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Stepfamilies across Europe and overseas, 1550–1900

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ABSTRACT

This special issue investigates the families arising from death and the remarriage of a parent to consider the outcomes for the children, parents and stepparents from 1550 to 1900. It investigates historical demography to establish the numbers and types of stepfamilies. The introduction sketches several themes such as: the lingering effects of parental loss; how remarriage shapes stepfamily patterns in Western and East Central Europe; the effects of being a stepchild; stepparent caregiving and the household economy; when illegitimate children become stepchildren; household structure, property and inheritance regimes; and avenues for future research. This stepfamilies issue explores the cleavages as well as similarities in stepfamilies from Western Europe to Eastern Europe and looks beyond the continent into the overseas territories of the Dutch and Portuguese empires.

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1. Introduction

'Stepfamilies across Europe and overseas, 1550–1900' investigates historical demography, remarriage patterns and emotional attachments of stepfamilies in Europe and some of the territories in the colonial world. This special issue began as a way to build on collaborative research in the edited collection *Stepfamilies in Europe, 1400–1800* outlining stepfamily patterns in Europe across the Protestant Nordic countries and into the Netherlands, England, Germany to more Catholic regions such as southern France, Italy, Spain and venturing further east to Austria and Hungary (Warner, 2018, 2016). This collective research on Western to Central European stepfamily patterns was extended to Central and Eastern Europe when a team of researchers in Gabriella Erdélyi's 'Integrating Families' project explored the historical demography and types of stepfamilies in Hungary (including modern-day Slovakia, Croatia and Transylvania in Romania), Bohemia (Czech Republic), the Romanian Principalities, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (including beyond Poland and Lithuania, parts of Ukraine and Belorussia) across areas of Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist and Christian Orthodox faiths (Erdélyi, 2019; Erdélyi & Szabó, in press). Uniting these efforts, this special issue explores the cleavages as well as similarities in stepfamilies across European regions and peeks beyond the continent into the colonial territories of the Dutch and Portuguese empires.

The thematic issue draws lessons from the 'Stepfamilies in the Early Modern World' conference hosted by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Momentum 'Integrating Families' Research Group in Budapest 2019, the virtual Leiden [ESSHC] European Social Science History 2021 conference as well as preparation for the XXIII [IChS] International Congress of Historical Sciences in Poznań, Poland, August 2022. Papers and discussions in these conferences explored stepfamily concepts in Qing China, Mongolia, Jewish sects in the Middle East, kinship concepts in the Ottoman Empire and so-called 'world stepfamilies', the transnational and sometimes mixed-race families that accompanied the European diaspora across the globe. While the COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions to participation in the special issue, these presentations formed the backdrop and intent to adopt a global and cross-cultural approach to understanding the dynamics of the stepfamilies formed either by parental loss and remarriage by a surviving parent or the inclusion of illegitimate children who – for some of their childhood – were raised in a household with their biological parent and a stepparent.

2. How do we define a stepfamily?

In 2020s, the term 'stepfamily', it seems, is becoming outmoded, as blended celebrity couples prefer to promote more positive connotations for the relationships created through the divorce and remarriage of a parent. 'Bonus mom', instead of stepmother and 'bonus son' instead of stepson, seeks to break the stigma of the 'wicked stepmother' (Sherwood, 2021).

In 2011, in a policy recommendation that still informs current practice, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Task Force on Families and Households used the term 'reconstituted family' rather than 'stepfamily', because of its 'negative associations, based on historical contexts' (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Conference of European Statisticians [UNECE-CES], 2011, p. 5). The UN task force defined a 'reconstituted family' as 'a family consisting of a married or cohabiting couple or a marital (registered) same-sex couple, with one or more children, where at least one child is a non-common child, that is, the child of only one member of the couple', which would be a simple stepfamily. Borrowing from this UN/European recommendation, the working definition of a stepfamily in the statistics department of a Western democracy adds that 'The family can contain such children of each married spouse or common-law partner. The family can also contain biological or adopted children from the current relationship', which would be a complex or blended stepfamily (Statistics Canada, 2021). This thematic issue surveys these stepfamily variations in the past. The UN task force further suggests that a stepfamily ends when 'the other partner adopts the child of one partner ... [because] the resulting family is no longer a reconstituted family' (UNECE-CES, 2011, p. 12; see also, Statistics Canada, 2021). Here, we part ways with current data collection models, because a crucial aspect of the research in this thematic issue and in recent historiography is to move beyond the choice to remarry by the parent and onto the stepparent-stepchild dynamics within or outside the newly reconfigured household. This special issue and recent research consider the integration of children into a 'reconstituted' family and the outcomes for stepchildren in the

longer term and into adulthood (Erdélyi, 2019; Erdélyi & Szabó, in press; Warner, 2016, 2018). The effects on the children – positive or negative – did not end with the remarriage of a stepparent.

From the mid 1500s to the early 1900s even in Protestant areas that allowed divorce, remarriage rates remained low to the extent that historical demographers studying these centuries focus on parental death as the precondition of remarriage, a situation similar in the Eurasia project, which surveyed the remarriage patterns of widows and widowers in Sweden, Belgium, Italy, China and Japan (Lundh & Kurosu, 2014, p. 172). Orthodox Christian, Jewish and Muslim European communities, which allowed divorce, and areas of Northeastern Japan where divorce was more common invite further investigation into the effects of divorce and remarriage in premodern societies especially in populations where information on children in the households of remarrying parents is available (Adelman, 2017; Doxiadis, 2020; Kurosu, 2011; Kurosu et al., 2014; Vintilă, in press). The articles in this special issue focus on the sequence of events creating a stepfamily in the premodern to early industrial era: parental loss, orphanhood; the remarriage of a parent to a stepparent; and then beyond into the lives of stepchildren within the blended household across its life-stages, occasionally into full orphanhood and continued life with a stepparent. Some also weigh the situations when a parent's remarriage meant the exit of a child into their own marriage, migration, entry to a trade or placement in an institution such as a convent. What happened to the children whose parents remarried?

We add to recent research on elite to working stepfamilies as 'inclusive families' that enveloped an illegitimate child (usually from a father) into the household with legitimate half-siblings (Bellavitis, 2018; Coolidge, 2018; Erdélyi & Szabó, in press; Warner, 2018c, pp. 250–252, 254–55). This issue includes stepfamilies that evolved when a single mother or widow gave birth out-of-wedlock, and later married a man who was not the father of her illegitimate child(ren). It also explores the sometimes murky decisions made by remarried parents on the choice to incorporate an illegitimate child (sometimes a half-sibling) or a stepchild into a blended household or to abandon or place them elsewhere.

When a stepchild lost its surviving parent, in most regions of Europe, a stepparent had no legal obligation to remain as caregiver. Indeed, many statutes and customary laws in Europe, deliberately limited a stepparent's right to continue caregiving, access to guardianship or any financial administration of a stepchild's assets once their spouse had died and the child became a full orphan. Yet it has become clear that stepparent-stepchild relationships did not end with the biological parent's death (Warner, 2018c, pp. 252–254). This special issue explores these ongoing affective bonds, living arrangements and bequests between stepparents and stepchildren. It investigates the diverse experiences of half-orphans who became stepchildren; half-siblings and stepsiblings; illegitimate children who became stepchildren; and stepchildren who became full orphans.

3. Where are the stepfamilies in historical demography?

Historical demographers have expended much energy on establishing remarriage rates and patterns in cultures across the globe, concluding as early as the 1981 proceedings of the *Marriage and Remarriage of Populations of the Past* that 'no matter how crude or subtle the measure, widowers are more likely to remarry than widows, and to do so more quickly; the likelihood of re-marriage decreases with age, though usually more

rapidly for women than for men' (Dupâquier et al., 1981; Watkins, 1983 as cited in Lundh & Kurosu, 2014, p. 173). This remarriage pattern has held true in the many studies to follow in the 1990s and 2000s (Fauve-Chamoux, 2010; Kurosu, 2007, p. 431; Warner, 2018, pp. 11–13, 266–7).

Researchers on past populations have also investigated the impact of parental loss on child survival, analysing the differential effects of maternal loss or paternal loss combined with the risk factor of the age of the child. The studies of parental loss across rural and urban regions in nineteenth-century Sweden, the Netherlands, and Estonia and into the twentieth century in Spain and rural agrarian United States to 1940 show that motherless infants were at the greatest risk of death, their chances of survival brutally narrow (Andersson, 1996; Beekink et al., 1999; Jaadla & Lust, 2021; Reher & González-Quiñones, 2003; Schacht et al., 2021). And yet, despite the established research on parental loss and its effects on the survival of half-orphans and orphans, combined with the gendered patterns of remarriage, the consequences of the death of a parent and the arrival of a stepparent in centuries past remain understudied. Peter Laslett's pioneering, yet flawed, methods of counting stepfamilies in the 1970s (Laslett, 1977), which, moreover, relied on inconsistent recordings in a seventeenth century source¹ are still used to report the percentages of stepchildren in past households (Capp, 2018, p. 90). As early as 1972 Micheline Baulant, in her seminal article on the 'scattered family', commented that the 'so-called complete family' persisted as the 'preferred prey of the demographer' (Baulant, 1972, p. 959). Almost three decades later, a team of historical demographers remarked that 'stepchild status' and its 'effect on the life chances of the child' remained unknown because 'the surviving empirical evidence is virtually silent' (Beekink et al., 1999, p. 641).

One of the purposes of the conferences and papers working toward this special issue has been to address this gap in historical demography and to count stepfamilies (Erdélyi & Szabó, *in press*; Warner, 2018b, pp. 9–11). The aim is to understand the structures of historical stepfamilies, from parental loss to the effects of remarriage on the well-being of the children who become stepchildren, the differential between a father-stepmother union and a mother-stepfather couple, the effects of no siblings, stepsiblings accompanying a stepparent, and the arrival of half-siblings on the outcome for the children in these blended families.

4. The lingering effects of parental loss

Of the children who survived to age 5 near Pilsen in Western Bohemia in Velková and Tureček's sample in this issue, about 13% experienced the loss of a parent, a percentage that does not include orphaned children who did not survive until age 5. In Sweden in the nineteenth century in a sample of more than 21,000 children, about 7.7% of children or 1 in 13 lost a parent before age 10 (Andersson, 1996, p. 982). In the Portuguese islands of the Atlantic in the 1700s and into the early 1800s, Matos and Paiva in this issue calculate that 33% of children lost a mother or father before age 15, and by their mid-twenties, 43.7% had lost a parent. 'Data for the Netherlands for the period 1850–1900 show that between 8% and 11% of all persons aged 20 or less had lost one of their parents' (Beekink et al., 1999, p. 641). In Péter Őri's contribution to this issue examining the mainly German-speaking populations in Hungary in the 18-nineteenth centuries, he followed children

through to adulthood when the numbers of half-orphans at age of first marriage were 42% for grooms with an average age of 24% and 38% for brides who were 21 years old on average.

Consistent with other research on maternal loss in infancy as the greatest risk to a child's survival (Andersson, 1996, p. 981; Beekink et al., 1999), the article by Velková and Tureček in their study of more than 6600 children to age 5 in Western Bohemia and the contribution by Péter Őri on children to the age of 15 in Hungary, connect their findings on the impact of a mother's death to remarriage and the creation of a stepfamily. Velková and Tureček demonstrate that in eighteenth-century areas of today's Czech Republic, a mother's death was an immediate threat to the life of an infant still dependent on breast milk. Unsurprisingly, under such circumstances local communities were less concerned with whether or not the father waited for a year of mourning, so widowers often remarried within a matter of weeks or months, a pattern echoed in Jürgen Schlumbohm's study in this special issue of a rural population in the north of Germany (Schlumbohm, 2021). Velková and Tureček as well as Péter Őri found in their respective studies that the effects of the death of a mother gradually lessened if it occurred when the child was older. The contributions in this issue found that maternal loss continued its 'lingering effects' and in eighteenth-century Western Bohemia, the help and care provided by a stepmother only began to show a positive effect on children after the age of 3. Velková and Tureček have shown that the death of the father was a particularly grave threat to children under five years since the need to assume more responsibilities within the household economy meant that mothers were stretched as caregivers. In these mostly rural populations of day labourers, farmers or iron-workers, running a household and earning a living meant that the entrance of a stepparent in general increased (step) children's chances of survival.

Péter Őri is careful 'to mitigate the effect of the parental loss' by using research methods that compare the impact of similar life experiences. In other words, Őri compares the situation of the half-orphan in a lone parent household to the half-orphan who becomes a stepchild in the remarried parent's household. The tendency to compare well-being and outcomes of half-orphans with children who reached adulthood having the benefit of both biological parents skews the results.² Similarly, a study of stepchildren's well-being in the American state of Utah 1847–1940, recently emphasized the cumulative effect of parental loss even into remarriage. 'To isolate appropriately the effect of becoming a stepchild from other life events, we focus on comparing step-children to other children who too have experienced parental loss, but whose surviving parent has not remarried' (Schacht et al., 2021, p. 2).

5. Remarriage shapes the structure of stepfamilies across Europe from West to East

With few exceptions, widowers remarried more frequently and more rapidly than widows after the loss of a spouse across Western, Central and Eastern Europe in the 1400s through 1800s. While female remarriage declined steeply over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries male remarriage rates lowered gradually (Fauve-Chamoux, 2010; Warner, 2018, pp. 11–13, 266–7). These known trends are buttressed in Péter Őri's article on German-speaking Zsámbék in Hungary from 1723 to 1859 in this special issue where

widowers remarried at three times the rates of widows. Similarly, Matos and Paiva's study of the population on the Azores islands reveals how widowers in one parish remarried in the 1700s at more than double the rates of women. Across these Atlantic islands, widowers maintained their higher remarriage rates even into the 1800s when female remarriage precipitously declined due to male migration to the Portuguese empire and imbalanced sex ratios.

5.1. Age gap and uneven remarriage in Western Europe

The example of the parish of Belm in Germany between 1650 and 1850, in Jürgen Schlumbohm's contribution to this special issue, exemplifies another aspect of the general trend in Western Europe: 'Widowers and widows rarely chose a widowed partner, but rather a single person'. As a result, the age gap increased between partners in second and subsequent marriages compared to first marriages. For example, in Schlumbohm's study of rural northwest Germany 'On average, a widower was 11.4 years older than his bride, a widow 5.5 years older than her groom. In first marriages of both sides, the husband was, on average, 2.5 years older than his wife'. Some notable age gaps between a remarrying parent and spouse surface in Portugal and in the Azores islands in the late 1600s to early 1800s, influenced by rates of male emigration. A typical example from Mafalda Lopes' study of the coastal city of Porto in this special issue would be the 18-year-old Portuguese bride Ana Maria da Cruz who became stepmother in the early 1700s to an elder stepson aged 19, his brother slightly younger at 17 and their youngest brother, 15 (Lopes, 2022).

A side-effect of these uneven remarriages in Western Europe becomes visible in the extended parenthood for aging widowers marrying a younger second bride. The age gap between the older groom and the younger bride meant prolonged fertility and a longer period of active parenthood as fathers to younger children (Coolidge & Warner, 2018; Erdélyi, 2018, pp. 146–52). These newlywed maidens, too, instantly became stepmothers with parenting responsibilities for young children, or like Ana Maria da Cruz, with stepchildren of the same generation ready to make their way in the world. Some age gaps, as analysed by Matos and Paiva in the Azores, were so extreme they suggest a possible retirement strategy for the aging widow or widower and an economic foothold for the younger spouse.

Building on the established Western European pattern that the age difference between remarried spouses tends to diverge much more than in first marriages, Bonnie Clementsson's contribution to this issue analyses approximately 1,300 Swedish petitions for dispensation to marry because of incest prohibitions. These requests between kin – related by blood or marriage – reveal how concerns about family hierarchy, the 'reverence between children and parents', and age imbalance changed through the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries. The stepmother or stepfather were often closer in age to their stepchildren, however this common practice of crossing generations in remarriage became problematic when relatives by blood or by marriage wished to form a union. The Swedish king and the Lutheran church routinely refused to grant permission to (re) marry if the couple crossed generations or upset the family hierarchy, because of the idea that the older generation should have authority over someone younger. For example, in the 1740s a farmer was denied permission to marry his stepson's stepdaughter because the bride would cross two generations and move into a position of authority over her own

stepfather. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, with more emphasis on companionate marriage, the decisions began to shift if the groom had a higher place in the family hierarchy. A man remarrying a niece of a deceased wife might be granted permission but a man wishing to marry his deceased wife's aunt would not. In phases and by the end of the eighteenth century, the attitude of authorities softened. We see this shift in action when a man's petition to marry his uncle's widow in 1790 met with approval when it was determined that the nephew-groom was 11 years older than his aunt-bride. Over the course of the 1700s and into the early 1800s, attitudes altered from a focus on position within the family hierarchy to the ages of the applicants. One prohibition remained: the incest taboo of a stepparent and a stepchild marrying after the death of the biological parent, regardless of whether they were close in age. Clementsson, 2021.

5.2. Matches of similar age and comparable life experience in East Central Europe

In East Central European remarriages, the partners seem to have been more evenly matched in age and life experience. For example, in some Transylvanian rural communities (today's Romania), widowers remarried widows of a similar age in as many as 45.3% of unions (Lakatos, *in press*; Pakot, 2009). In Pressburg (Bratislava, in Slovakia), widowed mothers remarried more often than men among the German-speaking Lutheran citizens (Tóth, *in press*). Similarly, in Wallachia and Moldavia, in the Romanian Principalities, mothers across all social strata remarried after widowhood and divorce (which was a frequent practice in the Christian Orthodox church). Constanța Vintilă shows how remarried mothers were often granted custody and continued in their guardianship rights over their children, another break with the tendency for widows to lose guardianship upon remarriage in Western Europe (Vintilă, *in press*). As a result, remarried mother-stepfather couples were common in these Romanian territories. Several divergences with Western European stepfamily types are emerging from these Central and Eastern European studies in the 'Integrating Families' project: a higher tendency for widow-widower couples with all their complexities of (step)children from two marriage beds and the further possibility of younger half-siblings; a higher presence of stepfathers; and stepmothers who brought their maternal and marital experience to the remarriage. In Eastern Europe, although nuclear families were more prevalent, a pattern of extended family (either stem family or joint family) households grew the further one travelled to the east (Erdélyi & Szabó, *in press*). These multiple-family household structures influenced remarriage patterns, the frequency of stepfamilies and the types of support or resistance a stepparent might experience (Lakatos, *in press*; Őri, 2021; Velková and Tureček, 2021).

6. How common were stepchildren and stepparents in Europe and its overseas territories?

In rural Spain, the census data from villages in the mid to late 1500s in Castile recorded 8.75% of households in Cuenca, 17% in Salamanca and 20% in Ciudad Real as having (step)children from at least one previous marriage (Vassberg, 1994, p. 184). Using genealogies in a sample of over 600 noble marriages in Tyrol over two centuries 1500–1700, around 13.75% were stepfamilies in this German-speaking region in northern Italy, usually with a widower father and a stepmother (Clementi, 2020, p. 736). If we look to the

European colonies such as New France in the seventeenth century, historical demographers tracked 9,875 children born of first marriages until age 25 (or when they left home to marry). For the children of widower fathers, 53.3% became stepchildren with a stepmother. Widowed mothers, in this growing French colony, had a high rate of remarriage with 46.6% of their children experiencing a stepfather (Denis et al., 1997, pp. 285–6). In examining birth order in New France for those born before 1700, among the children who had lost a parent, the eldest (because their surviving parent tended to be younger) were more likely to experience a stepparent, and this stepparent usually had never been married before (Denis et al., 1997, p. 289).

In this issue, Velková and Tureček's study of 6618 children born between 1708 and 1834 near the city of Pilsen in today's Czech Republic found that of the 58% of children who survived to age five, 2.3% had a stepmother while 1.8% had a stepfather. Among those 5-year-olds, 1.4% were motherless, while 4.3% had lost their fathers. At the age of 5 in Velková-Tureček's study of Western Bohemia, '62% were raised by a stepmother while only 30% of the five-year-olds had a stepfather'. For the infants who lost their mothers and died rapidly thereafter, as noted in the section on parental loss, these children did not live long enough for the father to remarry but any older brothers or sisters would frequently acquire a stepmother.

For the late 1700s, the historical demographer Péter Óri calculated that 6% of children under the age of 15 lived in stepfamilies in the town of Zsámbék about 30 km from Budapest. Stepchildren were present in 9% of households and Óri explains that adult, infant and child mortality influence these percentages: 'there was a much higher chance that someone died in childhood than survived until the death or remarriage of parents' (Óri, *in press*). The chances of acquiring a stepparent, of course, increased over the lifetime of the child. In Óri's research in this issue on the Catholic and German-speaking populations in Hungary 1753–1859, at the time of first marriage, 14.5% of brides and 16.3% of grooms were stepchildren. Because remarriage rates among widower fathers were triple those of widow mothers, most of those half-orphans experienced a stepmother.

6.1. *Illegitimate children become stepchildren*

Illegitimate children as a category are often placed within research on foundlings, abandonment or orphanages, and more rarely within the scope of the reconfigured family (Chappuis, 2021; Capp, 2018, p. 109). Recent studies on stepfamilies in Italy, Spain, Sweden, Austria, England, have shown, however, that a premarital or extramarital child might be raised within the household of one of its biological parents and a stepparent or integrated into the home of a stepparent (Bellavitis, 2018; Coolidge, 2018; Lahtinen, 2018, pp. 42, 48; Lanzinger, 2018, p. 173; Warner, 2018c, pp. 254–56). In the colonial context of Catholic New France in the 1710s to the 1740s, in a sample of 180 widows, about 13% in the town of Québec and about 25% in a settlement on the Atlantic coast were pregnant, usually for about 2 to 5 months before they reached the altar for a second time. Half of the remarrying widowers in the colonial capital of Quebec had conceived a child before remarriage, though a tendency to remarry more rapidly meant the bridal pregnancy was often not obvious (Brun, 2006, pp. 44–47). The fate of these children (some would be younger half-siblings) is worth pursuing. In this special issue, we

continue to explore the question of illegitimate children in a stepfamily context through both an overview from a historical demography perspective in Matos and Paiva's article on the Azores and a close-up view of some archival-based case studies in northwest Portugal in Mafalda Lopes' contribution.

Portugal and its archipelago in the Atlantic had high rates of never-married singles, late age at marriage, and high rates of migration to the Empire with increasingly imbalanced sex ratios. Within Europe, Portugal is known for its more egalitarian inheritance practices for daughters, with property rights and active legal capacity for women no matter their marital status. Once over 25, whether single, married or widowed, a woman could engage in any legal transactions in her own right, a feature of a seafaring and seasonally absent male population and robust property rights for women (Abreu-Ferreira, 2018, pp. 294, 309). In these territories, parish registers noted illegitimate births to single mothers and to widows. Under Portuguese law, among commoners illegitimacy was not a barrier to inheritance, as we learn from Mafalda Lopes in this special issue, while an illegitimate child of noble status could inherit up to a certain portion by testament only. Some illegitimate children of lone widows seem to have been raised with their older half-siblings. For the Azores, the parish records and family reconstitution presented Matos and Paiva with the opportunity to follow more than 900 illegitimate children born in the parish of Ribeira Seca in the 1700s to early 1800s to see if any of the unwed mothers married a man who was not listed as the father in the baptismal record and who may have helped to raise a stepchild. While the numbers of illegitimate children who became stepchildren were low within a context of high rates of unmarried women and few men, this glimpse of one parish on one of the nine islands raises intriguing questions about the nature of these relationships outside of marriage: consensual? fleeting? ongoing and never formally recognized by marriage? Moreover, Matos and Paiva found that a 'significant portion of the stepfamilies with a mother-stepfather union were formed by single mothers entering into a first marriage', about 40%. Matos and Paiva tracked births to show that over their lifetimes, single mothers and widows might have a combination of children both inside and outside of marriage thus creating families of half-siblings with the stepfathers who became their husbands, when the relationships became official through ceremony. On mainland Portugal, the illegitimacy rate could be as high as 10–15% of births and in Porto in the 1700s about 6–7% (Osswald, 1990; Sà, 2007, p. 24). Mafalda Lopes' article on northwest Portugal in this issue, gives us an insight into the situations of some of these illegitimate children and mothers. In one instance a twice-widowed mother with legitimate children, embarked on a relationship with a cloth merchant in the late 1600s during her second widowhood. They had four children out of wedlock over a period of twelve years. They did eventually marry.

7. The effects of being a stepchild

To understand stepfamily dynamics in the past, the historical demographers in this issue and in recent studies have analysed how certain factors such as the composition of the stepfamily – whether it was a father-stepfather couple or a mother-stepfather union; sex of the stepchild; the presence of (step)siblings; the birth of half-siblings in the

remarriage – influenced the stepchild’s well-being from survival to migration and occupational or social status (Matos & Paiva, 2022; Óri, *in press*; Tóth, *in press*; Velková & Tureček, 2021).

In this issue, Velková & Tureček’s study of more than 6000 children to age 5 in eighteenth to nineteenth century Western Bohemia, emphasize the positive outcomes for the half-orphaned children after the age of 3 and living in a reconfigured household with ‘economic security’ because a parent and stepparent couple could fulfil the divisions of labour. Once an infant survived to toddlerhood, stepmothers and stepfathers alike could replace biological parents for children. There was no major difference in survival chances resulting from the presence of a biological father as compared to a stepfather. In other words, it was not the biological or ‘blood’ nature of the bond that mattered, but rather the fulfilment of the role of parent as caregiver and provider.

In their 1990s study of the survival of orphans following the outcomes of more than 21,000 children to age 15, Andersson et al. emphasized the ‘impact of day-to-day care for the survival of the orphans, represented by having a step-parent’ (Andersson et al., 1996, p. 985). In a sawmill parish in nineteenth-century Sweden, and despite the long-term effects of maternal loss on a child’s survival, a stepmother provided a boost to a child’s well-being. Cumulative mortality to 15 years of age decreased from 60 to 15% with a stepmother (Andersson, 1996, p. 983). Among the 29% of motherless 1-4-year-old orphans who gained a stepmother, their mortality declined by 50%.

What happened to the stepchild’s well-being beyond survival? A stepchild’s outcomes could also be measured in the context of life choices, for example, on the Azores islands the high rates of migration to the Portuguese Empire shaped adulthood for all residents. In this special issue, Matos and Paiva explain that on the island of São Jorge at the end of the 1700s, there were 78 men for every 100 women of an age to marry, yet by 1900 that ratio had been cut in half to only 39 men per 100 eligible women. In a table showing the life trajectory of full orphans, half-orphans and children who reached adulthood in the generations between 1750 and 1810, the effects of parental deprivation are clear. At the two ends of the spectrum, the small number of children of single mothers who were orphaned had the highest rates of migration at 79% and the lowest rates of marriage, while over 1000 children who reached age 25 with both parents had the lowest rates of migration, 30%, and the highest rates of marriage in the parish, 51%. If we now turn to stepfamilies, in Matos and Paiva’s study, we see the financially stabilizing effects of stepfathers in helping the mother to recover a household economy and give their (step)daughters a boost in opportunity to marry in the natal community. Orphaned girls with a remarried mother and a stepfather were the least likely to migrate and the most likely to settle in the parish at first marriage. (Step)daughters of remarried mother-stepfather couples also had the lowest rates of permanent celibacy at 4%. The benefits of the reconstructed family of a parent and stepparent also show in the (step)daughters of father-stepmother couples, whereas the daughters of lone widows or widowers remained single at a rate of 18%. By examining the particular outcomes of children who had lost a parent, Matos and Paiva found that orphaned boys who had lost their mother and gained a stepmother were the most likely to migrate and the least likely to settle and marry in the parish. We see these patterns in more detail in Mafalda Lopes’ contribution on stepfamilies in Porto, a town poised on the Atlantic coast of northwest Portugal, where stepchildren, especially stepsons, relocated to Brazil and some families had further slave

trade ties to Africa as part of the legacy of the Portuguese empire. It can be helpful to balance the demographic overview with the life narratives provided by the everyday practices in testaments and contracts while court cases show how these stepfamily configurations sometimes created conflict.

Among German-speaking and Catholic small-town populations in Hungary, Péter Őri notes how a mother's death and a father's remarriage had a significant impact on the timing of a (step)daughter's marriage. A stepmother's presence seems to have freed a daughter to marry earlier than her counterpart whose lone widowed father might need support with housework and childcare. By contrast, the father's death or the mother's remarriage to a stepfather did not significantly affect the first marriage of daughters (Őri, *in press*). Nearby, among German-speaking Lutherans in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in urban Hungary (Pressburg in modern-day Slovakia), Árpád Tóth traced stepchildren into adulthood to their first marriages and found that stepchildren's opportunities for social and economic success – such as a career for boys and marriages for girls – compared uniformly to their younger half-siblings, who were reared by two living parents (Tóth, *in press*).

Péter Őri does find some negative consequences within stepfamilies in his analysis of child mortality in Catholic and German-speaking peasants and artisans in Hungary in the 1700s and 1800s, particularly for stepsons in the families where stepmothers brought their own children to a household. However, in this situation, Őri rejects the 'Cinderella effect' theory borrowed from psychologists dabbling in evolutionary biology; the theory that a stepchild would suffer neglect or elevated mistreatment because a genetic parent would prioritize 'investment' in their own biological offspring (Daly & Wilson, 1998, 2005). The 'Cinderella effect' was tested by historical demographers on populations in colonial Quebec and Krummhörn, Germany alongside a number of other social science models on the debatable premise that a 'theoretical framework can be transposed and applied to different populations' (Willführ & Gagnon, 2013, p. 193, 2012, p. 150). The realities of premodern, agrarian and industrializing populations require understanding the historical context when the necessity of a stepparent's extra set of helping hands contributed labour in households that relied on every able-bodied person, including children.

Instead, Őri suggests a new interpretation about the burden of the stepmother, particularly noticeable in the widow-widower remarriages where she began to care for the combined children of two marriages – her own children in addition to her new stepchildren. The workload of child care and household management accelerated competition for resources between biological and stepchildren, a finding echoed in the data from Krummhörn, Germany that 'girls' mortality increased by about 20% if the stepfather brought children from a former marriage into the new marriage', or how stepsons' survival was also more at risk 'especially if stepsiblings joined the family with the stepmother'. Neither of these negative effects were found in the colony of Quebec in rural Catholic families with many siblings and access to land in a harsh but bountiful climate (Willführ & Gagnon, 2013, pp. 203, 206).

By examining birth order, Őri found that first-born children (thus in the case of stepfamilies, children from the first marriage bed) experienced the most favourable outcomes. More children in the stepfamily lowered the survival of younger siblings – the half-siblings of the older stepchild from a surviving parent's remarriage. These younger half-siblings had the benefit of two living parents, yet to be born into a nineteenth-century

stepfamily with numerous children may have worsened their chances for survival. These findings are echoed in nineteenth-century to the early twentieth-century rural Utah where ‘stepchildren enjoyed higher survival probabilities than their half-siblings within the same family’ (Schacht et al., 2020, p. 5). These effects might be further compared to the late nineteenth-century regions of the Netherlands and the ‘importance’ of assessing the ‘number and gender of siblings’ on infant and child mortality in nuclear, intermediate or stem families. The Dutch study emphasized a point that is fundamental to stepfamilies in transition – ‘changing household composition over time’ (Riswick, 2018, p. 645). This emphasis on the context, such as number of siblings, gender and family type, has resonance for the stepfamily, especially in those remarriage scenarios (less frequent in Western Europe than in East Central Europe) where a Cinderella-type widow-widower stepfamily occurred. The widower father and widow mother each bringing their children to a remarriage meant, as Óri has noted, a sudden jump in workload for the mother-stepmother.

In the nineteenth century, Estonian brides tended to join a husband’s household in a virilocal marriage pattern, meaning that a stepmother may have had additional, informal support within a typical multiple-family household, which might account for the ‘significantly improved’ prospects of survival for children – especially daughters – of fathers who remarried stepmothers. Yet a mother’s remarriage to a stepfather had a more ‘neutral effect’ in a study of children up to age 9 in rural Estonia in the 1800s (Jaadla & Lust, 2021, pp. 12–14). The half-orphaned Estonian children raised by widowed mothers had a similar survival rate to those raised with the help of stepfathers, and perhaps these findings reflect why so few mothers chose to remarry, if it involved relocation and leaving an existing informal network of support within their own multiple-family household. It is worthwhile to pause and consider the presence or absence of support in household types in Peter Óri’s interpretation in this issue about the burden a stepmother faced after remarriage.

8. Step-parent caregiving and the household economy

Let’s descend from the quantitative bird’s eye view of historical demography to look in detail at the motives of the widowed parent seeking a new spouse who would become a substitute parent. Margareth Lanzinger’s study of eighteenth-century dispensation requests to marry between close kin in the Catholic diocese in Salzburg, and to state authorities in Vienna and Lower Austria, notes the petitioners’ emphasis on the ‘need to re-introduce the labour and the care contributions of a reliable partner after the death of a spouse’ (Lanzinger, 2018, p. 168). The dispensation petitions reveal the economic support and labour sought by widow mothers as desirable qualities in a prospective husband and stepfather. Widower fathers in their dispensation requests valued and needed the household and economic skills of a female partner and often underlined how the woman was known to be caring and as a blood relative or in-law already had ‘love’ for his young children (Lanzinger, 2018, pp. 176–9). We hear echoes of these motives in Clementsson’s contribution to this journal issue on the marital dispensation requests sent to the crown in Lutheran Sweden in the 1700s where applicants pointed to ‘both practical and emotional circumstances’. In seeking to marry a relative, widowers emphasized caregiving and the bond of a female relative with children, while widows or the

female partner prized the economic security and role of provider of the hoped-for husband. In their article in this special issue, Matos and Paiva complement their demographic data on remarriage in the 1700s and 1800s in the Catholic Azores with a more in-depth look at the requests for dispensation to remarry quickly, before a six-month period of mourning had come to an end. The widower fathers and some widow mothers on the Azores islands hastened to fill the gendered labour gap left by the death of a spouse. As one Portuguese widower pleaded in 1872, he had ‘no one to take care of’ his young sons ‘or any of the domestic affairs of his house’. He remarried two days later.

9. What happened to the stepchildren with the experience of a stepparent?

Mafalda Lopes’ article emphasizes the ‘invisibility’ of stepfamilies in the coastal economy of northwest Portugal in the pull of a European empire. If the children had reached an age at which they might be expected to apprentice, work as day labourers or migrate in search of a living, the remarriage of a parent could serve as a trigger of mobility to the empire or to marriage. In an era of high mobility among older children, these stepfamily relationships leave traces in property ties and inheritance at moments of death, rather than in the sharing of day-to-day life. Matos and Paiva, too, underline the fleeting nature of some stepfamily relationships on the Azores islands as part of the life cycle. Moving from the overview of parish registers to study in detail the available evidence in nineteenth century household lists, Matos and Paiva found that the minor children tended to join the reconfigured household with the stepparent, while adolescents and those on the brink of adulthood tended to exit the stepfamily into the next life phase – the age of the child was a determining factor.

Across Europe, with few exceptions such as Venice, Paris, Antwerp, or Romania, when widowed mothers or grandmothers remarried, they lost guardianship of their children (Bellavitis, 2018; Clementi, 2020; Perrier, 1998, 2018; Van Aert, 2007; Vintilă, in press; Warner, 2018c, pp. 244, 248–50). In this journal issue, in ‘Stepmothers and Stepdaughters in Early Modern Florence’, Megan Moran highlights the consequences of the choice to remarry by the so-called ‘cruel mother’ in Florence in the late 1500s and how it shaped the fate of children of a former marriage. When the widowed aristocrat Cassandra Rucellai remarried and moved into her new husband’s household, she lost her rights of use of her late husband’s home and her guardianship, so she left behind her son and two daughters who belonged with their father’s family, their paternal uncles. In her new husband’s household, Rucellai cared for her 15-year-old stepdaughter, also named Cassandra, and her younger sister Cecia. These stepdaughters were also nurtured by their maternal aunt, who had been widowed and lived part-time in her brother’s household, and, on occasion, lived with their paternal aunts. Eventually the remarried widow and widower had five more children, half-siblings to their father’s and mother’s first marriage bed children. While the stepmother Cassandra Rucellai’s first-marriage son was raised in an uncle’s home, her first-marriage daughters were sent to a convent, and they never lived with her second husband (who was technically their stepfather), nor his two daughters who were their stepsiblings. Moran suggests that there were two tiers of stepsiblings, because the stepsiblings left behind were ‘invisible’ (Moran, 2022). The consequences of remarriage for stepchildren, where children ‘belonged’ to the paternal line, were deeply gendered, a situation also practised among the German-speaking nobles of

the Tyrol region in northern Italy (Clementi, 2020). Children of the mother lost her immediate care when she became a stepmother while the children of the father stayed in place and welcomed their stepmother to their household. A remarriage involved a shuffling of the deck. Sets of children from each marriage bed, even within elite stepfamilies, might meet varied fates – left behind, raised together, placed in a convent. We see this phenomenon, too, in a deeply Catholic nation such as Portugal, into the 1700s and 1800s where Lopes' article shows that the convent or institutions known as *recolhimentos* might also serve as a living arrangement for the surplus of daughters – a cheaper alternative than marriage and potentially more honourable than life as a spinster or becoming a single mother.

Meanwhile, in sixteenth-century Florence, Cassandra Rucellai, the mother, remained in contact with her first set of children and the two sets of maternal half-siblings exchanged letters as they grew. It does not appear that the stepdaughter Cassandra had a personal relationship with her stepsiblings via her stepmother as they would never have lived together. Yet, after the younger Cassandra's father died in 1589, and even when she became a bride and a new mother, she wrote letters to her stepmother giving details of her growing brood and their health.

9.1. When the stepchild becomes full orphan

In most jurisdictions, after the death of their spouse a stepparent had neither a legal obligation nor a legal right to continued custody of their stepchild. The most visible examples of this ongoing stepparent caregiving appear in the archives as bequests, for example, from stepparents to stepchildren in England (Capp, 2018, p. 94). Lopes shows in this issue, too, the lifelong steprelationships in Portugal in legacies that transmitted a business to a stepchild or in the transactions revealed by important life events such as death or marriage. A widowed stepfather in Porto in the early 1700s ensured the stepdaughter he had raised since age 5, and who had been fully orphaned at age 19 but was still under his 'administration', had an ample dowry for her marriage, which he acknowledged was due to her through her deceased parents.

Despite the fleeting nature of some stepfamily relationships in the Portuguese territories, in the eighteenth to nineteenth century, Mafalda Lopes has found an irony that although by law a remarried mother could not keep the guardianship of her children, a stepmother in Portugal could apply to keep her stepchild after her husband, the child's father, died. In the Minho region of Portugal, a stepmother could successfully petition to become guardian because she 'treated' the stepchildren 'as if they were her own'.

10. The stepparent within the household structure, property and inheritance regimes

If we evaluate the effects of a stepmother or a stepfather on the well-being of a child in a blended family, it is important to place the historical demography research within the context of the type of household. Did the stepparent relocate to the household of the new spouse? The location of the recomposed family was shaped by property regimes and inheritance. If uxorilocal, the groom joined the bride's household, if virilocal the region followed the custom of the bride entering the groom's household, and if neolocal, the

couple established a new and independent household. For stepfamilies, these customs affected whether the surviving parent or stepparent was in their local community with their natal family, (former) in-laws, neighbours and networks or perhaps isolated from support. For children and stepchildren, the position of the stepparent in the household mattered a lot for the family outcomes, parenting of the child and in some cases (as we are learning from historical demography) survival of the children. In this special issue, we encounter several variations of how household types, property and inheritance regimes shaped the fate of stepchildren and the relations between biological parents, stepparents and their respective networks of kin and neighbours.

Legal instruments could be used to determine stepfamily inheritance and living arrangements, for example, *Einkindschaft* (German) or *eenkindschap* (Dutch) and *Morgengabekinder* (German, a kind of child dowry) were used in certain regions to ensure that each child – whether from the 1st marriage bed (the stepchild) or children born of a remarriage – were treated equally or at least not disadvantaged in terms of inheritance (Lanzinger, 2018, pp. 179–181; Roes, 2018; Warner, 2018c, pp. 243, 247). Jürgen Schlumbohm’s article in this issue, leads us to rural Westphalia where a remarrying parent could establish the stepparent as an *Interimswirt*, literally a ‘tenant-in-between’ with a fixed-term, until the youngest child – either male or female – was ready to take over the farm. This regional custom had several advantages. The youngest child as heir meant a few extra years for a stepparent to work the farm before stepping aside. The widowed parent, the heir and other children could enjoy the stability of social and kin networks while the stepparent’s labour secured the continuity of farming until the heir reached 25 to 30. Each child in the blended family seems to have received some kind of inheritance, such as a dowry or marriage portion. In most of the property transmissions tracked by Schlumbohm in the 1600s to 1800, the land went to the designated heir even if the surviving biological parent died and the stepparent moved on to their next spouse and more children. In other regions such as Lower Austria, a property could pass from spouse to spouse in a chain of remarriages to the detriment of the heirs and the next generation (Langer-Ostrawsky, 2010). Schlumbohm demonstrates how these legal instruments led to the safe transmission of property from one generation to the next with predictable outcomes, keeping families out of the courts and circumventing tensions between stepparent and stepchild.

Schlumbohm observes that at the transition of the heir to head of household, the stepparent and surviving parent might move to a separate retirement cottage (*Leibzucht*) in the same plot. Biological parents usually continued to share the house with the adult heir and spouse. This difference in the practices of sharing household space, Schlumbohm convincingly argues, did not derive from tense relations within the stepfamily, but was a practical decision of the stepparent, often younger than biological parents, to continue farming a small plot and because of younger children from a remarriage.

Across Europe, the consolidation of property and financial interests such as paying off debts or merging lines of inheritance emerges in requests for dispensation to remarry close kin (Lanzinger, 2018, p. 178). Clementsson’s study of eighteenth-century Lutheran Sweden, in this issue, suggests a combination of economic benefits and emotional bonds was at play in these requests for dispensation to remarry a relative. Working from a family reconstitution database in Protestant Zeeland in the 1800s to 1900s, Van Dijk and Kok, too, have found that among ‘farming widows, but not widowers’, a tendency to ‘remarry

kin suggests a strategy to keep the property within the family and to avoid dealing with opposition from the children' (Van Dijk & Kok, 2022, pp. 346–7), but the researchers suggest that emotional attachments in remarriages between close kin might also have been a factor. To understand the 'logic of farm succession', a further analysis of egodocuments, wills and marriage contracts would complement the current findings.

We have already seen Megan Moran's vivid portrayal of the sixteenth-century Florentine scenario, which required a remarried mother to extract her dowry and leave her children with their paternal family to join the stepchild(ren) in her new husband's household.³ Moran also delves into a case study of a widowed stepmother Maddalena and stepdaughter Maria who were legally tied to each other through the usufruct rights of the widow to live in her husband's house and the inheritance rights of the heiress respectively. Their bond was forged over decades since Maria was eight years old when Maddalena had remarried her father. The careful reading of their account books, correspondence and inventory renders visible their negotiations concerning the stepmother's ongoing widow's use of her stepdaughter's inheritance of villa, clothes, and furniture. The careful itemization of property and its use, of housing, and of living arrangements brings to light the stepmother-stepdaughter connections and gestures of care for each other. Apart from challenging negative stereotypes, their bond long outlasted the remarriage that created it. Maddalena Ricasoli spun whole webs of overlapping female networks over decades. She cared for her stepdaughter, and when her brother died, her orphaned niece Cassandra, too (discussed above, who had become a stepdaughter when Maddalena's brother remarried). The stepmother-aunt brought these two stepdaughters together as friends and family in a female network that in turn cared for Maddalena in her final years as an aging widow.

The severe drawbacks of moving into the household of a new husband's family come to the foreground in Dries Lyna's 'Restrained freedom? Widows, blended families and inheritance in eighteenth-century urban Sri Lanka' in this issue. The article examines a stepfamily conflict in the colonial European, multi-ethnic and urban context of Dutch Sri Lanka in the 1700s. The protagonist of this microhistory, a converted-Christian Sinhalese woman, Donna Cecilia, became a widow with a daughter by her much older Chettie husband on his third marriage. When he died, he left behind four adult sons from his two previous marriages. To keep her widow's rights of lifetime use, the mother had to cohabit in her deceased husband's household with some of her adult stepchildren who stood to gain if she left. Yet in urban Colombo, among a Chettie majority and in-laws, she was socially isolated as a Sinhalese and lacked a local support network. As a younger woman from a village, she had signed a prenuptial agreement, on a traditional palm leaf or *ola*, which drastically reduced her customary Dutch widow's rights to half the conjugal property if her husband died intestate. No witnesses of her ethnic group nor neighbours would support her claim(Lyna, 2022).

The bewildering array of legal pluralities in European overseas colonies deserves further attention for their effects on the ethnic groups that came under a colonial jurisdiction. The Dutch East India Company (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, VOC) and the (Protestant) Dutch Reformed Church took control of Sri Lanka from the Catholic Portuguese in the mid 1600s (Rupesinghe, 2018, p. 221). While Dutch officials might have preferred European brides to settle in the colonies such as Sri Lanka or Indonesia, few arrived on those shores and Dutch men entered mixed marriages and remarriages with

indigenous women (Gall, 1995, p. 108). Institutions such as the Dutch Orphan Chamber were imported to VOC regions but how were their protections applied for indigenous children or the mixed children of European settlers? In theory, the orphan chamber should have protected the rights of a mixed Chettie-Sinhalese daughter of a third marriage bed to receive her portion with her older half-siblings from two former marriages.

Among the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, cohabitation and concubinage were common and without Christian European concepts of legitimacy or illegitimacy. Yet to participate in the colonial judicial system meant a level of conformity with Protestant and European ideals, although Dutch institutions, too, grappled with recognizing some forms of the ‘Sinhalese way of marriage’ (Bulten et al., 2018; Rupesinghe, 2018, pp. 223–231). Dries Lyna’s study within this colonial context highlights the conflict over values, virilocal and uxorilocal marriage practices and pre-marital courtship customs in Dutch Sri Lanka in the 1700s, which reached a crisis point when the widow Donna Cecilia became pregnant. There was no cult of the chaste widow in Sri Lanka comparable to the one in Europe or China. The widow returned to her own village for a while and in the customs of her Sinhalese ethnicity, perhaps she sought to reclaim some property within her natal family at widowhood.

The dysfunction that led to the courtroom in Sri Lanka reminds us of the realities of stepparent-stepchild conflict under distinct legal and inheritance regimes around the globe. Mafalda Lopes analyses the changing laws in eighteenth-century Portugal to highlight the fears that first marriage children might have of stepfathers who dissipated their inheritances, even within a legal system with many more property rights for daughters, wives and widows. These anxieties about potential strife in the care of stepchildren also come across in sixteenth and seventeenth-century parishes in England under a much more restrictive inheritance and marital property regime for women (Capp, 2018, p. 92, 105; Stretton, 2018).

11. Future research: what questions build on this special issue?

At this juncture, after two edited collections on stepfamilies covering Western, Central and Eastern Europe, several conferences and this special issue venturing beyond Europe into the seas and shores of empires, we see several avenues for future research.

First of all, we need to bring research on areas around the globe and transnational connections to fruition and attempt to de-center the discussion on stepfamilies in the past, which has so far revolved around Europe and colonial America (Wilson, 2014). Two surveys of the world history of the family, have touched on remarriage patterns, but not the stepfamilies created by these new unions (Lundh & Kurosu, 2014; Maynes & Waltner, 2012). At the *Stepfamilies in the Early Modern World* conference, we made the first steps in comparing stepfamily types around the globe from Asia to transnational, mixed race families. Only six years ago, we still did not have a historiographical overview of the stepfamily in Europe (Warner, 2016). With this special issue as part of that effort, we have now achieved a foundation.

Let us make a brief example of the possibilities for thinking about stepfamily constellations from an Asian perspective. At the *Stepfamilies in the Early Modern World* conference in 2019, Matthew Sommer surveyed a ‘spectrum’ of practices in Qing China, from 1700 to the 1850s such as concubinage, polyandry, and conditional and

permanent wife sale that resulted in complex families among the elite and the rural poor, with only the middling classes engaging in the marital monogamy familiar in Western, Christian parts of the world (Sommer, 2015, p. 85) Among the elite, polygyny ensured procreation and especially a male heir, where a first wife combined with a female concubine or multiple concubines to perform both 'biological' and 'social motherhood' (Waltner, 1981, p. 133) Lower down the social scale where probable female infanticide led to a shortage of available adult women, widowers faced 'fierce competition for brides' because of the imbalanced sex ratio (Lundh & Kurosu, 2014, p. 178) and despite the cult of widow chastity, families and in-laws sometimes coerced widows into remarriage, a circumstance so common that during the Qing era punishments were introduced for forced remarriage (Sommer, 2000, pp. 167–173; Waltner, 1981, pp. 137–40). In uxorilocal remarriage, a widow remained in her deceased husband's household with the co-operation of her in-laws (Sommer, 2015, p. 255; Waltner, 1981, p. 145), and introduced a second husband and stepfather, with children of the first marriage bed, especially the son, retaining the family name (Wolf & Huang, 1980; Waltner, 1981, p. 143, 1990). Among the working poor, families practiced polyandry despite the Confucian code of female chastity and Qing Law (Sommer, 2015, pp. 55–85, 233–4). A wife remained with her first husband, while another male entered the household to share physical labour and resources. Paternity became ambiguous. At the other end of the complex families spectrum, again a sign of poverty, a wife might be transferred to others, in a conditional or permanent wife sale. If conditional, the wife performed surrogate motherhood for a period of years, a form of 'sexual labour' as if a 'rental concubine' as Sommer suggested at the 2019 conference. In permanent wife sales, a destitute husband sold his wife and in about 60% of cases in Sommer's sample this mother took any children with her as part of the sale, creating a stepfamily with the man who bid for her. In other instances, the wife-sale mother lost her connections to her children, splintering the family even further or she negotiated her situation to prevent the sale of her child (Sommer, 2015, pp. 212, 217, 220, 233). These mixed household arrangements of polygyny or polyandry, of sale and custody transactions, certainly merit further attention from the perspective of stepfamily relations.

Polyandry was also practised in Dutch Sri Lanka, and the practice of two men sharing a wife survived the Christianising efforts of the colonial authorities. The most typical practice of two brothers sharing a wife served to avoid the fragmentation of land in these Asian societies (Kok et al., 2021). The sheer diversity of this spectrum of practices in eighteenth and nineteenth-century China and other regions of Asia reminds us of the many forms of households, illegitimacy and the circulation of (step)children in European contexts of domestic service, and apprenticeship, indenture, placement in a convent despite a continued historiographical emphasis on the nuclear family, horizontal kinship and widowhood in the past.

The concept of 'inclusive families' assessed the lives of illegitimate half-siblings and what happened to fully orphaned stepchildren (Bellavitis, 2018; Coolidge, 2018), but did not extend (except anecdotally) to foster or adopted children, its own flourishing subfield of historiography (Gager, 1996; Rossi & Garbellotti, 2015). However, if we are to move to a more global perspective on stepfamilies, we need to acknowledge the exit and entry of children to families via adoption in Asian cultures. The practice of in-laws adopting, at

a young age, the future spouse of a biological son or daughter to be raised and trained within their family, for example, seems to be a liminal practice, somewhere between the stepfamily and joint-family household (Fauve-Chamoux, 1998; Wolf & Huang, 1980).

We also need to consider the context of divorce as the precursor of the stepfamily. Some jurisdictions such as Romania or northeast Japan allowed divorce and in religious faiths where divorce was a common practice such as among the Orthodox Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities, these regions may show patterns that deviate from stepfamilies arising from widowhood and remarriage. Divorce suits and their surviving records, where the custody of children was negotiated, offer an excellent route to better understand the interpersonal relations and familial practices in stepfamilies where children could have two divorced and remarried parents as well as two stepparents (Adelman, 2017; Doxiadis, 2020; Kurosu, 2011; Vintilă, in press). Another stream of research would focus on the mixed remarriages or stepfamilies across the globe in an age of European imperialism or, for example, among the Chinese or Jewish diaspora across the globe (Maynes & Waltner, 2012, pp. 70–72).

No matter where in the world, the questions remain the same, what happened to the children when parents entered a new sexual or economic relationship? In a family setting, under what circumstances did an adult care for children who was not their own? There is a rich mix of cultures and stepfamilies still to explore in centuries past around the globe.

Notes

1. Warner (2018b, pp. 9–11). There is a typo in Warner (2018, p. 17), n. 63, corrected here: 'To give one example, the 1674 listing identifies William as the child of John and Anne Maples. The 1688 listing marks William as one of the children of John Maples and his "2nd wife" Mary. Mary is clearly [William]'s stepmother, but [the village rector] Sampson did not note this and Laslett therefore did not count it'.
2. A tendency that continues today in census data collection, UNECE-CES (2011, pp. 5, 12).
3. On the *Magistrato dei Pupilli* [Court of Orphans] and the possibilities for widows and remarried mothers in Tuscany between the mid 1500s to mid 1700s, see Calvi (1998).

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