Squeezing Birth into Working Life. Household Panel Data Analyses Comparing Germany, Great-Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden

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'The production and distribution of any commodity entails many stages and much co­
ordination. Perhaps your desk is illuminated by a lamp. Your lamp is designed to fit on
your desk by a special attachment; has a plug which fits into an electrical socket on the
wall of your office; has a frame coloured to match your rug; was sold to you in a lamp
store which enabled you to choose a lamp to match your tastes and which you were able
to reach by car. .... You are able to light your desk because numerous businesses found
it in their self interest to produce commodities that are mutually compatible and
interconnective.' (Evans and Grossman, 1983).

Evans and Grossman show that price and self interest are sufficient to allocate
resources. However, it is well known that such general equilibrium is not the result if
the Walrasian auctioneer is lacking. Writing a thesis is best performed within an
organisation, with the help of people who not always have all the information to set a
price.

Although speediness and clarity had been some of my specialities I wasted my
investments in transaction cost economics at Tilburg University and turned to a totally
different research field at the University of Amsterdam. Siv Gustafsson attracted me to
the research on economics of fertility and guided my enthusiasm in a world full of
interesting data, subjects and information. She shares interest, knowledge and insights.
And I hope to continue feeling her warm and caring friendship and intelligence.

In the first stage of this research it was important to participate in the group of
researchers working on Population and Gender economics at the Economics Department
in Amsterdam to get to know the field. Participation in the European women’s labour
force network in 1995 at once revealed the structure of what the thesis should capture. I
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Towards completion of this thesis I needed some discussants and I benefited from
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Almekinders reading Chapters 2 and 3 and Kea Tijdens reading Chapter 7. Jan Dirk
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empirical side and Jacqueline Martina specialised in turning the language to a more
readable manuscript. René invested a lot of time in making one beautiful print out of all
the different documents.

It took a lot of effort to create the ‘fertility and work files’. I hope that this work will
proceed along two lines. First the files created this far should be more explored by
extended and improved analyses. Secondly, as time goes by the files need to be updated
by matching the more recent waves. I am happy that Eiko Kenjoh is enthusiastic to give
this continuation a start.

It was not that I needed the direct support of friends and family to write this thesis as
such, but the love, time and money my parents invested in my two sisters and myself
gave me the self-confidence and the pleasure to explore life, including working life and this research. My friends make my life more enjoyable.

One special friend needs to be in the final part of this page. Sometimes after spending many hours solely with the Swedish HUS data I felt like drowning in Virginia Woolf's Waves. I needed then the sensibility of Keri Hulme's and Ben Okri's writings, and Marcel's voice reading it to me in the evening was very pleasant.

Cécile Wetzels, Amsterdam, 1998