This dissertation contributes to answering the following question: Why were Dutch female labour force participation rates lower than in surrounding countries during the period 1830-1914? I consider the following explanatory factors: social norms, the opportunity costs of women's labour, and structural change. My conclusions about the relative weight of each factor are as follows. First, social norms regarding women's role within the household following from the growing affluence for the trajectory of women's labour. I show that married women withdrew from the registered labour force and instead, performed work that could be combined with domestic chores and that remained invisible in most statistical sources. However, these social norms were likewise strong in other western European countries, such as Britain, where FLFP was higher. Furthermore, Dutch FLFP was already low around 1850 when the transition to the male breadwinner society in western Europe started. Thus, it is no conclusive explanation for the aberrant Dutch trend in FLFP.

Second, men's real industrial wages started to rise after 1880 and became increasingly able to take care of a family of four. However, this was not true for men's agricultural wages. Women's wages in both sectors hardly increased at all during the nineteenth century in both sectors. I therefore conclude that industrial households were already able to realize a breadwinner-homemaker type of labour division from the 1880s, whereas agricultural households still relied for an important part on other sources of income besides the husband's wage labour by 1910. Thus, men's wages profoundly influenced household labour division. However, in Britain, men's real wages were even higher, but so were FLFP rates in the censuses. Thus, if the extent of men's real wages was indeed the most important explanatory factor, we would have expected even lower participation rates in Britain than in the Netherlands.

Third, the impact of economic structure and the changing demand for labour on FLFP has extended and curtailed throughout time. This dissertation studies a period of contraction: the nineteenth-century Netherlands. This country makes an important case study to explore the factors influencing the trajectory of women's work. First, FLFP rates as recorded in occupational censuses were low compared with surrounding countries. Second, Dutch industrialization took off relatively late and until well into the twentieth century a significant part of the labour force worked in agriculture, in contrast to neighbouring countries such as Britain and Belgium.

This dissertation concludes that the Netherlands is a case study for understanding why Dutch women's participation rates were lower than in surrounding countries during the period 1830-1914. I consider the following explanatory factors: social norms, the opportunity costs of women's labour, and structural change. My conclusions about the relative weight of each factor are as follows. First, social norms regarding women's role within the household following from the growing affluence for the trajectory of women's labour. I show that married women withdrew from the registered labour force and instead, performed work that could be combined with domestic chores and that remained invisible in most statistical sources. However, these social norms were likewise strong in other western European countries, such as Britain, where FLFP was higher. Furthermore, Dutch FLFP was already low around 1850 when the transition to the male breadwinner society in western Europe started. Thus, it is no conclusive explanation for the aberrant Dutch trend in FLFP.

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Major changes in the labour market exacerbated by the recession have brought about a phenomenal rise in unemployment, precarious employment, part-time work and poverty. The workplace is being transformed and flexible work arrangements have been replacing traditional nine-to-five jobs.