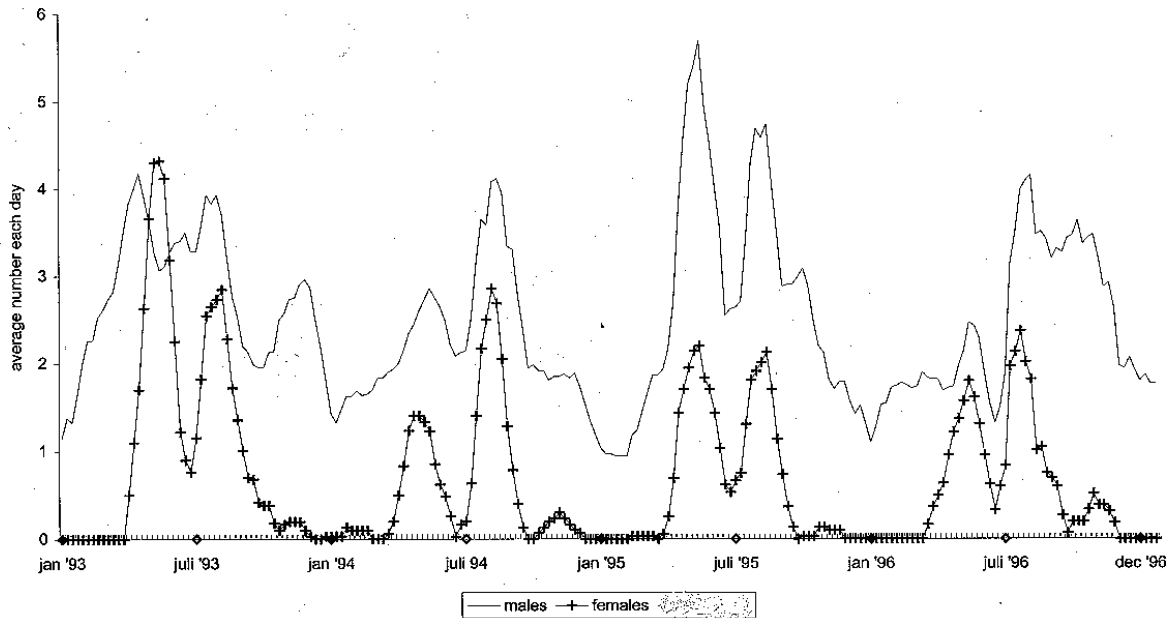
<sup>11</sup> Collenteur and Paping, 'De arbeidsmarkt voor inwonend boerenpersoneel', 127-131.

<sup>12</sup> R.F.J. Paping, 'Vaste en losse arbeiders en de werkloosheid op de Groninger klei, 1760-1820' in: *NEHA-Jaarboek voor economische, bedrijfs- en techniekgeschiedenis*, 57 (1994) 126-127, 151-153.

<sup>13</sup> Rijksarchief Groningen, Provinciaal Archief, Gemeenteverslagen Scheemda.

As becomes clear from Graph A, winter unemployment was a very serious problem in agriculture. In the summer half year farmer Dallinga hired some twice as much male labourers as during the winter. Seen in this light it isn't strange that many casual labourers searched for supplementary job opportunities outside agriculture. The working-class families which are studied here are mainly regular and semi-regular labourers (groups 1 and 2) working always for the same farmer. For female labourers the situation was even more severe than for casual labourers, because in winter farmer Dallinga did not demand the labour of any outside living female workers at all. So female labourers could only find agricultural wage work between April and October. They mainly weeded and helped in harvest-time.

Graph A: Male and female labourers working on the Dallinga farm in Nieuw-Scheemda, 1893-1896.<sup>14</sup>



Next to these wage workers living outside the farm, farmers also employed farm servants which lived inside the household.<sup>15</sup> These farm hands and maids were young unmarried boys and girls, mainly sons and daughters of labourers. They were contracted most of the time for one year, from may to may. This contract could be lengthened by one or more years if both parties agreed. When the servants were still relatively young, their parents negotiated the contracts. Around the age of 18, it seems that the servants became more or less autonomous, taking the decisions themselves. This arrangement with live-in farm servants was attractive for both farmer and labourer. The farmer had six or even seven days a week young servants at his

<sup>14</sup> Rijksarchief Groningen, familiearchief Dallinga, inv. nr. 4: farm-accounts.

<sup>15</sup> G.A. Collenteur en R.F.J. Paping, 'De arbeidsmarkt voor inwonend boerenpersoneel in het Groningse kleigebied 1830-1920' in: *NEHA-Jaarboek voor economische, bedrijfs- en techniekgeschiedenis*, 60 (1997) 96-135.

disposal, who were acquainted to the horses, cows and the rest of the farm. The maids could also do some of the housekeeping. The labourers saved on the costs of food, and their children could already earn some money at the age of 13-14. Their wage was at least until around the age of 17 or 18 handed over to the parents. Children living at home could also earn money, but as we have noticed it was difficult for them to find work the whole year through, and the parents had to pay for their food expenses instead of the farmers.

#### 4. The lifecycle of the family

For the village of Nieuw-Scheemda luckily four farmer accounts concerning hired labour have survived until now.<sup>16</sup> These accounts are in general very rare, because they normally were thrown away after some years. The two accounts of Dallinga and Barlagen are very detailed. The account of Van Cingel registers only a few annual contracts. The last one, from Knottnerus, reports the annual earnings of each worker on the farm. Although the number of labourers in the accounts is limited, the information given is very detailed. Especially the Dallinga and Barlagen accounts give precise information for some families of mainly regular labourers. During a long period had been noted whom of the family members worked and on which days. This gives the possibility to relate wage earning of the specific family members to the family lifecycle.

In Groningen the nuclear family was the dominant household structure, and the same was the case for the Nieuw-Scheemda labourers. However quite a lot of families were during a few years extended, but if you look to the circumstances this was mainly forced. A daughter gave birth to illegitimate children which lived temporary in the house of the grandparents, until the daughter married. A son made a girl pregnant at the age of 19 and was forced to marry immediately without having been able to rent a house of his own. Afterwards the young family left the parental household as soon as possible. A daughter became widow very young and returned with two little children to her parents.

*Table 4: Forced first marriages of cohort members (labourers) born around 1830, 1850 and 1870 in the Groningen clay area (percentages).*

	1830	1850	1870
First child born before marriage	11 %	13 %	10 %
First child born before 6½ months marriage	41 %	42 %	50 %
First child born after 6½ months marriage	48 %	46 %	40 %
N	205	174	121

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<sup>16</sup> Rijksarchief Groningen, familiearchief Dallinga, inv. nr. 4; Rijksarchief Groningen, Familiearchief Barlagen en De Groot, inv. nr. 12-13; Wage book Barlagen 1869-1881 (owned by family Westers in Warffum); Servants book Van Cingel 1869-1935 (owned by family Van Cingel te Haren); Loonboek Knottnerus (owned by O.S. Knottnerus in Zuidbroek, copy owned by Nederlands Agronomisch-Historisch Instituut).



As table 4 shows forced marriages were very common for labourers in the Groningen clay area. In this sense bourgeois ideas on family life do not seem to have much impact on this occupational group in the second half of the nineteenth century. The practice of letting the female partner become pregnant before marrying seems even to have increased. Forced marriages of course also signified that new couples suddenly were confronted by the problem of starting a household of their own. The first months these problems were solved by staying in one of the parental households or returning to these households. Because most of the time the bride as well as the bridegroom were working as live-in servant on annual contracts it was financially interesting to stay on the job as long as possible. Sometimes the husband remained live-in farm hand, for a short period after marriage and birth of the first child. Although on the one hand this practice of forced marriages seems to create much uncertainty, it was not completely irrational. Married women could earn less money (and emoluments) as a day labourers than unmarried women. So it was attractive to keep working as a farm maid as long as possible and postpone marriage until this event was nearly inevitable.

The practice of forced marriage stimulated presumably also young marriages. Remarkable is that the age at marriage of female labourers was in first instance (cohort born in 1830) higher than for other occupational groups.<sup>17</sup> During the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the marriage age of female labourers was falling considerably, so later on female labourers married relatively young. Male labourers were during the whole period relatively young when they married, compared with other groups in the Groningen clay area. However, their average age at marriage also fell a little bit more than those other groups, during the second half of the nineteenth century.

*Table 5: Average age at marriage of cohort members in the Groningen clay area born 1830, 1850 and 1870, who were labourer after marriage.*<sup>18</sup>

	males	N	females	N
born 1830	27,7	98	27,6	128
born 1850	26,6	82	24,9	103
born 1870	24,9	58	24,5	71

For working class families a theoretical family lifecycle can be sketched.<sup>19</sup> We must remember that most of the couples started a household on their own as soon as possible after the wedding, and stayed independent

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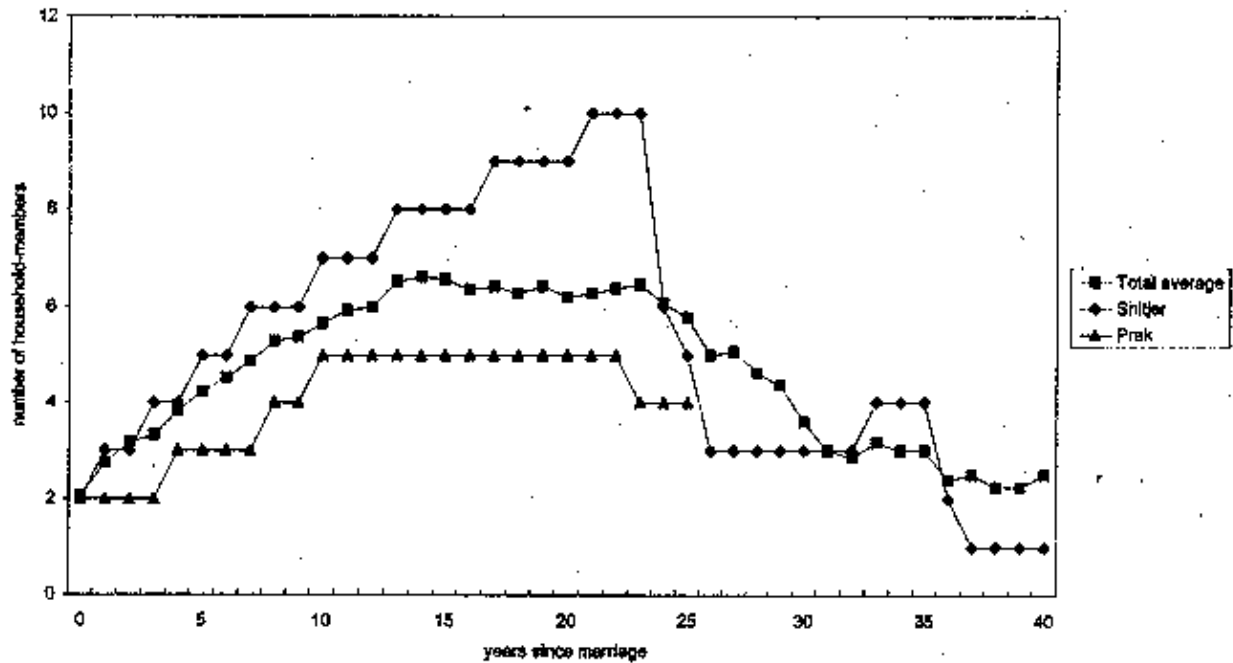
<sup>17</sup> Compared with: P. Kooij and A. Mennens-van Zeijst, 'Demographic behaviour in the Groningen clay area. The results of cohort analysis', in: P. Kooij ed. *Where the twain meet. Dutch and Russian regional demographic development in a comparative perspective 1800-1917* (Groningen/Wageningen 1998) 190.

<sup>18</sup> Collenteur and Paping, 'De arbeidsmarkt voor inwonend boerenpersoneel', 115.

<sup>19</sup> A. Knotter, 'Gezinsarmoede-gezinsarbeid: De invloed van de gezinscyclus op de inkomsten van gezinnen van losse (haven)arbeiders in Amsterdam in de eerste helft van deze eeuw', in: J. Kok e.a. ed. *Levensloop en levenslot. Arbeidsstrategieën van gezinnen in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Groningen/Wageningen 1999) 209-210.

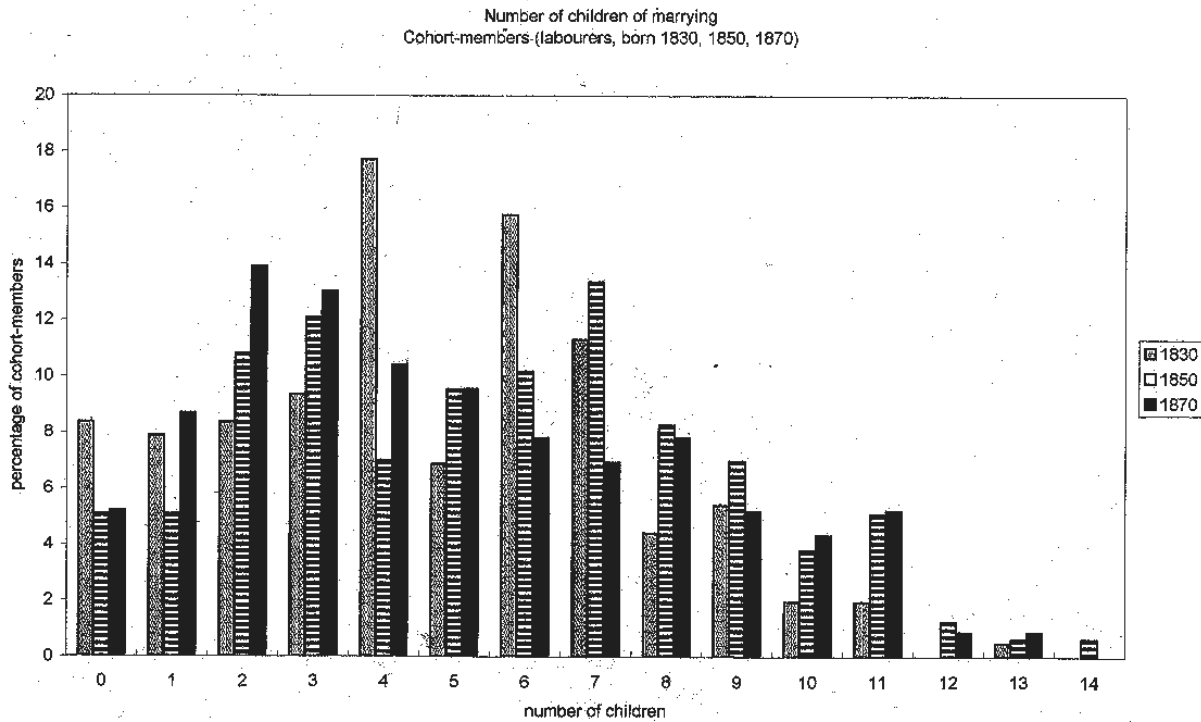
during the whole period of their marriage. In the first years of marriage the labourer families were still quite small with no, or only one little child. This can be seen as the first phase of the family lifecycle. The number of children increased in the following years. Especially between 5 and 15-20 years of marriage many little children not capable of earning much money themselves were living in the household (the second phase of the family lifecycle).

Graph B: Average household size and duration of marriage for several farm labourers in Nieuw-Scheemda.



However, after around 15 years most of the children started to become capable of working themselves, in many families no new children were born anymore. In this third period of the family lifecycle, which lasted until 25-30 years after marriage, the number of non-working children fell continuously, while the number of working children rose. However, I already memorised that many of these children left the parental household to become a live-in farm servant. So in this period the size of many labourer families began to decrease. This fall in size takes place quite early for the families with few children, and much later for the large families as the Snitjer's. In the fourth phase in the family lifecycle after 25-30 years the two old parents, if still alive, remained alone or sometimes with only one or two children in the household.

Graph C: Number of children of married cohort members (labourers born in 1830, 1850 and 1870).



It is clear that the family lifecycle is a model. The differences between the families could be enormous. One important reason is the large difference in the number of children labourer couples gave birth to as Graph C shows. Having two or three children was just as normal as having six or seven children. During the second half of the nineteenth century the number of very large, but also of quite small families (two or three children) rose. So the differences within the group of labourer families were increasing. Of the labourers marrying around 1855-1860 (cohort members born in 1830) some 40 % had four to six children, for the labourers marrying around 1875-1880 and 1895-1900 this was the case for just some 25 %.

Table 6: Average household composition and household size in Scheemda in 1862.<sup>20</sup>

	labourer households	farmer households
married men	0,9	0,9
married women	0,9	0,8

<sup>20</sup> *Bijdragen tot de kennis: Landbouw-statistiek.*

children less than 15	2,0	1,4
sons older than 15	0,2	0,5
daughters older than 15	0,2	0,4
male servants less than 15	0,0	0,3
female servants less than 15	0,0	0,3
male servants older than 15	-	1,1
female servants older than 15	-	1,0
total household size	4,2	6,8
total relatives in household	4,2	4,1

The departure of at least a part of the children of 15 years and older becomes clear if we compare the composition of farmer and labourer families in the agricultural statistic of 1862 (table 6). In the farmer household more sons and daughters older than fifteen were present, the number of children beneath fifteen was however much smaller. A part of the labourer children from 15 years and older had become farm hand or farm maid, even many children beneath 14 years had become farm servant. Every farm had on average more than two and a half servant living in. Because of this, in the labourer households counted less children above the age of 15.

## 5. Wage-work and the lifecycle of the family

From table 6 it becomes clear that labourer families in general had the strategy to send their children to work as servants living in the household of other families, especially farmers. The reason for this was connected to the family lifecycle. To rent out your children to become live-in servants elsewhere was a way to let them generate income and to lower the costs of consumption within the labourer households.

In this first phase of the family lifecycle it was relatively easy for married women to do wage work, while there were not many children to take care of. However, in this first period it was less necessary for women to work, the small family could relatively easily depend on the wage of the father. Economically the first phase was in general a favourable period.

After some years the household started to grow further and further, when more and more children were born. The need for money and food to maintain the family increased fast. For the mothers it became however much more difficult to do wage work, because they had to take care of the children. When the oldest labourer children became 9 years old they sometimes were not allowed to go to school in summer anymore. They had to keep an eye on their little brothers and sisters, when the mother was with the father at work on the farm. In this way it was possible for married women to combine work during summer with having a large number of little children.

The third phase started when children reached the age when they could earn income. For the

labourer family it was very attractive to let them earn as much as possible, for in this way the family could escape from the difficult first phase when the parents were troubled with too many dependent children. Leaving home to become a servant meant at least a fall in costs for the labourer family, not to speak of the wage they could earn for them. Most of the children indeed reached the age of 14 when the family was in a very difficult period. For the older children in the larger families the parents at that moment still had to take care of numerous younger brothers and sisters. For the last children in the labourer family it was also necessary to earn as much money as possible, because the earning capacities of the parents began to fall. The family was coming in the dangerous phase four of the family lifecycle. Agricultural work was very heavy, and a large part of the labourers were not capable too work anymore around the age of 50 to 60. The period between 20 and 25 years after marriage was in general quite favourable for the labourer families, but this was only the case if the family succeeded in finding well-paid jobs for the children.

In the next part I will look at some labourer families, and see how much income was earned during the family lifecycle. A problem is that we do not know how much money was brought home by the children who worked elsewhere. For the family Snitjer we clearly see phase three with many children capable to work. Especially 18 to 20 years after marriage the income earned by people in the household was very high. However this was mainly due to son Hindrik Snitjer, who in 1885 left the household for the city of Groningen. Some 25 to 30 years after marriage family income was already much lower. But in this period the costs were also lower because only a few children were still living at home. In first instance, father Klaas Snitjer's wage was lowered in 1889, but the next year Klaas became totally incapable to work at an age of only 55. Afterwards Klaas and his wife received poor relief each week, in the end 104 guilders a year. The family Snitjer clearly had come into the very unfavourable phase four of the family lifecycle, and was not capable anymore to earn enough money for a living.

Table 7: The earnings of the family Snitjer, 1877-1879, 1885-1891, regular labourer of farmer Dallinga in Nieuw-Scheemda.<sup>21</sup>

		1877	1878	1879	1886	1887	1888	1889	1890	1891
Klaas S.	*1834	310,71	287,19	251,59	252,26	265,05	250,40	232,51	68,91	12,10
Trijntje O.	*1836	36,20	23,20	29,63	27,84	40,66	37,46	19,43	4,55	-
Geessien S.	*1859	28,25	52,73	63,97	left					
Hindrik S.	*1861	196,40	224,05	215,-	left					
Koert S.	*1864	12,81	13,57	f.hand	left					
Harm S.	*1866	-	0,90	6,80	f.hand	61,41	married			
Frouwke S.	*1869	-	-	-	10,70	-	19,85	1,20	-	8,43
Aaltje S.	*1871	-	-	-	16,50	35,50	maid	maid	maid	16,88
Fenje S.	*1875	deceased 1884								
Luppo S.	*1878	deceased 1878								
poor relief										46,00
Total		584,37	601,64	566,99	307,30	402,62	307,71	253,14	73,46	83,41
years after marriage	(18)	(19)	(20)	(27)	(28)	(29)	(30)	(31)	(32)	
number of children		7	7	6	2	3	1	1	1	2

\*: birthdate

In the wage earning development of the family Prak the family lifecycle is also clearly present. From a few years after the beginning of the marriage until fifteen years the amount of money earned did not change much, although the number of children rose from zero to three in this period. The father earned some 85% to 90% of the family income, while mother Grietje Kramer worked in summer and had a share of 10% to 15%. Strangely enough it was exactly in the period that there were three very young children at home, 1884-1885, that the mother worked substantially longer, possibly to compensate for the deteriorating income of her husband. When son Thomas began to work quite regularly and stayed at home, there was a steep rise in the family income. After Thomas had left to become a farm hand elsewhere, this role was taken over by his sister Maria Prak. Extraordinary was the presence at home of Hindriktje Prak, who never did any farm work. Although the population register record no special occupation, it is probable that she had an other way to contribute to the family income. Possibly the family Prak tried to protect the youngest daughter for a not very prospective future in agriculture.

<sup>21</sup> Rijksarchief Groningen, familiearchief Dallinga, inv. nr. 4.

*Table 8: Income composition of the household of the family Prak, regular labourer of farmer Barlagen in Nieuw-Scheemda.*<sup>22</sup>

	years after marriage	Total income	Lodewijk * 1850	Grietje * 1851	Thomas * 1879	Maria * 1881	Hendriktje * 1883
1878	(3)	304,27	90%	10%			
1879	(4)	288,48	90%	10%			
1880	(5)	331,25	85%	15%			
1881	(6)	315,08	84%	16%			
1882	(7)	318,60	87%	13%			
1883	(8)	287,57	87%	13%			
1884	(9)	317,61	77%	23%			
1885	(10)	301,01	75%	25%			
1886	(11)	283,37	85%	15%			
1887	(12)	277,72	86%	14%			
1888	(13)	260,98	86%	13%	1%		
1889	(14)	282,45	87%	12%	1%		
1890	(15)	325,48	83%	16%	1%		
1891	(16)	330,72	85%	14%	1%		
1892	(17)	332,39	83%	10%	7%		
1893	(18)	350,67	76%	10%	13%	1%	0%
1894	(19)	396,17	66%	8%	21%	4%	
1895	(20)	454,40	56%	8%	29%	7%	
1896	(21)	385,01	65%	10%	16%	10%	
1897	(22)	326,38	76%	12%	f. hand	13%	
1898	(23)	328,66	76%	7%	elsewhere	17%	

\*:birthdate

For the labourer families it was in the short run economically attractive to take care that their young children earned money as fast as possible, this was especially the case if the family was in the second phase of the family lifecycle. Table 9 shows for some children, how many days year they worked on the farm for daily wages annually.

<sup>22</sup>

Rijksarchief Groningen, Familiearchief Barlagen en De Groot, inv. nr. 12-13; Wage book Barlagen 1869-1881.

*Table 9: Annual days work for wage of labourer sons and daughters still living at home with their parents, 1870-1900.<sup>23</sup>*

SONS:									
age:	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Hindrik S.	?	?	?	?	?	?	292	293	294
Koert S.	?	?	?	?	23	31	(farm hand at age 14)		
Harm S.	0	0	3	20	?	?	(farm hand later)		
Koert G.	0	0	10	110	88	(farm hand at age 13)			
Harm G.	3	1	0	44	29	52	144	36	(f.hand at age 16)
Thomas P.	9	8	15	5	57	89	149	143	110 (f.h. at 17)
Stinus B.	?	?	?	0	0	49	61	118	102
DAUGHTERS:									
age:	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Trientje A.	0	1	0	0	51 (maid at 13)				
Engeltje A.	0	0	3	0	57 (maid at 13)				
Aaltje S.	?	?	?	?	?	39	86 (maid at 16)		
Maria P.	0	0	0	9	29	36	50	59	64

Except for Hindrik Snitjer it was impossible for children of labourers living with their parents to find full-time work. For girls this was even more difficult than for boys. In one year, they could at a maximum find 60 to 90 days of paid labour, so it was very attractive for the families of labourers to let the girls become a female servant as soon as possible. For boys the problems seems a little less. However, Thomas Prak and Stinus Bos both did not manage to find paid labour for more than half of the year, although they were already 16 or 17 year old.

From table 9 it also becomes clear that the number of working days of children younger than 12 years was negligible. Boys and girls of 13 or 14 worked only some 2 to 3 months each years, although there were exceptions as the sons of the family Greven, Koert and Harm, who both were relatively active when they were only 12 or 13 years old. The reason for this, remains unclear. For the parents the wage of these only two sons, do not seem very important, because of the small family size and their very active mother. Perhaps in this family doing wage work was seen as very important for children.

Most of the children indeed became live-in farm servants, some when they were only 13 years old, others stayed at home until they were 16. A minority always stayed at home. At the end of the nineteenth century the number of farm servants fell heavily because of a proliferation of this practice. Because the standard of living of labourer families had increased quite a lot - a result of rising real wages - labourer families became more inclined to keep their children at home. This was socially attractive because in this

<sup>23</sup> Rijksarchief Groningen, familiearchief Dallinga, inv. nr. 4; Rijksarchief Groningen, Familiearchief Barlagen en De Groot, inv. nr. 12-13; Loonboek Barlagen 1869-1881.



way family life remained intact, not being infected by absent children. Also the children had more freedom in their parental home than in the houses of the farmers, where they had to make very long working days, and sometimes also had to work on Sunday. Maybe the most important reason for this development, however, is that the future prospects of labourer children staying at home were better than for those which became live-in servants.<sup>24</sup> Relatively significant more children of labourers who stayed at home, managed in the long run to escape from the dismal life of an unskilled farm labourer. The strategy to keep the children at home was in this way an investment in the children's future and in the quality of life around 1900. However, in the short run it meant that costs rose because of food expenditures, and wage income decreased also because the children couldn't easily find work the whole year through.<sup>25</sup>

The difficult period in the second phase of the family lifecycle forced the labourer families to let their children become live-in servant as fast as possible. The more favourable third phase was easier to reach when the older children were consuming elsewhere and were working the whole year through. Another question concerning this family lifecycle is, if it influences the decision of the female partner in the marriage to work, and especially if it influences the number of working days, because nearly all the wives of labourers worked at least a few days for wage each year. Knotter has suggested that the wives of labourers only worked if their husband didn't earn enough.<sup>26</sup> However if the children were old enough, they replaced their mother as wage earner. This all means that the number of their working days must be closely related to the phases in the family lifecycle.

For some 15 regular labourer families in Nieuw-Scheemda in the period 1870-1902 we are able to calculate from farm accounts approximately the number of days the wife worked for wage. For some the information stretches over a long period. However, in the analysis each year is considered as a separate piece of information.

The annual number of working days of married women (WORKWOMAN) is explained with the help of regression analysis. First, the children born of this woman and still alive have been split into three groups 0-8 years (CHILDY), 9-13 years (CHILDM), 14 and older (CHILDO). Also the number of years since the date of marriage (MARDUR) is used as an explanatory variable (Marriage duration). Because it is possible that there were general changes in the number of days women worked during this period, I used the variable YEAR, which range goes from 0 for 1870 to 32 tot 1902. In total there were 89 observations suitable for this analysis ( $R^2 = 0,22$ ):

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<sup>24</sup> Paping, 'Gezinnen en cohorten', 68-70.

<sup>25</sup> G.A. Collenteur en R.F.J. Paping, 'De arbeidsmarkt voor inwonend boerenpersoneel in het Groningse kleigebied 1830-1920' in: *NEHA-Jaarboek voor economische, bedrijfs- en techniekgeschiedenis*, 60 (1997).

<sup>26</sup> Knotter, 'Gezinsarmoede-gezinsarbeid' .

$$\begin{aligned} \text{WORKWOMAN} &= 81,08 + 0,46 \cdot \text{MARDUR} + 2,96 \cdot \text{CHILDY} - 5,12 \cdot \text{CHILDM} \\ \text{t-value} & \quad (0,81) \quad (1,25) \quad (-1,41) \\ & - 5,93 \cdot \text{CHILDO} - 1,43 \cdot \text{YEAR} \\ \text{t-value} & \quad (2,24^*) \quad (-4,36^*) \\ *: & \text{ significant at a 5\% level} \end{aligned}$$

The result is perhaps a little bit disappointing, because only 22% of the differences are explained in the regression equation. The most important explanatory variable is not the family lifecycle, but the specific year. Wives of labourers decreased their number of working days significantly during the period 1870-1902. The explanation must be partly sought in the rising real wages of their husbands, and also partly in the development that paid labour of married woman with children became socially less acceptable. However, also the number of children older than 14 years had a significant influence. In accordance with the findings of Knotter it appears that the earnings of these older children partly replaced the earnings of their mothers. When the children became older the income of the wives of labourers became less necessary. The presence of children between 9 and 13 which could take care of the younger children and in this way made it easier for their mothers to work, did not promote working of woman, on the contrary, it even seems that these children also earned enough to make their mother stop working, however the influence was not statistically significant.

In a second regression equation I modelled the family lifecycle with the help of a dummy variable ( $R^2 = 0,17$ ). It becomes clear that only in the third phase the wives of labourers significantly decreased their number of working days, which is in accordance with the former result that older children partly replaced their mother in earning income. Already in the second phase the mothers lessened their number of working days, because of the large number of children to take care of, however, this influence is very insignificant. In the dummy: PHASE1, families with two children or less, younger than 14 year and less children older than younger as 14 year, is set at zero. PHASE2 comprises families with more than two children less than 14 year, and less children older than younger as 14 year. PHASE3 comprises families with more or just as much children above the age of 14 year as beneath it.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{WORKWOMAN} &= 85,10 - 3,95 \cdot \text{PHASE2} - 17,86 \cdot \text{PHASE3} - 1,25 \cdot \text{YEAR} \\ \text{t-values} & \quad (0,57) \quad (2,32^*) \quad (3,76^*) \\ *: & \text{ significant at a 5\% level.} \end{aligned}$$

The equation which models the three phases explains less than the equation with the number of children. Only 17% of the deviations are explained, which means an unexplained 83%. It is clear that other factors

than only the family lifecycle are of importance for the decisions of married female labourers to go to work. Possibly social opinions and the ambition level of the family also played an important role.

## **6. Conclusions**

Just as elsewhere, labourer families in Nieuw-Scheemda in Groningen went through a family lifecycle. Because of the growing amount of young children who do not earn any money, the economic position of the labourer family becomes more difficult after some 5 years of marriage and more. After some 15 or 20 years the situation becomes better, while older children began to add to the family income. The number of household members began to decrease in this period, because most of the children were leaving home to go work and live on farms between the age of 13 to 16. However, already at the age of 12-13 children began to do farm-work, but not very regular, the amounts of money they earned were small. Children living at home were confronted with high seasonal unemployment. Only as a live-in servant they could be sure to find work the whole year through. Working as a live-in servant was in this way economically attractive. The farmer paid for the daily food, and the wages were most of the time higher than could be earned by irregular farm labour as children stayed at home. However, at the end of the nineteenth century farm labourers more and more kept their children at home, even if the children became older than 16. Although in the short run unattractive this strategy was preferred because staying at home was better for the future of the children and also more pleasant.

Female farm labourers only worked during the summer half year. The farmers were not in need of much labour in the winter, and the female labourers were dismissed during this period. Some wives of labourers worked more and others worked less. The family lifecycle caused some problems if women wanted to work. If there were little children, someone had to take care of them. However, especially in the period when there were many little children, the extra money of the mother was needed most. From the number of days female labourers worked, it becomes clear that they chose to work when the children were young. Only when the children began to grow older, their number of working days declined somewhat, but never stopped at all. So it may be presumed that females worked partly because it was necessary. However, even if it wasn't necessary female labourers remained working some days to supplement their husband's income.

During the period 1870-1902 the number of working days of married female labourers fell. The reasons are probably that female labour became less accepted and the labourer families could afford the mother to work less, because the real wages of the males were increasing fast in this period. In this way we can see in the decreasing number of working days of female labourers in Nieuw-Scheemda the appearance of the normal pattern of family labour in The Netherlands during the twentieth century until 1975: the husband works and earns the money, the wife stays at home and takes care of the children and the household.

