

SUGGESTIONS AND DEBATES

“Family Strategies”: A Contested Concept

In the past three decades a fair number of historical demographers and family and labour historians have used the concept of “family strategies” as a means to understand better the social behaviour of individuals and families.¹ At the 26th Annual Meeting of the American Social Science History Association (Chicago, November 2001), a session of the Family/Demography Network was devoted to a critical discussion of this concept of family strategies. Given the importance of the issue, we have invited three of the panelists to rework the papers they gave on that occasion. Two of them, Katherine Lynch and Pier Paolo Viazzo, have joined forces here to discuss the matter from a predominantly theoretical perspective with particular attention to the use of the concept in social anthropology, and in medieval and early modern history. Based on recent Dutch empirical studies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Theo Engelen questions the use of the concept of family strategies, given the availability of the broader concept of agency. The riposte to these critiques comes from Jan Kok, who is actively engaged in the application of the concept of family strategies in the research programme of the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

The Editorial Committee

1. This tendency has also been visible in contributions to this journal. See, for example, Laurence Fontaine and Jürgen Schlumbohm (eds), *Household Strategies for Survival 1600–2000: Fission, Faction and Cooperation*, *International Review of Social History*, 46 (2000), Supplement 8.