

CHAPTER FIVE. TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE FAMILY

Study of the household is the study of community, just as study of the organic cell is the study of biological life.

F. TÖNNIES, *Community and Civil Society*

Thus the family was buffeted by contradictory forces. On the one hand the roles it was found or assigned to fill accentuated its ubiquity, its strength, and its powers and compelled it to close ranks around its terrible secrets. [...] On the other, increasing awareness of the family's demographic and social role compelled those in power – philanthropists, physicians, the state – to envelop the family in solicitude, to penetrate its mysteries, and to invade its fortress.

M. PERROT, A. MARTIN-FUGIER, *The Actors*

The question of the family does not occupy a prominent place in contemporary sociology. This might seem paradoxical since transformations of the family have been widely discussed, especially in recent years. However, these accounts are largely lacking in theoretical depth and generally have a normative character. Indeed, not much has changed in sociological theory of the family since the 1940s when two paradigms emerged: the functionalist one developed by Parsons (1949) and the interactionist one developed by Burgess (1945). The lack of interest in the family amongst sociologists stands in sharp contrast to dynamic developments in this subject in other disciplines. One may even get the impression that sociology surrendered this issue to other social sciences such as anthropology, demography, social policy and economy. Meanwhile, recent knowledge about the family assembled in these fields, especially studies in historical demography, indicate the necessity to fundamentally revise certain claims that are still widespread in sociology, e.g. the conviction about the family's passive role in historical changes, or Le Playa's myth about the "golden age" of the family in pre-industrial times (cf. Szacki 2002, 560–1).

Likewise, the question of the family does not occupy a prominent place in sociological empirical research. It tends to appear as a "virtual" mediating

variable: a vehicle for transmitting social status or inscribing parental values in children.¹⁹⁵ Its characteristics are usually inferred from studying other phenomena. In studies of the family this entails focusing on individual actors or dyads, chiefly married couples. Still, it would be difficult to recall any example of empirical research on the family understood as a component of the social system – one playing a specific role in reproducing and supporting it.

At the same time, it is important to note that, in sociology, the twilight of theoretical reflection on the family as a specific social institution is accompanied by a strong tendency to proclaim the end of the contemporary family. There are two ways to explain this convergence. First, family would be seen as losing its significance as a sphere of social life, its functions being gradually overtaken by other institutions. That would be the reason why sociology devotes less and less attention to the family, shifting its focus instead to educational systems, social policy, and labor. This is contradicted, however, by the fact that sociologists are inclined to interpret the “disappearance” of the family as one of the crucial factors in the crisis of postmodern society. Certainly, such a thesis contains an implicit assumption that the family is important for the functioning of individuals and society. Furthermore, surveys show that the family is invariably found – both in the most and least developed countries – at the top of the list of “key values in life” (cf. Giza-Poleszczuk 2002). Thus, if the number of divorces or single parents rises, reaching alarming levels, it would mean that people find it increasingly difficult to live a family life rather than that they do not need a family any more.

According to the second explanation, the conviction about the downfall of the family would stem from assuming the kind of a theoretical model of the family that indeed ceased to be dominant in social life. In other words, this more or less openly articulated assumption about the “real” shape of the family would make it impossible to note that it is not family as such that has run its course, but one of its historically developed forms. However, regardless of which explanation is more truthful, both point to the de-theorization of the concept of family. In other words, the idea of family has become banalized, just like the concept of society, which is used almost automatically by sociologists, as we argue in Chapter One.

Both these concepts also share one crucial similarity – in contemporary understanding, both “society” and “family” emerge from ideological and scientific discourses developed in the nineteenth century, which have lent these two

195 This current was started by research on the relationships between upbringing and authoritarian personality, and is continued in research on the so-called parental values (cf. Adorno et al 1950; Kohn 1959; Schooler & Kohn 1983).

terms the status of universals. However, as Michelle Perrot and Anne Martin-Fugier underline, “the family reigned triumphant in the doctrine and rhetoric of all parties from conservative to liberal and even libertarian, which celebrated it as the basic cell of the organic social order. Actually, it was far more chaotic and varied than this triumphal portrait suggests. The nuclear family had only just emerged from broader and still persistent systems of kinship, whose nature varied with locale and setting, social level and cultural tradition” (1990, 97).

Already in the 1970s, many scholars (Laslett 1972; Lasch 1977; Levine 1977; cf. also Flandrin 1980) argued that the “family” – understood as a triad comprised of mother, father and children – was initially a chiefly ideological category, while its triumph as the “basic unit of society” coincided (not accidentally) with the period of laying the foundations of democracy and industrial society. In his seminal work, Alexis de Tocqueville observed that “[d]espotism, which in its nature is fearful, sees the most certain guarantee of its own duration in the isolation of men, and it ordinarily puts all its care into isolating them” (2010, 887). “Democracy,” in turn, “relaxes social bonds” and “tightens natural bonds” (1031). The family – a natural community, the model of an altruistic “enterprise,” and the first school of establishing the collective will – becomes crucial not only to individual happiness but also public good.

All of this means that taking up the question of the transformations of the family requires an immediate bracketing of all associations and contexts, as well as a suspension of the theses that are habitually made in relation to this concept and have taken hold in sociological reflection, appearing as something obvious. We thus need to problematize again the concept of family, assuming that our current perspective on the subject may be in fact particular and historical – that, perhaps, the “ideas of values” that constitute it are elements and expressions of various norms, legitimizations and ideologies, which have made family one of the more important subjects since the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁹⁶

5.1 The universe of the concept of family

Contrary to popular belief, the concept of family is one of the most complex in sociology. Moreover, in contrast to what common sense suggests, the family is also a radical abstraction. There are several factors that contribute to this.

196 Suffice it to recall eugenics movements and ideologies (cf. Gawin 2003; Weeks 1989), or the harsh criticism of the bourgeois family by Marxists, and Lenin’s attack on the family as such. Right-wing ideologies, in turn, have tended to regard the family as the anchor of social order, sanctifying all of its related aspects.

First of all, the family is essentially a process rather than an entity. It is born when partners form a more or less stable relationship; it grows and expands along with the birth of children; it shrinks as children leave home; finally, it “dies” along with the death of its founders, in the meantime giving life to other families. Let us note here that the process described above implicitly assumes the vision of the contemporary nuclear family. Actually, the process may take a different course. The initial pair does not have to form a stable relationship isolated from its broader surroundings; children do not have to leave home, and if they do, this can happen either earlier or later; finally, the family does not have to die if it is rooted in something else than people.¹⁹⁷ A married couple with children is, in a sense, the culmination of the idea of family: the family accomplished, or the family in dynamic development. At the same time, however, it is only a specific representation of the family, one that does not have to accurately describe its forms found in other cultures or historical periods.

The family is therefore a process also in the sense of its historical duration, extending beyond the horizon of a single generation. When represented by name, heritage or genealogy, it can exist for centuries. In everyday life, the family is a specific stream of events, too: after all, it is realized through a continual recreating of interactional structures – those of the microcosm of home (cleaning and cooking) – or performing household rituals. Thus, the concept of family is only an abstraction: one focused either on a “freeze frame” that briefly captures a mere split second of such a stream of events, or on the synchronic model of the “dominant” process.¹⁹⁸ The image of a family as a married couple with children constitutes only a specific point in the process of its development, and a normative claim indicating the direction this process is supposed to take.¹⁹⁹

197 The family could acquire a kind of immortality, despite demographic disasters, in places where it would achieve stability through material representation in the form of a house, and come to be identified with it; where it would not be a particular person but land that receives the nobility’s and fiscal privileges; and finally, where people would traditionally “take their name” from the house in the form of “estate name” (“lord over Lule”).

198 The “dominant process” is understood here as the kind of a course of family life that prevails in a given historical society. It is usually a statistical entity, a central tendency that shapes processes of forming marriages, as well as patterns of fertility and of dissolution of families.

199 This image became widespread in the eighteenth century, when family paintings became highly popular, no longer showing individual persons but entire groups of relatives (cf. Perrot & Martin-Fugier 1990).

Second, the family involves many dimensions that are traditionally studied by different social sciences: biological reproduction (recreating the population), economic reproduction (joint use of natural resources), and social reproduction (continuity of social “units”). Examination of the family as the basic “means” of recreating the population belongs to demography, which considers the family as a reproductive unit. Since Malthus, meticulous records have been kept on the rates of marriages, births inside and outside them, fertility, and women capable of bearing children, because it has become apparent how important demographical phenomena can be for the long-term well-being of societies. Families are, simultaneously, households – specific micro enterprises that operate in the context of the overall economic situation. Control over economic resources has always been a key factor in the functioning of the family, not only for the sake of survival but also due to increasing demands to invest in children.²⁰⁰

Finally, families are “political” units, at least in two meanings. In the first sense, family represents the individual’s primal space, in which it nevertheless becomes necessary to negotiate the “collective will” (cf. Gauchet 2000). Contrary to the currently dominant vision of the family as a purely positive space free from conflict, the interests of family members do not entirely coincide – neither between the generations, nor between siblings and spouses. Therefore, a legitimized mode of decision-making has to exist in every family. According to Guizot, one of the leading liberal thinkers of the nineteenth century, “[n]owhere else [than in the family] is the right of suffrage more real or extensive. Suffrage comes closest to being universal within the family” (after Perrot & Martin-Fugier 1990, 103). In the second sense, it is in the family that the public or common good emerges, understood in the most basic way, i.e. as “family honor,” attentiveness and care, or simply the cleanliness of the household.²⁰¹ It is inside the family that there also emerges the category of “common interest,” which requires the subordination of individual interests. The clearest manifestations of this would

200 These demands embraced the removal of children from the job market, universal compulsory education and prolongation of the period in which children remain supported solely by parents.

201 As is notable in this context, the concept of “public good” is used today in relation to various kinds of goods produced or managed by the state (defense, public safety, care for the environment). However, according to its definition, the public good is the kind of good that no one can be excluded from – in the same sense as the “cleanliness” of home enjoyed by all of its inhabitants, or the splendor of the family name enjoyed by all people bearing it.

be sending “surplus” daughters to the convent, or appointing only one heir in the will in order to keep the estate intact.

Although all of these dimensions are regarded today – almost automatically – as coming together in the concept of family, thus employing this term to define a group of related people living under one roof, running a joint household, and using specific modes of taking necessary decisions, “it is [...] important to emphasize that what was referred to in past times as the ‘family’ was not identical with the father-mother-children triad, and that one cannot study this triad, in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries without taking into account its relations with lineage or kindred on the one hand, and the domestic staff on the other” (Flandrin 1980, 10). In other words, “being related,” “economic community” and “living under one roof” were to some degree separated before the nineteenth century, while categories describing relations between economic reproduction and recreation of the population (and society) oscillated between “lineage,” “race,” “house” and “family.” The combination of the concepts of being related and living together – previously separate things – emerged in the French language only towards the end of the eighteenth century, and more precisely: after the French Revolution, which significantly changed the legal framing of family relations²⁰² in accordance with the more general ideas of “freedom” and “brotherhood.”

There also exists one more important reason for the difficulties with grasping the concept of family, apart from its processual character and internal complexity. It is the dynamic feedback relation between a family and its broader surroundings. Contrary to the currently widespread vision of the family as a yielding yet passive recipient of changes occurring in the wider social context – at best adapting to subsequent pressures – historians indicate that it is also an active participant in those changes and their facilitator. In an introduction to the famous book titled *Reproducing Families. The Political History of English Population History*, David Levine, one of the most prominent scholars researching the history of the family, notes: “This essay begins from the premise that the plebeian family was not simply the object of change but that its demographic response to economic forces created conditions which profoundly

202 These changes include the obligation to divide property equally among *all* children, to allow *divorce*, and – a true innovation – the necessity to obtain mother’s permission to designate a particular man as the father of a child conceived outside wedlock (in other words, even if a man was ready to accept the child as his own, it depended on the woman’s consent; naturally, being joined in matrimony would automatically designate the husband as the father).

influenced subsequent historical developments. [...] The reproduction of the social formation has been situated at the heart of my argument so as to capture one of the most revolutionary features of English history: the silent, cumulative pressure exerted by peasants living on the edge of subsistence, with just a toe-hold on their ancient rights and liberties. It created the reservoir of labor which was exploited by colonizers and industrializers alike. By focusing on the mentalities and survival strategies which motivated peasant producers (and, of course, reproducers), afflicted as much by social contradictions as their own fertility, we can see a micro motor powering English expansion: first, within the British Isles; next, across the Atlantic; and, third, around the whole globe” (1987, 5 & 7).

And so we come a full circle: if the family is both subject and object in the process of changes, then it indeed constitutes the basic “cell of social life,” in which we can observe the basic processes of “social metabolism” (reproduction of population as well as of social and economic order, and maybe even of the political one). Perhaps, it is due to the more or less precisely formulated intuitions regarding the fundamental character of that “natural community” that the family has always constituted not only an object of idealization, or even ideologization but also a legal, religious, and social institution.

What is more, when political actors, such as state or church, were taking over the right to legitimize marriage and – consequently – children born within it, as well as the right to extend the ban on incest, or to determine the legal rules of inheriting and paternal power, it all had a deeper political sense. As Jacques Mulliez has indicated in his analyzes of the transformations of private life in the Roman Empire, “in its desire to renew both society and state, imperial authorities had to redefine the power wielded by the pater. In this sense, from that time paternity was a political tool in Rome, with *patria potestas* (paternal authority) constituting an important factor in the organization of the City. It also lasted throughout the Empire as an instrument wielded by state authorities. This could explain the strong influence of the Roman model visible since the sixteenth century when the rise of absolute monarchy based on class society provided favorable conditions” (1995, 46–47). And although the most comprehensive and far-reaching political effect on family was observed only in the nineteenth century²⁰³ – when “demographic policy” emerged for the first time on state-wide scale, along with the infamous eugenics as one of its key ideas – it is in entire history and anthropology that we find traces of an outside interference with family

203 We have Europe in mind, particularly countries that were “centers of modernization” at the time.

matters, either in the form of unwritten marriage rules, or family legislation. One could even say that the family has always been a far too important matter to the entire society to leave it in the hands of impulsive individuals.

The problem lies in the fact that this “basic unit of society” clearly cannot be defined, even to some degree, as a stable object with distinct boundaries and a precisely determined set of “functions.”²⁰⁴ History, ethnology and anthropology have firmly demonstrated a variety of forms, tasks, strategies, sizes, and constitutive principles of that which has come to be traditionally called family. Only by departing from the commonly imposed image of the mother-father-children triad as a “natural community,” isolated from its social surroundings by virtue of its privacy, can we begin to grasp the full complexity of this phenomenon, and understand the variety of shapes that the family has taken in the course of history.

Putting aside the family’s contemporary representations we shall focus on the processes of which the family is a function, and on contexts in which it materializes in particular forms. “Being a function” refers here not to a determinism that defines “onset conditions,” but it rather refers to moments (or periods) of stable harmony in the processes of interactions which take place in the population and in the environment (including the artificial one created in humanity’s activities), as well as to interactions between collective representations, in the course of which the concept of a particular social whole crystallizes as family. Regardless of the particular shape that family assumes in a given historical context, in this discussion it shall be regarded as a unit of reproducing the population and its binding structures of social order (cooperation), of economy (acquiring goods), and of politics (power).²⁰⁵ This means, at the same time, that reproduction covers not only simple recreation of biological population, but also simultaneous recreation of this population’s internal order, and its system of relations with the environment.²⁰⁶ After all, family is a “moral entity” that “describes itself, thinks

204 Sociologists invariably enumerate in this context the procreative “function” as well as socializing, expressive, and other functions lost in the course of historical development, namely productive and political ones. In this perspective, it becomes natural to accept the conclusion about the family’s twilight – its departure as a social “cell” – and the gradual loss of its functions. This invariably suggests either that the social “organism” can manage without family or that it also faces downfall.

205 In reference to the title of David Levine’s work quoted above, the basic unit of reproduction is, in this view, a social whole (including family) but not a particular person.

206 The term “recreation” does not mean here a faithful reproduction of the previous state, but rather creation of a new “specimen” or copy – every human being (apart from identical twins, of course) is unique, and – in this sense – every generation is

of itself, and represents itself as a unified entity maintained by a constant flow of blood, money, sentiments, secrets, and memories” (Perrot & Martin-Fugier 1990, 131). Let us emphasize this again: this “unified entity” – a unit of reproduction that weaves in itself the three fundamental processes of reproducing social order – does not have to necessarily be an “elementary family”²⁰⁷ – i.e. a triad comprised of mother, father and children.

5.2 Processes of reproduction

In line with the model of analyzing social life adopted in this book (and described in the previous chapter), groups created on various levels of interactions are an “interface” through which individuals establish relationships with the natural environment and other people. One has to bear in mind that elements of this “interface” are not just other individuals but primarily various kinds of artefacts containing memories of past experiences earned by a given type of base group with the natural environment (mostly tools), histories of its interactions (language), and its collective self-consciousness (myths, religions, ideologies). Additionally, social life is organized hierarchically: “repeated assemblies” of interactions from higher levels are “nested” in those from lower ones. The “elementary family” (a unit “assembled” around the task of biological reproduction) can be treated as the lowest level of the above hierarchical organization and the groups it creates: a level resting on dyadic “micro coordinations,” primarily between mother and child, as well as between mother and father²⁰⁸ or among other pairs. Regardless of the whole configuration’s stability, the condition for purely biological reproduction is the repeated character of interactions between woman and man, and between woman and child.

This does not mean, however, that this kind of an isolated unit of reproduction would be indeed the basic “cell” in the hierarchy of the social organization

different from the previous one, just like every configuration of social or economic order. The very process of “replication” carries the potential to change, especially if the environment changes too.

207 From this point on, we shall use the term “elementary family” to denote this fundamental triad, a somewhat minimal group necessary for reproduction to occur. Although the term “nuclear family” carries the same intuitions, it is used in sociology in very specific contexts. By adopting a new term, we wish to avoid evoking habitual associations with those concepts of family that currently prevail in sociology.

208 Regardless of the extent to which their relationship is stable or institutionally sanctioned.

of reproduction, while the “triad” would be – within this unit – a distinguished subsystem of interactions. The composition and size of basic units of social reproduction can vary depending on the context, primarily on the historical conditions in which the process unfolds. Therefore, besides the term “elementary family” it becomes necessary to introduce the term “family unit” understood as a task team crystallized around the recreation not only of its own form but also that of the larger social entity. “Family unit” can be thus considered as a specific group focusing on the realization of a common goal;²⁰⁹ moreover, both the goal itself and the boundaries of this group are parts of a “shared reality” that is characteristic for a given type of society.²¹⁰

It needs to be remembered though that population, habitat, and collective representations comprising a given form of sociality are dynamic “objects” generated through continuous processes of creation and recreation. Population is produced and reproduced in the purely biological sense; the environment – in the process of labor;²¹¹ finally, representations – in the process of communication. At the same time, each of those processes generates specific structures that assemble interactions occurring in collectivities engaged in those processes: biological reproduction – structures of relations; economic reproduction – structures of co-dependence in the process of production; and finally, the reproduction of communication – systems organizing the shared world (common knowledge). These realms may overlap or coincide to a different degree: in tribal societies, genealogical myths would tie the entire population in a web of kinship (cf. Ossowski 1966), while in contemporary societies they define only its small part.

The elementary family, one that prevails today, does not necessarily have to be the place or “cell” in which “streams” of goods, symbols and genealogies meet. The family unit also can assume numerous shapes, comprising a variety of realms

209 We pass over the question of defining this shared goal here because it certainly changes in history. It has surely been related to continuation (i.e. has a long-lasting character), either in the sense of merely surviving, or winning fame and even immortality.

210 In this sense, the representation of family as a specific social relation is bound to be enmeshed with a broader vision of the world created at the level of the base group. The family “sees itself” only from the perspective of a larger social entity; this is one of the reasons why family has always been involved in collective self-perception, or has been incorporated as part of more general policies. In the theory of Michel Foucault (1988–1990) this means that family is invariably involved with the discourse of *power*.

211 Labor is understood here as a specific system of interactions with the environment, as a result of which the latter becomes transformed, thus becoming the “object” of subsequent reproductions.

and privileging some over others. This is because the tasks faced by this unit are strictly related to its context, i.e. to demographic, economic and social trends.

Considering the family unit as a “meeting space,” where larger systems are bound together and launched into the future through children, entails several crucial consequences.

First, when understood in this way, the family can include inside itself a lesser or greater number of people – not only relatives but also servants, slaves or liegemen.²¹² Second, it can function as a more or less self-reliant, isolated unit – all depending on the strength and character of relations that tie it to its surroundings. Third, it can be oriented towards various tasks: either primarily towards securing the “production of people” or towards “economic expansion,” along with continuity in re-producing resources, or towards guaranteeing “social expansion” by extending the web of bonds and building a social position. And finally, fourth, the family unit has a clearly dual character: it is a whole for those who belong to it, but at the same time it remains part of a larger system. The same applies to its members: they belong to families, but can also be part of other social configuration: clans, work teams, religious sects, or social classes. Thus, depending on what part of activities engaged in by members of the family unit takes place inside and what part outside it, and on how their loyalties are shaped, the family can be emptied or filled, gain or lose significance, both for its members and for other social configurations.

Here, in this “silent, cumulative pressure exerted by peasants living on the edge of subsistence,” in the marital calculations of aristocrats, in the hard work of a Puritan father of the family, hides the revolutionary power mentioned by Levine – one that changes history. Social order is created and recreated by family units and other social configurations, which permeate one another. In its various manifestations, the family unit always constitutes a vehicle for the reproduction of both physical people and larger social, economic and demographic entities. Just as the married couple is a “mechanism of generating genetic variety” – after all, each person is different and everyone constitutes a unique combination of

212 This phenomenon is captured by the well-known concept of “extended family.” Although Le Play was mistaken to assume that in its golden age, i.e. before the Industrial Revolution, family in its “extended” form united (in one household) three generations and cousins twice-removed, he was right about the fact that family before the Revolution differed from the so-called nuclear one. However, it is important to remember that this family would incorporate dependent people or servants rather than blood relatives, while its size was strictly correlated with social status: the higher the status, the bigger the family (cf. Flandrin 1980; Levine 1977; Laslett 1972).

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characteristics inherited from parents – so it also performs that function in relation to the other two processes of reproduction (i.e. social and economic ones) because no child is brought up in exactly the same environment, and every product of labor is unique.

In this sense, the family unit has an abstract and temporary character: it is a dual structure shaped at the boundary between past and future, as well as at the point where various social configurations meet. The family contains within itself – albeit in a hidden fashion – both hallmarks of continuity and harbingers of change. This is precisely what makes its essence so difficult to grasp.²¹³ The family is always local and the only thing that could be indicated as a regularity in its development are tendencies related to clearly distinguished features of the context.²¹⁴

The major challenge in speaking about family, especially about the transformations of its character, consists in identifying the factors that decide about the shape the family unit takes, about its ties and relations with the surroundings, and about its internal character. The knowledge we have today on the prehistory and history of family suffers from two important limitations. First, it is gathered from a specific perspective – e.g. anthropological research of the Boas school was conducted in the context of criticism of American middle-class families. Second, that knowledge relates to only a specific kind of family: in traditional societies, these would be mainly families from the upper levels of social structure, because only they left the sources we can study now; in modern societies, these would be middle class families because they were the gravitational center of the new order; finally, in contemporary societies these would be “sick,” broken, pathological families from the lower social tiers since they are the focus of social policy.

It would be difficult to present, in a comprehensive manner, historical family configurations in all their richness and variety. In this review, we shall focus on

213 Historians keep pointing out difficulties related to attempts at grasping regularities in the “development” of family. In the same country, at the same point in history, a family of peasants from the Paris Basin fundamentally differs from families of Breton peasants, just like there is a difference between English plebeian families living in adjacent counties. That is why “family” – when extracted from the complex web of relations and dynamic processes – constitutes an abstraction. In other words, family as such does not exist – there are only its representations, either produced at the level of social self-consciousness, or through science, politics and ideology.

214 These would be “relational linkages,” to employ the terminology proposed in the previous chapter.

those that constitute clear and distinct types: clan-like families in primal societies, large family structures in feudalism, the full family of the blossoming middle class, and finally the shaky, broken family of the postmodern era.²¹⁵

5.2.1 Family constellations: societies without history

A review of anthropological data and studies on societies “without history” – mostly hunter-gatherer ones – leads to the conclusion that they had a genuine obsession with blood relations as the basic structure that determines relationships within the group. It is equally striking to note how a relatively slight importance is attached to the elementary family, i.e. married couple with children. It seems to have the status of a “dependent unit.” In some tribes, like the Nayar, who live at the Malabar coast, marriage would be established symbolically, with no lasting ties linking spouses, and real authority over woman and children would be wielded by brothers-in-law. In other communities – like the Massai or the Chaga from Africa – the marriage-based family is only one of many existing forms of relationships; in other tribes, wives could be borrowed. The dependence of the elementary family also manifests in the practice of often arbitrary assigning of kinship to children by either tying them only to the father’s group, or solely to the mother’s.

This “dependent” elementary unit still plays a vital function insofar as it provides the group (clan, tribe) with new people. Among some tribes, like the Brazilian Indians Cashinahua, a relationship is legalized as marriage only when the woman becomes pregnant. Fertility is one of the dominant subjects of rites, magic and art.²¹⁶ In such a configuration, the couple “produces children” not for itself but for its (partner’s) group, which further makes it a medium (tool)

215 Roman family and the lineages of ancient Greece roughly approximate the forms found in European feudalism. Hence, we do not present them as a separate configuration. While discussing the construction of Greek family, Carola Reinsberg writes: “The fact that in Homeric times marriage constituted a universally accepted form of life stemmed from the system of organization of that society. It was an aristocratic and feudal system based on the political and economic power of particular houses, whose continuity and survival were guaranteed precisely by the institution of marriage as a form of managing the *oikos* (household), both in the narrow and broader senses, and by securing rightful heirs” (1998, 15).

216 Primitive figurines typically represent women with excessive bodily features emphasizing the symbolism of fertility. In ancient Greece, both maidens and married women would still visit the temples of Priapus to enhance their capacity for bearing children (cf. Reinsberg 1998).

of reproduction rather than an autonomous social unit. One could argue – following Lévi-Strauss (1985) – that a reversal of roles can be observed here: it is not marriage that gives rise to family, constituting its foundational act, but rather the family brings marriage to life. It is the main and socially sanctioned means, at the families’ disposal, of surviving and establishing relationships.

In tribal societies, marriage also does not constitute a key element of social structure; it is rather considered a tool for strengthening the community by forming unions and alliances. A skillful handling of “marriage selection” often allows to gain support in struggles with enemies, or obtain information about fertile areas. This in turn significantly consolidates the group.²¹⁷ It also happens, as Gilmore shows (2001), that spouses do not live together – both the forming and un-forming of the relationship takes place without larger ceremonies, while responsibility for the child is taken by the uncle, not the father (avunculate), and children are distributed to clans in accordance with their parents’ sex (boys to the father’s clan, and girls to the mother’s). After the period of breastfeeding, when children are constantly with the mother, they are moved to a group that rears children collectively, and then – in the case of boys – are initiated and moved to a group of men. In this sense, the child neither belongs to the married couple nor is only their responsibility – children are rather a kind of “public good.”

Scholars researching primal societies were also struck by a fairly far-reaching sexual freedom, especially in contrast to their own, bourgeois customs. This image of a primary community contributed to an idyllic and plainly false vision of a non-oppressive community or even “primordial communism” in which there is neither private property nor the family.²¹⁸

Let us investigate in detail the features of the context in which blood relations gain primacy over elementary family²¹⁹ and in which fertility is emphasized as its

217 One of the testimonies to the precedence of group interest is the ubiquity of systems of forming marriages, which define in strict terms the rules of making pairs, in line with more general principles of “weaving” the population and reproducing it.

218 As far as the idyllic character is concerned, a special role was played in its spreading by the culturalist school of Franz Boas in USA, primarily through Margaret Mead’s research on Samoa. As to the “primordial communism,” it was Friedrich Engels who observed – in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) – that family is a derivative of private property, which has allowed relations of power and domination to enter into the realm of “natural” relations (based on equality and partnership) between man and woman.

219 It is important to stress here that the married couple is not related but establishes kinship between families through children who are related to the families of both spouses.

major task. In the realm of demography, primary societies are characterized by a fragile equilibrium stemming both from short life expectancy²²⁰ and restrictions imposed by the habitat's capacity to provide food, requirements for mobility (movement in the case of a nomadic lifestyle) and defenses. The size of the population and its structure become in this situation one of two key conditions for survival, apart from natural resources. The collectivity thus needs to balance two contradictory pressures – on the one hand, limited means of living (the pressure to constrain its size), and on the other: efficiency in economic, reproductive and military terms (the pressure to increase its size). Hence the cult of fertility is accompanied by the admissibility to commit infanticide, practiced in relation to children born “untimely.”²²¹ In this way, the population can remain at a sufficiently low level so as to facilitate direct contact among group members. The environment, from which resources are obtained, is only slightly transformed. It is exploited until natural resources are exhausted, whereas “tamed” or “cultivated” only to a narrow degree. Moreover, an appropriated environment (one that allows itself to be exploited) constitutes the group's common good – even meat from hunted animals would be distributed among all members of the community.²²²

A high level of risk causes life practices to become extremely rigid: the fragility of an existence that balances on the verge of survival makes any experiment a threat to the group's life. Internal conflict is a danger too – hence the vast importance of integrating rituals and the emphasis on the necessity to follow tradition closely. The significance of the population's structure – i.e. the right proportion of adults to children, and women to men – is linked to the fact that the survival of the entire collectivity demands an adequate, full “cast” of all task teams (hunters, gatherers, children, and the elderly, who embody collective memory). In this context, the basic “unit of survival” is not the elementary family but the larger “family unit” (clan) or even the entire tribe.

In this sense, the married couple is only a “vehicle” for weaving together family groups through a community of blood embodied by children.

220 This makes elementary family an ephemeral construct threatened by the premature death of any partner, who then needs to be replaced; this is yet another factor contributing to its “dependence.”

221 “Untimely” means here the situation when the woman is already burdened with one small child and the tribe needs to move; when twins are born; when the woman is already breastfeeding one child and there is risk she might not be able to feed both; and finally, when the mother dies in labor (cf. Daly & Wilson 1988).

222 However, the prestige of a good hunter remains an individual asset (cf. Diamond 1997).

There can be no doubt that due to its size and lack of intense contacts with the outside world the tribe is a strongly endogamic population. Kinship is therefore an actual factor in structuring the group, imposing on it a “metric” of closeness and distance. Little wonder then that collective representations arise exactly from the concept of kinship: the vehicle of community, the guarantor of solidarity, and a factor structuring the group. Totemism, cult of the ancestors, and genealogical myths²²³ make the idea of kinship cover also the past and the natural environment.

Within this system, there is no place for a singled-out position of elementary family: the collectivity is rooted in clans, groups of men (hunters, warriors) and women, as well as the tribe’s elderly and shamans. The tribal community is a reality in which the realms of biological, social and economic reproduction almost overlap, with the major role played by the reproduction of the population as the most valuable yet simultaneously fragile resource.

5.2.2 Lineage, race, and house – constellations of the “traditional” family

There can be no doubt that in traditional societies and communities the family unit becomes the basis of social organization. Nevertheless, this unit is still not what we understand as family in today’s sense. In a historical analysis of this concept, Jean-Louis Flandrin (1980) indicates several models between which feudal Europe oscillated: “lineage,” “race,” “house,” and sometimes also “family,” although the last term was used – quite characteristically – in relation to the lower classes. Elementary family – a married couple with children and with a visibly dominant father – was still a dependent unit embedded in an overarching social whole.

The key issue for grasping the constellation of family life in a traditional society is to recognize the role and demands of the land as the basic economic resource. Except for communal lands in some European countries, land was privatized. It was all the more valuable when there were fewer opportunities for expansion through deforestation or fertilization of wastelands. Land becomes the center around which the reproduction of the population is organized: in order to participate in the stream of reproduction one needed to be “settled.” This applies both to aristocratic or noble families and peasant ones.²²⁴

223 It is worth mentioning at this point that the spirits of the ancestors and genealogies create *the past* as a factor that plays an active role in the present.

224 This did not concern the families of craftsmen and tradesmen; except for these groups, however, land was a key resource for the entire population.

As an attribute of social strength, however, land imposes its own limitations and demands on the reproduction policy. On the one hand, land needs an heir, but on the other it could not have too many of them because that would pose the risk of fragmenting the estate, which could lead to the diminishing of the family's social position. Hence, most Western European countries would employ the principle of entail, i.e. the transferring of the estate intact to just one heir, most preferably to the eldest son. And since the possession of land was the condition of engaging in reproduction, a large number of high-born children would not enter matrimony. This particularly affected women, for whom there were no alternative career opportunities in the army, allowing, for example, to enrich oneself during wars. As a result, the mediaeval matrimonial market was characterized by male hypergamy: high-born maidens unable to inherit outnumbered equal but inheriting sons. This allowed lower-born young men to enter the elites (Duby 1997–1998). The necessity to wait for the passing over of the estate greatly extended the period before marriage, especially among men – heads of noble houses were reluctant to concede power to their sons.

Putting biological reproduction into the service of economic transmission or expansion caused marriage to be determined not by love but rather by larger goals of the family as a whole. Still, it would be expected of marriage to lead to the “production” of an heir. Apart from incest, infertility and the *non consummatum* clause were the only permissible reasons for annulling the sacrament of marriage. The subordination of the family unit to the demands of the land caused – as Bourdieu aptly put it in relation to affluent peasant families from Brittany (1972) – that it was not the son who inherited the land but rather the land that inherited the son.

A similar tangle of factors characterized – as Witold Kula has accurately demonstrated (1983) – peasant families in Poland's eighteenth-century serfdom-based economy. A peasant marriage was subordinated to the demands and needs of the farm. The family was a unit of production; more than that – the mode of production would determine family's optimal form. The efficient functioning of both the family (securing means necessary for survival) and the farm (optimizing productivity) required meeting specific conditions. First of all, a peasant family would have to be full: the farm needed both men's and women's work in a strictly defined proportion. That is why richer families would include farmhands and servants, while widowed parents – if their children were not mature enough to provide the farm with adequate workforce – had to remarry under threat of losing the farm or being transferred to a smaller area (one demanding less work). Landowners holding all rights to the land had the prerogative of making such transfers; sometimes it was even the landowner's duty to find a partner for the

widowed peasant. Given high mortality rates, especially among women in labor, this immensely complicated the structures of peasant families. It was quite commonplace to see families where children from the current marriage would live together with ones from previous relationships of either husband or wife.

The requirements of the farm also dictated the “optimum” number of children. Child labor played an important role on farms and constituted the only way of securing provisions for elderly and decrepit parents given the obvious lack of today’s pensions. According to one Polish proverb, which has survived to this day, “children are the peasant’s treasure.” Due to the brittle balance of the relation between “mouths and farmlands,” an exact right number of children had to be secured. If there were too many children, this could spark problems with feeding them. If there were too few, managing the farm could become problematic. However, the right number was difficult to achieve in the face of high mortality rates.²²⁵ This caused repeated remarrying and “redistribution” of children to be commonplace phenomena on eighteenth-century Polish farms. The practice of transferring (not adopting) “useless” children to other parents was widespread; such redistribution simply constituted a legal prerogative of the manor’s owner.

The demographic factor played an immensely important role in the economy of the traditional society, both due to the risk entailed by high mortality rates and unexpected deaths, which endangered the farm’s efficiency in working the land, and in relation to the surplus of people, which could not be easily resolved given the overall low efficiency of agriculture. This kind of society was characterized by a very slow growth of population, which stemmed mainly from numerous demographic catastrophes (due to disease or hunger) and low average life expectancy resulting chiefly from high mortality rates among children. Reproducing the population in the face of depopulation comprised one of the crucial concerns among rulers in relation to their subjects, and among subjects themselves, mainly in the case of great houses. Rules that forbade migrating and ensured an endogamic system of marriage – which were widespread in the Middle Ages, when “marrying out” from the village was frowned upon – constitute a testimony to efforts made in order to secure demographic balance. The importance of fertility – even after Christianity was reinforced²²⁶ – can be clearly discerned

225 According to certain estimates, some two-thirds of all children would die in mediaeval Europe (cf. Chaunu 1971).

226 Christianity delegalized numerous pagan fertility cults.

in the above-mentioned sole reasons that the Church saw as valid ground for divorce: infertility or *non consumatum*.

What structured the population was no longer kinship as a general idea of the social whole, but the endogamic concept of the purity of blood, which manifested in the concept of the “estate.”²²⁷ This was related to the immense growth in the number of people – in comparison to tribal organization – who were then “consolidated” in more or less violently created territorial wholes: countries, counties, and fiefdoms. The community of genealogy, understood as descending from a single common ancestor, was impossible to uphold as a basis of such consolidation, just like it was impossible to derive society’s internal differentiation from the life of the mythical ancestor.²²⁸ As a new social idea (representation), the estate retained primacy over family units, constituting a base group for them (*deme*), i.e. one in which processes of reproduction could take place.²²⁹ The estate involved not only marital endogamy but also a cultural one – with regard to the mother tongue, customs, lifestyles and knowledge – and an economic one, which entailed principally the ban on labor for representatives of the higher estate.²³⁰

The importance to preserve “distinctions,” along with requirements stemming from land being a crucial economic resource, comprised an additional

227 In the above-mentioned work by Stanisław Ossowski, titled *Więź społeczna a dziedzictwo krwi* (1966), the author demonstrates how genealogical myths (deriving the collective from one *common* ancestor of the entire house) were replaced with Bible-derived myths about *many* ancestors (“race”). In Poland, the nobility was said to derive from Seth, while peasants – from Ham.

228 Particular events from the life of the ancestor – e.g. meeting a kangaroo, or crossing a river – would often become mythical moments of establishing clans (of “Kangaroo,” of “Frog” etc.).

229 However, it is worth to point out here one crucial modification: in biology, the boundaries of *deme* are determined by spatial factors (the criterion of physical access), which still played an important role in tribal communities, although they were also supplemented with culture-based criteria. In the feudal society, it was the latter that acquired a key significance, which is clearly visible in the case of powerful houses whose members would sometimes even marry people from the other side of the continent.

230 Labor was a plebeian preoccupation; in continental Europe, the nobility was not allowed to engage in trade or industry. The only admissible posts were in the clergy, in the army, at the court, or would involve holding offices, which were often inherited at the time as a sinecure. It would be difficult to deem any of those preoccupations strictly as labor, which we shall return to in the next chapter.

factor strengthening control over marriages, now treated not only as a tool for preserving the status quo but also as a means of developing the power of noble houses. As Jack Goody attempts to demonstrate (1983), both royal and church authorities adopted various strategies in order to limit the growth of the power of noble houses. For example, extending the ban on incest was not only a source of revenue from dispensation, but also made it more difficult to accumulate wealth. After all, in aristocratic families everyone would be somehow related, especially if one used the Germanic method of establishing kinship.²³¹

Reproduction – and the elementary family along with it – were thus subordinated not only to the logic of controlling land, but also to social and political games, in which the estate emerged as a unit superior to lineages, families or houses. Elements crucial for reproduction – marriage and status of the child – were brought under the regulation of written law executed by state institutions. This meant that collective representations of family were incorporated into the system of reproducing the political order itself. Christianity (and its kin – monarchy) favored “legitimate” families based on “rightful marriage,” or ones able to approximate that image. It seems natural to discern here the influence of Christian morality, but it is not the only element motivating this inclination. The elevation of marriage, which became a sacrament²³² and began to play the role of “social police,” was a very useful tool in the hands of monarchy, which desired to secure a social order in which everyone would occupy the right place.

This was the beginning of the ceaseless interference of church and lay authorities with the organization of “family.” A “rightfully married” man could not be a father the way he liked, while children conceived out of wedlock were deprived of any rights. The father was not the one holding power in the household but one indicated as such through legal marriage, or – to quote the well-known words of St. Paul – *pater is est, quem iustae nuptiae demonstrant*. One

231 According to this method, given the ban on marriages within seven degrees of consanguinity (which equaled as many as fourteen degrees when calculating with the Roman method), a man ready to marry would be prohibited from coupling with as many as 2,731 cousins from his generation (assuming an average demographic trend), which practically meant all marriage-ready maidens he could meet, or even exceeded their total number (cf. Flandrin 1980).

232 It is worth noting that the resulting indissolubility of marriage (“till death us do apart”) greatly stabilizes the family unit and guarantees that its property is not fragmented (cf. Fisher 1994).

who used to be the head of the family due to certain individual characteristics could now obtain such status only by entering marriage, and could become father only to a child conceived with his legal wife. If the pater accepted such limitations with respect to the legitimacy of the relationship and children, this was only because he was more than amply compensated with legal and religious guarantees of power in the household, a power extending to the public sphere through fiefdom.

In ideological and cultural systems of the traditional society, the family occupies a central place. After all, at the heart of Catholicism we find the Holy Family, which constitutes, as it were, a model for all earthly families. However, the full realization of the idea of family as a primarily spiritual, and not a biological, unit (after all, Joseph was not the biological father to Jesus) was postponed until Reformation, when Protestantism put the father on a spiritual pedestal (Bogucka 1998). Since the reforms of Gregory VII in the eleventh century, marriage was declared a sacrament despite its ambiguous sense in the New Testament.²³³ Thus, it was deemed the only legitimate model of reproduction. The period also saw the first humble attempts at interfering with family's "internal" matters such as the authority of parents over children, relations between spouses, and bedroom secrets. However, the legal system's focus was on financial questions, mainly inheritance, the right to the woman's dowry, and matters of marital arrangements. Both the king and the Church found the noble houses to be of crucial importance – both as an ally and as a competitor in the fight for power.

These new references constituting the dynamic of family constellations hide behind the above-mentioned variety of terms referring to family. *Lineage* is a term used in reference to the genealogical continuity derived from a pair of founders, incorporating *all* members, both in main and lateral lines. *Race* in turn refers to the continuity of the *masculine*²³⁴ name, which was achieved through male heirs, although it would be often "patched" by adopting closer relatives. This term is strictly related to the concept of pater familias as the creator of a family-race. *House* would mean land whose inheriting established a chain of continuity, although not necessarily that of a "lineage" or "race." When there was no male heir, the husband of the daughter could adopt the name of the "house," thus "patching" the demographic gap in the continuity of the bloodline.

233 According to St. Paul, marriage constituted a lesser evil than unregulated sexual life, but celibacy was still the desired ideal.

234 Here, in the dominance of the masculine genealogical line, we find the legally guaranteed dominance of the father-patriarch in the family unit.

All three concepts refer to the *longue durée*, establishing social categories from a level higher than that of elementary family. The married couple and its children would be the moment of transmitting “house” or “lineage” into the future, its expansion in time and space, rather than an independent social unit. That is why the term “family” is mainly used in reference to the lower classes who had no “extension” in genealogy or land and were, by the same token, sentenced to a short life deprived of any significance.²³⁵ What is more, wealthy peasants or artisans would use the concept of house rather than family (Flandrin 1998). Relationships between spouses, parents and children were also subordinated to the logic of long lasting, which dominated over that of emotions. As Michelle Perrot and Anne Martin-Fugier point out, “all societies – except for ours, where mediating structures have disappeared, leaving the state and the married couple, as it were, facing each other alone – expressed distrust for exaggerated love between spouses because it could make them forget about their duties to the society” (1990, 198). A similar severity characterized the normative ideal of parents, especially the father. The propagated principle was: “the more a father loves his child, the more diligently he teaches it and punishes it,” or – following the teachings of the Ecclesiastes, who was often mentioned in sermons – “one who loves his son often uses the cane” (Delumeau & Roche 1995).

Therefore, depending on whether emphasis would be laid on the continuity of name, genealogy or property, the family unit would be defined in various terms, which then became mixed in use. However, it has always been a unit extending beyond the elementary family, incorporating in itself – as a point of reference – vast structures of kinship, numerous unrelated household members, and also covering (through the extended metaphor of the father) the clientage of the house. “Family,” in the sense closer to the elementary family, can be found in the language used to refer to urban lower classes or the countryside poor – people who had nothing to transfer, who were barely able to survive and therefore focused primarily on the purely biological task of physical reproduction. This is a significant observation that indicates presentist intuitions behind the concept of family as a unit without past, one that functions on the margins of economic processes and social reproduction, providing the population only with “naked” people. These intuitions shall find their development in the modern industrial society.

235 Significantly, as distinct from families from the higher classes, ones from lower tiers were easily fragmented, losing their continuity. Thus, they are not the long-lasting chains of names, properties or social positions (noble titles).

5.2.3 “Family” as a vehicle for the reproduction of social structure: the dominance of the logic of market and state

It is in the modern industrial society that elementary family emerges as a clearly distinguished basic social unit, one that is problematized in public discourse. Larger units – e.g. lineage, house or race – are no longer the place where the three dimensions of social reproduction are woven together. It is the “rightful” nuclear family: the household, the space of living together, “natural community,” and the original space of democracy. This representation certainly does not reflect the complex reality of family life, but rather suggests or even creates it: “family – society’s ‘invisible hand’ and the economy’s ‘hidden God’ – was at times a conspirator within the very heart of democracy; it straddled the ambiguous boundary between public and private” (Perrot & Martin-Fugier 1990, 125).

The shape of the family unit began to change, although it needs to be remembered that the shift from agrarian to industrial economy was a slow process in European societies. The significance of land as “capital” or the resource conditioning social position gradually began to wane as financial and “human” capital came to the fore. The emergence of industry, and the job market along with it, allowed young people to seek economic independence away from their original family unit; work and skills became a resource that could be sold.

However, it would be entirely unjustified to regard the family unit as a passive recipient of changes occurring independently from it. Indeed, it played a crucial role in shaping modern industrial society. John Hajnal (1965) indicates a specific form of Northern and Western European family, which – he argues – was one of the factors behind the emergence of the new economic model. Principles of inheritance returned non-inheriting, well-educated noble sons to satisfy the needs of growing trade and industry, especially in places where estate rules did not prevent them from taking up work.

At the dawn of the transition to modernity, traditional society’s possibilities of expansion were exhausted – land was already distributed, while forests and swamps were robbed of all patches that could be cultivated; in England, enclosures cut at the roots of the existence of district communities. At the same time, Europe was showing first signs of the “Vital Revolution” that was to come soon (Chaunu 1971): children began to live longer thanks to better conditions and increased parental care. The number of unmarried individuals among the higher classes also rose as a result of blocking the possibility to “settle” on one’s own land. The emergence of new areas of economic activity – or rather, an active

search for them²³⁶ – paved the way before the non-inheriting to independently create their own economic basis for reproduction.

The strengthening of the nation state, which began with “enlightened absolutism,” was simultaneously a process of wearing away the power of houses. One consequence of the expansion of the state was also the increasing legal interference with things that previously were decided solely by the family unit, primarily by the patriarch. Commenting on events sparked by the French Revolution, Andre Cabantous observes: “Deep economic, social, political and cultural changes that transformed the French society in the years 1750–1920 also affected the father figure, differentiating its function and image. From that point on, apart from the pater familias who rules over his sons, there slowly emerges a migrating or absent father, a divorcee” (1995, 323). Here is a list of blows dealt to French patriarchy in this period:

1792 – women gain the right to file for divorce

1793 – wealth has to be distributed equally among children (ban on free allocation of wealth in the will)

1841 – children forbidden to work in manufactures

1874 – child beggars act (parents made responsible and punishable)

1874 – Roussel Act (the right to inspect – by state officials, naturally – the well-being of children handed over to wet nurses)

1889 – paternal rights can be stripped in favor of social care if father is deemed “unworthy”

1898 – act on mistreatment of children

1912 – establishing fatherhood becomes women’s right

1935 – abolishing of the right to punish children physically

It is not hard to discern that an absolute majority of the above legal acts concern children. On the one hand, they aim to secure children’s well-being. Importantly, the child does not belong solely to its close ones, but is “future of the nation and the race, tomorrow’s producer and progenitor, citizen and soldier. Between the child and the family – especially the poor family, presumed incapable of caring for its own – a host of third parties intervened: philanthropists, physicians, and statesmen determined to protect, educate, and discipline the young” (Perrot & Martin-Fugier 1990, 196). On the other hand, these “third parties” support children in their conflicts with father and family home, providing them with a strong

236 These possibilities did not emerge on their own – they were the effect of an intensified search undertaken in the face of rising economic pressures.

institutional ally in family's internal disputes.²³⁷ However, regardless of whether revolutionaries really turned sons against their fathers, the occurring changes legitimized and made it easier for young people to escape from the supervision of their parents, strengthening at the same time the tendency to seek economic independence.

The rise of industry, especially in the first phase dominated by outwork, opened new possibilities of becoming independent also before peasant children. As David Levine has demonstrated (1977), the chance to obtain means to achieve self-reliance led to the lowering of the marriage age, thus increasing their number, and – in consequence – causing a demographic boom, which gave rise to scientific demography²³⁸ and made matters of population an object of interest to the state. However, earning economic independence also had its other side: Levine writes in this context about the loss of control over conditions of reproduction (1987). Land was and still is a stable, at least partially predictable resource of means, one that allows long-term “planning.”²³⁹ At the same time, the job market – especially in the early stages of industrial growth – was capricious and unpredictable. The plague of unemployment described by Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844) deprived masses of working-class families of all means, although this was, in turn, caused by the surplus of available workers following the demographic boom rooted, after all, in the possibility to earn a living in the industry.²⁴⁰ This is one of the most convincing examples of feedback between economy and demography.

Demographic and economic factors supported and accelerated each other. It was not “industrialization” that forced families to adapt. Rather, changes in strategies of forming family units, caused by the closing off of the environment

237 It needs to be acknowledged that this kind of support was used not only by children but also by parents. At the height of the family's triumph, people like “insane and feeble-minded had no rights as citizens. Under the law of 1838 they could be held *on request of their families*. [...] Confinement of ‘madwomen’ increased dramatically over the course of the nineteenth century: from 9,930 in 1845–1849 the number of female lunatics rose to 20,000 in 1871 [...]. In 80 per cent of the cases these women were committed at the behest of men (a third of them husbands, the rest fathers and employers)” (Perrot & Martin-Fugier 1990, 170; emphasis added).

238 We mean here the theory of Malthus.

239 Surely, crop failures could occur but in the long run one could count on the land's ability to “feed” its owner.

240 The second factor in the plague of unemployment was the shift from outwork to factory work; in the case of the latter, efficiency caused a drop in the demand for workforce.

due to the shortage of land and a rapid growth in population, were – as Levine argues – “the silent revolutionary force” that changed history.

This does not entail the loss of significance of the family unit, but rather its reorientation towards a new dimension, namely the *moral* one. Since the French Revolution, “family” has been one of the fundamental themes in ideologies, both conservative and liberal. According to Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* published in the 1820s, individual is the subject of law (law can be only personal); however, this does not mean that this individual is socially autonomous. He or she would be rather subordinated to the civic society, of which the family is a crucial realm. Without the family, the state would deal with “inorganic” collectivities, masses that would easily succumb to despotism. Hegel is accompanied by the above-quoted Tocqueville, according to whom natural family ties are an antidote to the revolutionary fragmentation of society, and by Guizot, who saw the family as a model and prototype of democracy.

Such distinguishing and privileging of the family – the elementary family, let us add – nevertheless conceals a certain ambiguity. On the one hand, as Guizot claims, “family is a single entity whose elements are of secondary importance” (after Hunt & Hall 1990, 103). On the other, however, these “secondary elements” are supposed to obtain full rights as *individuals*, also in relation to the family itself (to father or husband). This was the first step towards a vision of family not just as a “unit of reproduction,” but as an association of free individuals joined by a web of voluntary ties and emotions: a miniature of the civic society. The family is supposed to be the first school of democracy, in which one learns the skills necessary to strike compromises and work together for the common good (although it seems difficult to define what this common good would be except for socialization, which prepares one to be a “good citizen”).

All systems of social philosophy from that period presented the family already in its elementary form – a form that certainly was not the reality at the time, not even during the first stage of industrial society. As Louis Bergeron notes, “[l]arge private and, more recently, public industry is much less free of family domination than is generally believed. [...] Among business leaders family connections still determine career trajectories” (after Perrot & Martin-Fugier 1990, 123). During Flaubert’s trial in connection with the novel *Madame Bovary*, the author wrote to his brother Achilles: “They ought to know at the Ministry of the Interior that in Rouen we are what is called *a family*, that is, that *we have deep roots in the region*, and that in attacking me, especially for immorality, they will injure many people” (after Perrot & Martin-Fugier 1990, 123; first emphasis preserved, second added).

Since that time, transformations of the shape of the “family unit” would occur in two directions. On the one hand, it was still involved as an active actor in the dynamic changes of economic and social character – internal and external migrations, the development of new fields of economic activity, changes in the realm of work organization, and the severing of ties that make it dependent on “house” or “lineage.” On the other hand, it became subject to intense influence: first, as an element of new social ideology²⁴¹ and the object of active interference on the part of the nation state, and then, after the Second World War, as the object of research in the rising social sciences. Still, during the first stage of industrial society, the family unit – either indeed “shrunk to nuclear family” or discreetly extending its nepotistic ties in the field of economy – combined in itself all three dimensions of reproduction. The issue here is not only that companies have a family-like character but also that great industrialists-reformers would build a system of paternalistic ties, including construction of housing estates for workers, while professional education or transmission of skills and trades would occur inside families, not necessarily nuclear ones. What is more, despite the growth of the sector of universally accessible education, socialization would still take place within family, in accordance with models of family pedagogy, in which the father would play a dominant role.

Simultaneously, there unfolded the process that would later lead to the emergence of the last family configuration: the postmodern family, established through the very power of reflexivity. After all, just like the “social cell” of modernity, it is the creation of social ideology, to which the scientific diagnoses of experts are attached.

5.3 Flourishing of industrial society and criticism of bourgeois family

Whereas the nineteenth century was the period of “family triumphant,” the second half of the twentieth century, especially the time after the Second World War, brought about devastating criticism of it. It seems that the idealized family of the nineteenth century did not perform well as a “civic mini-society” since it brought about the hecatomb of two wars, a youth rebellion, and the downfall of authorities. “Lawrence K. Frank, drawing on the studies of Margaret Mead,

241 The novelty rests in both the very phenomenon of ideology as a means of mobilizing and introducing coherence to the growing population, and the fact that it was the first time that “society” became an object for ideology.

Ruth Benedict, Gregory Bateson and Erik Erikson, compared the ‘affection, tenderness, and benevolent patience’ shown to children in primitive cultures with child-rearing practices in the West, where the child was ‘terrorized, humiliated, and often brutalized.’ Such practices, he maintained, produced the ‘aggressive, destructive, exploitive individuals from whom Western European culture has suffered for so many centuries’” (Lasch 1977, 103).

The critical analysis of the family, especially the American one, was done by representatives of basically all directions in social sciences: the Frankfurt School with the concept of “authoritarian personality” as a product of disciplining mechanisms operative in the family; psychoanalysis with the idea of “neurotic personality” developed in the coldness of the family house; as well as structuralists, functionalists, and even interactionists. The belief that the family is weak – spread in mass media and by the rising army of specialists and therapists – was incorporated into the self-consciousness of both parents and children, deepening the uncertainty as to the former’s competences. Parents were treated in a particularly harsh way in the heyday of the romantic vision of youth. “The director of the Association for Family Living, Evelyn Millis Duvall, complained that ‘only one profession remains untutored and untrained – the bearing and rearing of our children.’ Parenthood, in her view, remained the ‘last stand of the amateur’” (Lasch 1977, 108).

The radical shift of position, which led to the rejection of the ideal of “bourgeois family,” was certainly an answer to the structural pressures heralding the twilight of industrial society. One could even say that – as in the case of the weaving of events and feedbacks, which created the bourgeois and proletarian family in the form of elementary family, although still enmeshed in a discreet web of nepotistic interrelations²⁴² activated when necessary – we once again deal here with an entire set of interdependent factors. From the perspective of the present subject, there are four dimensions of these changes that seem crucial.

The first one is the increasing isolation of family from its surroundings, stemming from the collapse of neighborhood, lengthening of time spent outside home, as well as the increasing sense of alienation²⁴³ and hostility towards “society.” The more intimate, personal and private, the family space becomes as

242 Blood relations played a particularly important role in migrations. It suffices to recall the phenomenon of Irish policemen in USA. Cf. also Finch (1989).

243 This sense was, to a large degree, developed not only by the media, but also by social sciences, which objectify the social reality and create a vision of society as a “steam-roller” that crushes one’s individuality.

an alternative to and a shelter from the brutalized “outside” world, the more it becomes uprooted from the social order. As a result, nothing can become nested in it, nor does it itself become part of any greater whole. This also means that family’s relations with its surroundings become increasingly “antagonistic” or even discontinuous²⁴⁴ – in line with the ideology of family as “a safe haven in this ruthless world.”

The second is the expansion of the hired work market – basically the only possibility (with the exception of rentiers and landowners) to gain means necessary to survive. This caused the conceptual category of “labor” to change too. It began to be associated solely with gainful employment, making “household chores” not only worthless but also a field of conflict. Labor was extracted from home and the recommendation was to abstain from “bringing work back home,” either in the sense of things that need to be done or a bad mood. Thus, labor became conflicted with home: days cannot be stretched indefinitely and every hour invested in work means one hour less for home. In this way, labor came to dominate over the family, especially in the case of women.²⁴⁵ “The most important indictment of the present organization of work is that it forces women to choose between their desire for economic self-sufficiency and the needs of their children. Instead of blaming family for this state of affairs, we should blame the relentless demands of the job market itself. Instead of asking how women can be liberated from the family, we should ask how work can be reorganized – humanized – so as to make it possible for women to compete economically with men without sacrificing their families or even the very hope of a family” (Lasch 1977, xvii). The demands of the job market also impose the necessity to make other choices regarding mobility, availability, “integration” with the work team, while labor itself goes through significant changes.²⁴⁶

The process of separating “workplace” from home was accompanied by the process of separating the family from the “place of education.” In a way, the absence of parents at home was one of the factors behind the lengthening of the time spent by children in school, and the development of the sector of services “compensating” for the absent mother, which in turn could facilitate further

244 It is important to remember that we change identity whenever we leave home.

245 Work is obviously an indispensable source of means to support family. It needs to be kept in mind, however, that the ever-expanding marketing makes more and more goods “indispensable,” either for the child’s proper development, or for securing one’s social position. Although families were also subjected to economic pressures in the past as well, they were less subordinated to labor as a sphere separated from family life.

246 This shall be discussed in the next chapter.

lengthening of her absence. This significantly changed the internal space of family life: in some way, “no one’s home.” The space of home is also emptied as a sphere of action: “there’s nothing to do” at home except for “resting” (i.e. watching television). Even “recreation,” “free time” and “hobby” have been moved outside home. In other words, “life goes on elsewhere.” The banality of what is left at home – doing the washing, cleaning, and cooking²⁴⁷ – does not suffice to create a common “task” or goal that would seal a sense of unity. Thus, the family loses a sense of unity with regard to its shared goals, ceasing to hold specific functions except for meeting the emotional demands of household members.

Third, dynamically developing sciences enter the realm of the family. On the one hand, we have medicine and pharmaceuticals, providing reliable contraceptives on a mass scale (for the first time in history). Their significance cannot be overestimated – not only do they provide control over reproduction, which can be subjected to rational planning, but also make such decisions an act of the *individual* will, one that does not necessitate negotiating with the partner.²⁴⁸ An independent voice was also won by social sciences problematizing the family and formulating its normative ideal. In scientific criticism of family, a significant role began to be played by feminist movements as well as ones striving for the emancipation of minorities (particularly sexual ones). From the perspective of new, reflexive models, new ideals of family life have been formed: partnership, exchanging of roles, autonomy of individuals and the principle of dialogue²⁴⁹ instead of “disciplinary training.”

This is particularly clear in the area of upbringing. One could say that all knowledge and competences necessary to complete this task have been appropriated by “professionals,” which left parents with nothing but a sense of guilt. The famous handbook by Spock advises parents to listen to their hearts, but at the same time warns about the terrible consequences of losing self-control. Words uttered without thinking in a fit of rage could destroy the child’s self-confidence, scolding could lead to long-lasting problems, while failure to provide the child with love and a sense of security could do irreparable damage. Conflict is pushed outside of the family – a “good family” ideally sees none of it. The same happens

247 These are unprofitable activities and thus not falling into the category of “labor,” which makes them fruitless.

248 Coitus interruptus, practiced before, as well as earlier condoms, all demanded man’s cooperation. The pill and then the spiral, however, made women entirely independent of the will and decision of their partners.

249 As Lasch observes, not without a certain note of spitefulness (1977), the principle of dialogue is nothing else than a mode of “appealing to enlightened egoism.”

with discipline since the family is meant to be a space of love and unconditional acceptance, not one of violence or compulsion. The family thereby ceased to exist as a specific entity having its own rules, and instead became transparent. In this ideology, no important processes of social or economic character come together in the family. It is rather a place of self-realization and emotional fulfillment.

Fourth, *welfare state* was developed, featuring mighty social policies oriented, among other things, towards helping and “repairing” faulty families. As Charles Murray demonstrates in his controversial study (2015), such programs mostly brought about the opposite result, chiefly because they failed to acknowledge the specificity of the family as a social whole, instead orienting themselves towards *individuals*.

“The history of modern society,” Lasch writes in his excellent analysis of the mythologized view of family, “from one point of view, is the assertion of social control over activities once left to the individuals or their families. During the first stage of the industrial revolution, capitalists took production out of the household and collectivized it, under their own supervision, in the factory. Then they proceeded to appropriate the workers’ skills and technical knowledge by means of ‘scientific management,’ and to bring these skills together under managerial direction. Finally, they extended their control over the workers’ private life as well, as doctors, psychiatrists, teachers, child guidance experts, officers of the juvenile courts, and other specialists began to supervise child-rearing, formerly the business of the family” (1977, xx–xxi). According to Lasch, the modern industrial society has “proletarianized the family,” in a way stripping it of control (or competence) over all vital processes comprising the general reproduction of social units.²⁵⁰

Were we to take this diagnosis seriously, it would be necessary to assume that the “family unit” analyzed here ceased to exist because the three above-mentioned fundamental systems of social reproduction are “nested” not so much in the family anymore as, rather, in individuals. In a way, this would mean a return to the tribal reality – where the elementary family was dependent and unstable – or to the fleeting reality of plebeian families under feudalism – where family played no role in the reproduction of the social system except for providing “naked people.”²⁵¹ This seems to be the direction in which Beck’s analyzes

250 The paradox lies in the fact that, at the same time, the family is still considered as the “original environment of socialization,” one that is basically responsible for the totality of the individual’s success in life.

251 Naturally, there is a great difference here too – in tribal societies the dependent family was a “unit” of the clan, while plebeian families under feudalism were “nested” in the

point. He rightly observed in *Risk Society* that “[t]hought through to its ultimate consequence, the market model of modernity implies a society *without* families and children. Everyone must be independent, free for the demands of the market in order to guarantee his/her economic existence. The market subject is ultimately the single individual, ‘unhindered’ by a relationship, marriage or family” (Beck 1992, 116; emphasis preserved).

The stable nuclear family, one assuming the subordination of individuals – especially women and children – with regard to the institutional distribution of roles and obligations, became dysfunctional under pressures of mobility, individualism and flexibility. On the one hand, in the historical form it was given in early modernity, family is in real crisis, which manifests itself in the rising number of divorces, in postponing of marriage, in the gradual departure from formalization of relationships, with people choosing cohabitation instead, or finally – in the shift of power relations between women and men, which is generally regarded as the twilight of patriarchy. On the other hand, however, the model of nuclear family – legitimized in the modern era – has been subjected to shattering criticism. As a result, both in real and symbolic terms, the “triumphant family” characteristic for the modern society is now falling into oblivion. Some view this as a crisis or even downfall of the family; others, however, regard this process as the emergence of a new, more reflexive form of the family.

Is it not the case, however, that the “downfall of the family” is simply the downfall of a certain *myth* of the family, while the “emptiness” of the deserted home is a mythologized counterpart to the equally unreal, vibrant life of the “social cell”? Similarly, is it not true that the “postmodern family,” i.e. one reduced to the expressive function, constitutes a *new* myth constructed on top of real structural pressures? Just like with the question about the crisis of society, there can be no certainty here whether we deal with the real dissolution of a certain institution, or rather with the inadequacy of the intellectual model still used to describe phenomena that are entirely new and cannot be grasped in this way.

5.4 Postmodern family

There is consent among theoreticians of postmodernity – like Bauman, Beck or Giddens, to name just a few – that the postmodern family is a reflexive relationship between subjects, a relation of open and continuous character, and not

community of the local manor farm or estate. Currently, the “naked people” produced by families do not belong to any such overarching community.

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a normative social institution of the old kind, one imposing roles and duties on individuals. If that is so, then family demands ongoing work of a reflexive and emotional kind, while its internal relations have become “pure” (to use a term developed by Anthony Giddens), i.e. autotelic and not instrumental. “Of key importance here is the emergence of the ‘pure relationship’ as prototypical of the new spheres of personal life. A pure relationship is one in which external criteria have become dissolved: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship as such can deliver” (Giddens 2006, 6). In contrast to personal ties in traditional and modern societies, pure relations are not anchored in the outside conditions of social and economic life. This means that the family is constituted to an ever-greater degree through emotional transactions, in consequence of which outside points of reference are replaced with mutual closeness and intimacy. It is not “society” but individuals that create a family, simultaneously creating themselves: both the stability of the relationship and the confirmation of their identity depend on the quality of their relations.

Family members, especially the “founding” couple, need to continuously engage with work that demands not only reflexivity but also technical competence. This imposes on individuals the kinds of limitations of which they were not aware before: commitment is necessary for the relationship to endure; however, anyone who becomes fully committed is risking that – in case of break-up – he or she will be painfully hurt. Dangers involved with engagement are even greater since the postmodern, fluid world does not guarantee permanence of any relationships. The paradox lies in the fact that – as Bauman aptly puts it – relationships “*need to be only loosely tied*, so that they can be untied again, with little delay, when the settings change – as in liquid modernity they surely will, over and over again” (Bauman 2008, vii; emphasis added).

Therefore, individuals have to yet cannot form stable relationships. As a result, first, family as a stable and long-lasting relationship becomes brittle or even entirely impossible; and second, this situation condemns individuals to an endless lack of fulfillment. Volkmar Sigush, a therapist quoted by Bauman, observes that “[a]ll forms of intimate relationships currently in vogue bear the same mask of false happiness once worn by marital and later by free love... [A]s we took a closer look and pulled away the mask, we found unfulfilled yearnings, ragged nerves, disappointed love, hurts, fears, loneliness, hypocrisy, egotism, and repetition compulsion... Performances have replaced ecstasy, physics are in, metaphysics out...” (after Bauman 2008, 46).

The model of the postmodern family – or rather its normative idea – emerges from the conviction that it ceased to perform traditional functions, mainly economic and social ones, for the sake of the expressive function; moreover,

many emphasize its instability. It cannot be entirely ruled out, however, that not much has changed in this respect: the “postmodern” family still constitutes a unit reproducing the social whole but operates more discreetly, while the capitals transferred to the younger generations – including cultural, social and economic capital – have a much less material character. After all, it is still inside the “family” – including patchwork or incomplete ones – that there emerges, to use a theoretical term developed by Gary Becker (1991), “human capital” (children), while the selection of partners meets the criteria of rationality (Giza-Poleszczuk 2005).

It is not true that today’s family is particularly brittle, or that this has to do with fluid postmodernity. Phenomena like low marriage rates, cohabitation, single motherhood, or “patchwork” families not only occurred before but were also often the rule. To quote some examples: in sixteenth-century Sweden, cohabitation rates were higher than today (Wojda 2003); “patchwork” families were the rule in periods of high mortality rates and simultaneous economic demand to secure family’s completeness (Kula 1983); until the nineteenth century, most marriages in England had a consensual character, not a formal one (Stone 1977); finally, in the past the break-up of the family after the death of one of the spouses would force more children to live in an incomplete family or under stepparents than today.

In other words, the phenomena considered today to be signs of crisis appear as such only against the background of a specific, historically-determined normative ideal. If in historically distant epochs the concept of “lineage” or “house” allowed to legitimize “patching” families through adoption, remarrying, relations between relatives or redistribution of children, today the idea of a good relationship provides meaning to practices enforced by structural pressures. Let us recall Ulrich Beck’s thesis quoted before: “Thought through to its ultimate consequence, the market model of modernity implies a society *without* families and children.” If Beck is right, the “postmodern family” – both in empirical and ideological dimensions – greatly contributes to the materialization of this assumption. This means that it is still a unit reproducing collective order, although in the postmodern era it is the market that has come to determine this order. If so, this sheds new light on the sense of crisis experienced in relation to the family.

5.5 Crisis of the family as crisis of society

So, where does the crisis-focused discourse originate? It considers the fragility of contemporary family as a threat to the very foundation of society’s existence.²⁵²

252 This suggestion appears, for instance, in Greenspan’s theory discussed in Chapter Two.
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Moreover, there is a clearly felt rise in anxiety about currently observed transformations of family, as experienced by common people, and expressed by columnists, scholars in social sciences as well as representatives of religious institutions. All of this undoubtedly constitutes a symptom of certain social fears, although they could be inadequately formulated. Thus, one needs to pose the question about the reason for the emergence of such fears. It is easy to point to demographic or economic consequences of the “family’s crisis,” e.g. negative birth rate and resultant ageing of the population as well as an unfavorable proportion of those working to those receiving pensions, or the related policy of accepting migrants from “foreign” cultures. Is it possible, however, to identify any specific dangers entailed by the weakening of family relations, and carrying implications for the functioning of society as such, or for its foundation that conditions the possibility of living together?

A question like this allows us to immediately notice that the main axis crystallizing the attitude toward the “postmodern family” is the question of whether one considers it from the perspective of *social needs* or *individual needs*.

In all previous ideologies (or representations) of the family, it was the first approach that prevailed – one giving primacy to the needs of communal living. In a society understood as a structure of collective actions, a strong and stable family was the source of order: a specific “social police” guaranteeing the minimization of “loose people,” i.e. ones not incorporated into social structures and therefore possibly dangerous. “Prisons and boarding schools, barracks and convents, vagabonds and dandies, nuns and lesbians, bohemians and toughs, celibate individuals and institutions, often were obliged to define themselves in relation to family or on its margins. It was the center; they were the periphery” (Perrot & Martin-Fugier 1990, 97); thus, “[t]heir physical and moral lives were complicated. Suspect or accused, they dwelt on the defensive, caught in a net which, though still relatively loose, steadily tightened” (259). It was the family’s task to “bind” and somewhat pacify the centrifugal tendencies among individuals,²⁵³ to motivate them to adapt conformist patterns of behavior; and finally, to provide “energy” for even more intense labor.²⁵⁴

253 Those workers who were “burdened” with responsibility for the family’s existence rarely displayed a revolutionary attitude; they were rather ones among whom strike-breakers would be recruited (MacKinnon 1991).

254 On the other hand, however, this paradox has been noted by authorities throughout history. The family is indeed simultaneously a “subversive organization” (Pinker 1998) that easily departs from rules of social life in the name of nepotism.

In this perspective, family is not only social police but also social insurance. By creating a web of self-help, family aids the individual in finding solutions to difficult life situations without engaging public structures of help or social care²⁵⁵ (cf. Giza-Poleszczuk 2000). Even those who recognized the significance of the family for the development of the individual – like Freud, among others – placed emphasis mainly upon civilizing and restraining natural impulses that threaten social order.²⁵⁶ Although Freud's theory paints a picture of the family torn by conflicts and tormented by ambiguous feelings, its primary function was still to develop a superego and thus impose normative limitations on the individual.

In the context of this approach, the crisis of the family has entailed the rise of the number of “loose” and insufficiently socialized people, who are a potential economic burden, possibly lowering the degree of social integration, or even posing a threat to the public.

In contemporary considerations of the family, greater emphasis is placed on the role it plays for the *individual* rather than the society. It is primarily the individual who needs a “good family” that is supposed to not only constitute an irreplaceable source of security and stability, but also provide inspiration for development and self-realization. The family “socializes” only in the sense of laying the foundations of personality – not by “binding” and “civilizing;” it creates persons individualized, who exist only for themselves, not for any kind of “society” and not even for family itself, towards which they would have some obligations. The family understood as an institution based on cooperation, or even interdependence, does not fit this image at all.

“In liquid modernity,” Bauman writes, “[...] it is no longer the task of both partners to ‘make the relationship work’ – to see it work through thick and thin, ‘for richer or poorer,’ in sickness and in health, to help each other through good and bad patches, to trim if need be one's own preferences, to compromise and make sacrifices for the sake of a lasting union. [...] What follows is that the assumed temporariness of partnerships tends to turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. If the human bond, like all other consumer objects, is not something to be worked

255 Contradictory tendencies arise in this case as well: a self-sufficient family weakens centralized power, at the same time eliminating the field in which other groups could be formed, including associations, which constitute the basis of “civic society.”

256 It is worth emphasizing here, however, that in Freud's theory the family does not constitute “a safe haven in this ruthless world” but rather a space of specific conflicts as well as ambiguous or negative emotions. Such a vision of the family fits well with those currents that criticize the family: Marxism, neo-Marxism, and some strands of feminism.

out through protracted effort and occasional sacrifice, but something which one expects to bring satisfaction right away, instantaneously, at the moment of purchase – and something that one rejects if it does not satisfy, something to be kept and used only as long as (and no longer than) it continues to gratify – then there is not much point in ‘throwing good money after bad,’ in trying hard and harder still, let alone in suffering discomfort and unease in order to save the partnership. Even a minor stumble may cause the partnership to fall and break down; trivial disagreements turn into bitter conflicts, slight frictions are taken for the signals of essential and irreparable incompatibility” (2006, 163–164). The ideology of individualism, which to a certain extent legitimizes the structural pressures necessitating “individuation,” requires one to regard all forms of collectivism with suspicion because they limit individual autonomy. This includes the family as a supraindividual entity. As a result, whereas family was the specific “social police” in the past, guaranteeing the preservation of social order, today this role is played by public institutions that guard individual rights against threats arriving from inside the family.

Thus, it becomes clear that the heart of the matter is a question much more fundamental than the one of whether family is undergoing crisis or not. In the ideological dimension, the issue is about legitimizing individualism, not only in the ethical aspect, but also in the institutional one. Hardly anyone seems to doubt that structural pressures favor neither establishing a family nor securing its stability. However, the question is whether we shall consider these tendencies as a sign of the emergence of new forms of family – thus legitimizing them – or whether we shall treat them as a crisis-caused anomaly. Those in favor of the latter option indicate that it is absolutely necessary for the functioning of society to restrain egotistic impulses and reinforce the “moral sentiments” that incline us to be unselfish; this in turn demands subordinating individual needs to social demands. The best field for practicing this “social organ” – as Tönnies calls it – is none other than family. Although this training does involve some suffering, misery accompanies individualism too. As Bauman observed with insight, “being an individual *de jure* means having no one to blame for one’s own misery, seeking the causes of one’s own defeats nowhere except in one’s own indolence and sloth, and looking for no remedies other than trying harder and harder still. Living daily with the risk of self-reprobatation and self-contempt is not an easy matter” (Bauman 2006, 38). Therefore, the question is not about the crisis of the family but about the thesis arguing the primacy of family (and by the same token, society) over the individual.

When expressed in the language of sociological theory, the debate on the crisis of the family is indeed an old dispute about the status of the concept of

society. It is also easy to note that it goes hand in hand with the controversy – indicated in Chapter One – over the question of what is it, in fact, that undergoes crisis: society or sociology, as well as over the question of whether it is possible to have a society comprised of individuals that are not rooted anywhere, or whether it is actually impossible to think about society differently than as an entity formed by smaller social sub-entities. If our assumption about society being a hierarchically nested system is true, it would be impossible to speak of any crisis of the family, regardless of how different its form is today. Although there can be no doubt that the “postmodern family” emerges in the context of structural pressures characteristic of contemporary times, it simultaneously allows them to expand through specific forms of socializing processes leading to reflexivity, fluidity and mobility. It is worth to recall here as well that family still constitutes to be the vehicle for economic, social and cultural reproduction, although the means it has at its disposal to achieve these goals are way subtler than marriage control, entail, or patriarchal power over women and children.