

BOOK REVIEWS

Special topic coordinator: INED's "Fertility, Family and Sexuality" research unit

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KREYENFELD Michaela, KONIETZKA Dirk (eds.), 2017, *Childlessness in Europe: Contexts, Causes, and Consequences*, Dordrecht, Springer, Demographic Research Monograph, XI-370 p.

This open access book, edited by Michaela Kreyenfeld (Hertie School of Governance, Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research) and Dirk Konietzka (University of Technology, Braunschweig), provides a comprehensive overview of childlessness in Europe. Against the background of (re)increasing levels of childlessness in many European countries, the editors bring together demographers and sociologists who examine its contexts, causes and consequences.

The majority of articles in the book are country-specific analyses, covering the UK, France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands. In addition, an article on childlessness in the United States puts European countries in perspective. Unfortunately, the book does not include any studies on Southern, Central or Eastern European countries.

Its main strength is its comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach, which consists in bringing together (1) quantitative demographic analysis of the socio-economic determinants of childlessness in European countries, (2) qualitative studies on fertility ideals and life course plans, (3) a descriptive overview of assisted reproductive technologies, and (4) a discussion of the consequences of childlessness in terms of well-being, old-age income and intergenerational transfers.

The country-specific studies draw on various national data sources that provide substantial detailed information on educational patterns, employment and occupation histories, etc. In addition, most of the data sources provide information about partners, if existing. In most articles childlessness is analysed from a woman's perspective, mostly for methodological reasons, but information about the existence of a (cohabiting) partner and his/her socioeconomic background is often taken into account in the analysis. This couple perspective leads to several interesting results. When comparing the different national studies, a common point that emerges is that childless women are increasingly partnered. As suggested by several authors, continuous birth postponement due to career investments, difficulties combining work and family life, and unstable labour market conditions may incur the risk for women of ending up (involuntarily) childless; however, these women are still often with a partner.

It therefore seems that, in many cases, lack of a suitable partner is not the main reason for birth postponement and childlessness. For many women, barriers to realizing fertility intentions seem instead institutional. A clear distinction between institutional and individual determinants of childlessness is, however, quite impossible, as is distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary childlessness. This definition problem is highlighted in detail at several places in the book. Bernardi and Keim's qualitative study of working women's life course plans clearly illustrates a potential overlap between individual and institutional aspects of childlessness.

The couple approach also reveals that there is a gender bias in the degree to which partner status, education and occupation explain childlessness. For France, Köppen, Mazuy and Toulemon find that for men, the differences in childlessness by socio-economic group disappear almost entirely once partner status is controlled for, while for women, the relative differences diminish but remain considerable. In the partnered women group, childlessness rates are still higher among higher-educated women and those with higher-level occupations. It seems that low social status and unstable economic conditions hinder men more than women when it comes to finding a partner, but they hinder partnered women more than partnered men when it comes to having children. Meanwhile, policy implication remains the same for both sexes: more stable labour market conditions would make it easier for both women and men to start a family, have children.

The main weakness of the book is that only one article compares trends in childlessness across a large set of European countries. Bringing together data from 28 European countries, Tomas Sobotka demonstrates that the proportion of childlessness is U-shaped within the majority of European countries, with childlessness at its highest in the 1900 and 1970 cohorts and lowest for the 1940 cohorts. German-speaking countries have outstandingly high levels of childlessness for the younger cohorts, while CEE countries have the lowest levels, even though it is likely that childlessness will increase significantly in these countries in the very near future. Sobotka proposes the best possible measures of childlessness in Europe by combining different data sources (censuses, social science surveys, vital statistics) and discusses in detail the numerous methodological challenges involved in estimating childlessness. This methodological section is extremely useful for any researcher working on fertility in Europe.

The need to draw on several data sources country by country to obtain good estimates of childlessness might explain why comprehensive international comparisons of childlessness are scarce in the literature. The data limitation might also explain why the book does not contain any studies of socio-economic differentials in childlessness based on comparisons of more than two countries. There is a lack of comparable international data combining good demographic and socio-economic measurements. The researcher has to choose between census data, which is not available for certain countries and time periods; demographic surveys (Gender and Generations Survey, Fertility and Family Survey), which often lack detailed information on socio-economic characteristics of all household members, including the partner; and socio-economic household surveys, such as the EU-LFS or EU-SILC, which provide comparable socio-economic variables but risk inducing biased estimates of demographic behaviour.

This makes it difficult to quantitatively evaluate the correlation between institutions (policies, labour market conditions, gender and family norms, etc.) and demographic behaviour. Several articles in the book describe current family policy settings and discuss policy implications on a national level, but these discussions are not directly derived from quantitative impact analysis. By bringing

together different country-specific case studies, the book illustrates the heterogeneity of childbearing behaviour across European countries. It becomes clear that a purely individual-level approach is not sufficient for explaining patterns of childlessness since those patterns differ by socio-economic group and country, as highlighted, for example, by Neyer, Hoem and Andersson. Institutions – education, employment, social policies and norms – must be modelled as potential determinants of individuals' and couples' childbearing behaviour. However, this multi-level approach is only possible if comparable individual data is available for a large set of countries.

The difficulty of obtaining harmonized measures that cover both demographic as well as socio-economic aspects at the individual level for a wide spectrum of European countries might explain why the book does not contain a concluding policy chapter putting social and labour market policies and their impacts on fertility behaviour into a European perspective.

Given the afore-cited limitations and constraints, this book on childlessness in Europe is as comprehensive as possible. The lack of comparative policy analysis points to the need for further collection and harmonization of European data containing both socio-economic and demographic variables.

Angela GREULICH

GOTMAN Anne, 2017, *Pas d'enfant. La volonté de ne pas engendrer* [No children: the will not to procreate], Paris, Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 246 p.

Drawing on interviews she conducted with other sociologists (Pascale Donati and Charlotte Debest in France) and a considerable body of literature, Anne Gotman analyses the discourses of people who “desire not to procreate”. The presentation of the sociological context provides the backdrop for an analysis that takes into account two conflicting perspectives: political discourse, arguments and justifications of individuals without children; and the psychoanalytic approach, which holds that childlessness necessarily implies a lack or renunciation. The work is devoted primarily to analysing personal discourses, a process that reveals a broad diversity of situations, histories and attitudes toward childlessness.

Gotman recalls that after hitting historically low levels among men and women born in the 1940s in most developed countries (the childlessness figures for France were 10% of men and 12% of women), childlessness, chosen and not chosen, is now rising again, moderately in France and more sharply in Northern countries and Western Europe. Childless people are an extremely heterogeneous group. Numerous typologies have been put forward in France, ranging from hostile (in 1936 Paul Popenoe found childless people to be self-centred couples, two-income couples, and neurotic individuals) to strongly empathetic (in 1975 Jean Veevers distinguished two groups: the proactives, and people who ultimately give up on having children). Gotman adopts the second distinction between people who decide early in life that they do not want to have children and people who postpone becoming parents because the right conditions are not in place and then realize it is too late. In the current context, being deliberately childless has assumed a new dimension. Thanks to birth control, young people bent on attaining set educational and occupational outcomes are less likely to have children, and the question of whether or not to do so is asked later in life. This results in the postponement of first births and higher male and female infertility, modulated nonetheless by social policy, economic conditions and how individuals go about reconciling family and work life.

The question of childlessness concerns women first and foremost, especially in the current context. Medical contraception methods and access to abortion have enabled women to choose childlessness, while the task of reconciling occupational life and raising children still rests primarily on their shoulders. The stakes are lower for men, and it is not really up to them to decide. The normative pressures that women experience are therefore quite different from those affecting men.

Having established this general overview of the situation, Gotman proceeds to distinguish between two types of positive discourse. The first emphasizes respect for individual choices; in this case the choice of personal freedom, the decision to escape work-related discrimination, which often targets women as potential child-bearers, etc. The second type of argument is environmentalist

and cites the excessive growth of the world's population and the planet's limited resources as reasons for behaving in a way that runs counter to the prevailing pro-birth attitude in France. The accusation of selfishness or self-centredness can therefore be turned around: whereas being childless is a way of caring about the future of the planet, parents are blinded by the importance they attach to their children – and having them. Gotman does not take either of these types of arguments – which are in fact inconsistent with each other – very seriously. The first, she explains, reveals the (condemnable) liberal values behind individualist positions while the second is fuelled by “dirigiste”, “soft eugenics” impulses with no scientific basis, despite the fact that it is important that the population stop growing. These discourses, she explains, are first and foremost rationalizations of resistance and of a demand for freedom to behave in a way that is still perceived in France as outside the norm, particularly for women.

According to the psychoanalytic perspective, meanwhile, which can readily prove normative and conservative, not having children is a symptom, “the result of intra-psychic conflict” that prevents people from assuming the risks associated with being a parent. According to this argument, people who feel no personal desire to procreate (or say they have been liberated from such desire) are people with long-standing complaints against their mothers (or fathers) who therefore refuse to reproduce a parental role they have themselves rejected; they are people who have either turned their back on their parents or who, by not having children of their own, manage to maintain what are fundamentally unsatisfying ties to those same parents. Gotman distances herself from this discourse, with its underlying assumption that, unbeknownst to themselves, childless individuals are suffering. Whereas psychoanalysis would claim that the term “nullipare” reflects a lack in the person to whom it applies, childless persons do not express a sense of lack and actually appear more satisfied with their condition than parents are with theirs, at least according to wellbeing studies such as the World Value Survey. Gotman hypothesizes instead that it is precisely “to avoid suffering” that childless persons “renounce a desire they cannot really take responsibility for”. More importantly, not having children is a way of escaping gender stereotypes and so situating oneself outside the category of “woman” or “man”. We can therefore take seriously childless women's claim that theirs is a positive rejection of motherhood, especially since “maternity itself is marked by strong inner conflicts” – though it appears such a positive experience that those conflicts are not studied.

Behind both of these stereotypical discourses and analyses, respondents' positions are not so clear, and the interviews bring to light several contradictions and shared perspectives between parents and non-parents: it is important to see that the opposition between them is in part artificial. The first thing to note in careful analysis of the discourses of childless persons (most of whom, here, are urban, working women, managers or people working in the “intellectual professions”) is that some respondents simply refuse to answer, either because

they do not want to discuss their own family history, implicated in their desire not to have children, or because they have not really formulated the question for themselves. The interviews were conducted with men and women familiar with and relatively skilled in using socially constructed discourse, and they only account for or do justice to the most visible, fully developed components of discourse on non-fertility. Up against heavy social pressure to procreate, respondents often have difficulty expressing their personal desire to remain childless or their lack of any intention to procreate without drawing on standard political discourses. Instead of trying to express the inexpressible, they seek to justify themselves, either defensively (they plan to have a child later; they have medical problems; they might adopt) or actively, in the form of resistance. If motherhood or fatherhood is thought of as a compulsory service, then the childless can be thought of as conscientious objectors – envied for escaping the destiny of parenthood. This discourse, characteristic of upper-class individuals engaged in gratifying, relatively prestigious occupational activities or working for associations, includes references to the great variety of situations found among childless people – which respondents mention in order to escape the judgment that they themselves are “outside the norm”. Respondents may also emphasize their strong relationships with other people’s children (nieces or nephews, friends’ children), as this gives them a role in keeping with the logic of generational transmission; or they may minimize such ties (saying, for example, that stepparents are not obligated to raise their partner’s children). Some simply say they want a life without the constraints or hindrances of children.

The rationality of would-be coherent and convincing discourses on childlessness may suggest a fear of strong, permanent ties with other human beings, the constraints associated with those ties, and the degree to which they escape individual control. Being childless may be more of a lasting state than an explicit choice, even though childless people rationalize this *fait accompli*. On the contrary, some respondents explain that they have not been able to form a couple or that the couple they do belong to is fragile, making it impossible for them – sadly – to have a child.

Economic rational choice theories are not very useful for interpreting these discourses. Indeed, the decision to have children may be just as difficult to explain, as a choice, as childlessness, beyond citing the notions of transmission and the pact between generations that inscribes each person within one or more family lines. The arguments used by childless persons are more explicit, but material constraints or attaching great value to personal freedom does not suffice to explain the recent rise in childlessness. For Gotman, we are perhaps at the beginning of a new era where the “*désir d’enfant*” has become optional and where the intergenerational pact can be circumvented by developing relationships with the children of a life partner or of family and friends.

In conclusion, Gotman explains, childless people describe their lives as a project, a becoming, not as an inheritance that needs to be transmitted or converted.

The demand for individual freedom and the other arguments childless people put forward do not reflect any particular psychic difficulty, but rather the need to construct a discourse to justify themselves against what is still a powerful norm, especially in France. The book offers a broad overview of the great diversity of people who have voluntarily chosen childlessness. It might usefully be supplemented by specific analysis of men and women from other social categories, as they would very likely describe the constraints of daily life differently. The vast range of sources and the diversity of approaches discussed make this an indispensable work for understanding childlessness, a behaviour that continues to be stigmatized in France while currently rising after a period of marginality.

Laurent TOULEMON

SCHMITZ Andreas, 2017, *The Structure of Digital Partner Choice: A Bourdieusian Perspective*, New York, Springer, 219 p.

This book, derived from the author's thesis, sets out to develop a theory of partner choice based on Bourdieu's approach and to demonstrate empirically the relevance of this approach for on-line dating sites. The effort is to be commended for its originality and for the distance the author takes from the theoretical framework dominating this field of study internationally and especially in Germany, including in the collective project he worked on at the University of Bamberg. Despite his radical critique of rational choice theory, his analysis is always constructive, highlighting areas of compatibility between theories and possible exchanges with majority approaches that do not interpret phenomena in Bourdieusian terms.

Schmitz begins by observing that online dating is essentially driven by market forces. However, he rejects the idea that this makes it fundamentally different from non-internet partner meeting, explaining that it needs to be seen in the long-term context of modernization (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 explains how closely online dating sites correspond to the ideal type market theorized by Weber and Simmel; that is, a place where people not only trade but also compete for the possibility to trade.

It would therefore seem legitimate that most studies on the subject should use methodological individualism, presented in detail in Chapter 4. The author discusses three quite different methodological individualism-driven approaches: Gary Becker's economic approach, wherein status maximization is combined with additional specializations for men and women; Peter Blau's theory, which posits a preference for similarity; and Catherine Hakim's idea of individuals' erotic capital as fundamentally independent of their social position. The shared limitation of these three approaches is to assume that all actors have the same preferences and that they calculate in the same ways to satisfy them, whereas in fact they are constrained by their personal characteristics, which are more or less valuable on the market, and by the structure of potential opposite-sex partners. While these approaches are used "pragmatically and productively" in existing studies, they unduly simplify and fail to clarify the overall logic driving actors' actions – a fact that has led several studies to propose adjustments to the classic models.

In Chapter 5, the author says we need to scrap this theoretical framework and to replace the opposition between rational actor and structure with the idea that structures are incorporated by actors themselves: their preferences and actions are forged by their habitus, itself the outcome of their position and trajectory in social space. He then makes the following challenge, or demonstration by *reductio ad absurdum*. As a market that closely approximates the ideal type, online dating should be highly conducive to analysis in rational choice terms. If it can be demonstrated through theoretical and empirical analysis that the rational choice approach is, if not totally irrelevant, at least extremely simplistic

when it comes to explaining how online dating sites work, then the relevance of Bourdieu's more inclusive conceptual framework will be validated that much more effectively for other situations.

Despite the three articles Bourdieu published on marital strategies in the Béarn, he offered no systematic theory of couple formation. It is therefore on the basis of Bourdieu's general theory that Schmitz developed his analytic framework. For Bourdieu, social space is fundamentally relational: the value of an individual's capital depends on how other agents assess it, and their assessments are in turn affected by symbolic domination mechanisms. Like many choices, partner choice is not usually consciously calculated or anticipated, though Bourdieusian theory does acknowledge that it might be in some social groups and historical contexts. Marital strategies are based instead on "the practical sense", the product of interaction between habitus and structure, and of agents' self-classifications and classifications of each other. Specifically, some women's preference for men of a higher social standing than themselves (female hypergamy) follows from masculine domination and expresses interiorized power structures.

Chapter 6 presents an empirical procedure for testing this theoretical framework. The demonstration is based primarily on the extremely productive matching of data on interactions from a generalist German online dating site with questionnaires filled out by consenting users (3,500 respondents) recruited directly by the site. The sources thus bear traces of all of an individual's actions (who contacted whom, who answered), the signals released onto the market (descriptions and profile photos) and the more standard statements collected by the sociological questionnaire. Interviews with site users constitute a secondary source.

Chapter 7 presents the findings. It is regrettable that this chapter is relatively short and arrives so late in what is otherwise a dense, detailed discussion of vast methodological questions. The backbone of Schmitz's demonstration is his multiple correspondence analysis on individuals' lifestyles, which constructs a social space similar to Bourdieu's in *Distinction*. In a vivid display of methodological inventiveness, the author then delivers a series of analyses, each related to this social space. The findings bring to light the heterogeneity of forces driving agent behaviour: self-assessment of one's chances on the market, objective chances as measured by a contact centrality index, stated preferences, deceptive self-presentations, and initiation and pursuit of interactions. Once the black box of interactions has been opened, the different categories of agents and agent dyads identified demonstrate with a clarity seldom encountered the relations of class and gender domination at work. Altogether, the violence of certain observations (for example, a romantic "taste for necessity" among agents with little symbolic capital) justifies the author's claim that far from offering an attenuated version of the social structure, online dating sites actually reveal how fully offline relational forces are at work.

Milan BOUCHET-VALAT

AUBOURG Valérie, EID Georges (eds.), 2017, *Famille et temps. Modification des liens conjugaux et parentaux* [The family and time: changes in conjugal and parental ties], Paris, L'Harmattan, 232 p.

This book brings together several of the papers presented at a 2014 conference marking the fortieth anniversary of France's Institut des Sciences de la Famille (ISF), an organization to which both editors belong. A great number of specialists of the family, representing several nationalities and a wide variety of disciplines, including historians, legal specialists, psychologists, theologians, philosophers, sociologists and ethnologists, took part in the conference, exchanging their findings before a wide audience and in the open-minded spirit characteristic of the ISF. However, the work's pronounced multi-disciplinarity, the extremely wide range of viewpoints, ultimately constitutes a weakness, as it is not conducive to a clear discussion. While the aim is to understand how family ties have changed over time, the reader quickly discovers that the notion of time has quite different meanings for the different authors, making the whole quite heterogeneous.

The first section presents the Institute and its activities, rooted in the socialistic Catholicism of its founder, the jurist Emma Gounod, one of whose texts is included here. Valérie Aubourg sets out to retrace the institutional history of the ISF, its training and research missions, and the specific groups it addresses. The historian Paul Servais traces the history of changes in the family, ties between the Catholic Church and the institution of the family in France, and between the university and the Church – a history to which the ISF is heir.

Contributors to the second part reflect on time and the changes that have impacted families. In his theoretical text, Georges Eid analyses new types of attitudes to the past and tries to relate them to changes in the family. Adopting a post-modern perspective, he relates the emergence of “pointilliste” time, in which individual practices are focused on and guided by the present, to “protean” family forms marked by separation, blending and fragmented event histories. Eid names this attitude to time, where individuals work to protect themselves against an uncertain future – especially in connection with romantic encounters – “preventive time”. Pascale Boucaud examines the implementation of international legislation guaranteeing individuals the right to marry and found a family, a right first put forward in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Her primary focus is legal regulation of forced marriages and legal equality and responsibility in families.

The third part analyses “families in the time of democracy” – here, time means period or era. In his compact text, Jean-Hugues Déchaux describes how the spirit of democracy (founded on equality and contracts) modified representations of and beliefs about parenthood, and how a kind of secularization of parenthood facilitated the development of family structure pluralism. In a framework where family obligations are seen as contractual, individuals become the “instituting power of the parenthood tie” in collective representations. Surrogacy, for example, and medically assisted reproduction intensify the voluntary, elective, contractual

dimension of the tie between parents. This section includes two other texts on the family and time.

The fourth part discusses “temporality and family-related uncertainties”. The psychologist Kamel Arar examines how the accelerated time of contemporary society has changed the “fabrication of humankind” and affected groups like the family whose purpose is to produce “the human”. The psychologist Jacques Arène probes the time dimension of the family in connection with the question of continuity in family lines, which he considers one of the family’s essential functions. He observes that the rise of narcissism has somewhat eroded that continuity.

The last part focuses on families in the current period of “virtual” activities. Gérard Neyrand reflects on the influence of social media in meeting potential life partners. Social media modify the space and time of classic encounters, which are now marked by uncertainty and greater male-female symmetry. Last, the historian Olivier Servais reflects on how video games have redefined family time. After a period in which video game-playing separated the generations, a new generation of parents now seems to be reducing that fracture, sharing time playing video games with their children.

The thinking put forward in this book on relations between time and the family thus seems rather fragmented. Above and beyond the problem of multiple disciplinary perspectives, the notion of time here is much too general and vague: we move from shared time to the time of filiation, from “the spirit of the time” – i.e., of a particular period – to a more or less uncertain future. Moreover, it is regrettable that so many chapters are based on secondary source material – while some cite no empirical documentation at all – leaving the impression of a heterogeneous assembly of abstract, essayist writings.

Christophe GIRAUD

MAILLOCHON Florence, 2016, *La passion du mariage* [A passion for weddings], Presses Universitaires de France, Le Lien social, 400 p.

Since the 1970s, there have been many fewer marriages in France and people marry later in life.⁽¹⁾ Marriage, which used to constitute a fundamental step in the transition to adulthood, has now also been disconnected from living with an intimate partner in that it is preceded by sexual debut and cohabitation. However, from the 1990s, the wedding ceremony itself has been massively reinvested in France. Its forms have been diversified, and couples now celebrate their union as opulently as possible with the understanding that it is a moment for impressing wedding guests with their singularity and the force of the partners' commitment to each other.⁽²⁾ Florence Maillouchon here analyses a qualitative study of 49 young married couples⁽³⁾, reconstituting the different stages of their wedding celebration, the intertwining of those stages, their conjugal meaning, and effects due to the roles associated with each sex.

The book explores the different components in the celebration sequence: the wedding announcement, wedding preparations and, finally, the wedding party. Maillouchon's study of couples' discussions and choices during these different stages reveals the presumed individualization of the rite to be in fact "a regulating norm and constraint" that standardizes practices as couples comply with a "model of romantic luxury" (p. 346). Because wedding culture and the wedding industry⁽⁴⁾ determine representations, most notably through film and marketing, partners ultimately make their choices within a precise and relatively circumscribed framework.

To begin with, the wedding announcement moment has been reorganized. While the notion of engagement refers in collective representations to age-old practices, despite the fact that their form has changed,⁽⁵⁾ a new conjugal sequence known as the proposal has now emerged in France. In the first section of the book, Maillouchon observes that marriage proposals seem to involve the staging of a "surprise" (p. 22). While in most cases, the couple's decision to marry is made jointly, it is important to recreate a feeling of surprise with the help of a special and, if possible, luxurious setting in which each partner performs a highly gender-specific role. The man organizes this event, which is supposed to surprise his future wife while being tailored to his own personality. And in the rare cases where the woman takes the initiative, her future spouse makes a second proposal,

(1) Prioux France, 2005, "Mariage, vie en couple et rupture d'union", *Informations sociales* 122(2), pp. 38-50.

(2) Segalen Martine, 2005, "L'invention d'une nouvelle séquence rituelle du mariage", *Hermès*, 43, pp. 159-168.

(3) Respondent couples were French and got married between 2001 and 2012. They were contacted in a variety of circumstances (through municipal wedding announcements, at wedding and bridal shows, boutiques, forums) and questioned together twice: before and after the wedding.

(4) Ingraham Chrys, 2008, *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*, 2nd ed., New York, Routledge, 304 p.

(5) Pugeault Catherine, 2010, "Les fiançailles: affaires conjugales, affaires familiales", in conference proceedings of *Les transformations de la conjugalité: Configurations et parcours*, pp. 11-21.

considered from then on the only “true” one. For the proposal to be well made, it must take a special rather than banal form as it is supposed to attest to the depth of the man’s commitment in front of friends and/or family. The second characteristic of the new type of wedding celebration in France is that the engagement has been “diffracted” into a series of events: the proposal, the announcement to the family, and increasingly, the announcement to the couple’s circle of friends. Here again, the dominant way of proceeding is to stage a surprise: the couple organizes a meal and/or an evening party in a festive setting, seeking thereby to ensure their families’ support for and participation in their future union. But in France, family responses often seem cooler than expected: a generation gap may be observed between parents, who may be critical of marriage as a model and who “reason above all in terms of an institution”, and the younger generation, who “think mostly in terms of an event” (p. 85).

In the second section, the author analyses how wedding preparations are handled, notably by comparing couples’ pre-wedding aspirations to how fully those aspirations were realized. She observes that the pre-event organization period has grown longer, amounting today to at least a year – a length of time that would have been considered excessive twenty years ago. The point of the organization period is to find ways to personalize or customize every stage of the ceremony and party, an observation that suggests “form is more important than substance” (p. 138). To ensure the event goes off well, a couple has to perform a considerable number of tasks (finding a venue, caterers, clothes, flowers, etc.), though some of them are outsourced to service providers and assistance from internet sources. In couples’ discourse, organizing the wedding ceremony seems almost a full-time job, a “major undertaking” that must be executed “just so” in order to achieve agreed objectives. Speaking in retrospect, couples often focus on the difficulties and exhaustion involved in bringing off the event, as well as the tensions that may have developed during the preparation period. However, they also stress their “ability to develop and execute a project together”. Meanwhile, the quantity of work involved weighs more lightly on men than women. Many women report not only taking practical responsibility for a greater number of aspects of the event than their male partner but also supporting a “mental workload” that, as they see it, he assumes none of. For their part, male respondents seek to legitimate this asymmetry, which runs counter to the current egalitarian norm, by reporting that their partner prefers to carry out these activities herself and wishes to maintain “control” over the event (pp. 195-206). Fairy tale-fuelled representations of weddings wherein the bride-to-be is the main actor thus create conditions for “twofold servitude of women: social and gender-based” (pp. 220-221). In order to have and experience the wedding they want, women are willing to assume much of the organization work, a fact that Maillochon interprets as a way of entering into their wifely role as “woman of the house”.

In the last section the author analyses ceremony and party options and

couples' choices, showing that event personalization, a feature highlighted by couples in interviews, actually leads to homogeneous, "normalized" choices (p. 251). The vast majority of venues chosen are outside the home (halls, manors, restaurants). The amounts of money spent on decoration have also been rising as decoration "fulfills the function of expressing the couple" (p. 282). Moreover, clothing works to reinforce gender asymmetry because "the model of the long, white princess-like dress seems to hold across social and geographic borders in France". Conversely, the groom's suit is secondary and adapted to the bride's wedding dress or the decoration, as the idea is to shine the spotlight on the bride. The aesthetic labour involved is thus concentrated on the woman's body: brides are supposed to look as if they are on stage and to stage their physical appearance. Moreover, the importance attached to form implies the use of a considerable number of visual supports. A complete set of photographs of all the details of the ceremony and party, taken either by professional photographers or family members, is meant to "immortalize" the event and enable the couple to "relive" it as often as they like.

The strength of this book lies in its detailed description of how gender roles are reinforced by the practices involved in organizing a wedding, an event represented asymmetrically in the collective mind and as such similar to the gender inequalities that are reinforced upon the birth of a child.⁽⁶⁾ Nonetheless, the author grants social class its rightful place, showing that because this new notion of the romantic wedding involves luxurious settings it necessarily excludes underprivileged segments of the population, who may go so far as to renounce getting married because they lack the resources for the ceremony or to postpone marriage to save money.

Gaëlle MESLAY

(6) Régnier-Loilier Arnaud, 2009, "Does the birth of a child change the division of household tasks between partners?" *Population & Societies*, 461, 4 p.

Other books

RAZZELL Peter, 2016, *Mortality, Marriage and Population Growth in England, 1550-1850*, London, Caliban Books, 135 p.

It is the stated ambition of this book not only to present long-term trends in English population changes over three centuries but also to explain them by way of a thesis caught up in a vast, centuries-long debate on the relations between demographic change and economic development. The author's aim is to achieve a synthesis that supports the claim that fertility did indeed fall during the eighteenth century and that falling mortality was the main driver of population growth in England during the period.

This thesis aims among other things to validate the idea that demographic changes are largely independent of economic development, a position most notably argued by the economic historian J. D. Chambers in the 1960s. Chambers' reasoning turns on the assumption that mortality rates were autonomous; he was particularly critical of Malthusian positions stressing that fertility was modelled by living standards. E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield refuted Chambers' claim through an examination of nearly four million individual entries in parish registers.

As Razzell states from the outset, he has in no way attempted to construct a mathematical model of population growth, as that would mean drawing on demographic unknowns that require strong hypotheses. Moreover, he explains, such hypotheses may readily be manipulated to support conclusions that validate a particular claim. He therefore has adopted a different methodological procedure, based on sources that allow for direct empirical measurement of individual variables and simultaneous cross-tabulation of data to ensure reliable results.

The controversy re-sparked here obviously requires the author to discuss his methodology, sources and data in addition to his findings. The first chapter thus discusses the reliability of parish registers in measuring population growth in England. Razzell presents his methodology in detail while critiquing Cambridge Group findings (those of Wrigley and Schofield).

Chapter 2 gives what can only be a broad outline of trends in infant and child mortality in England from 1600 to 1850. Here the author uses the well-known technique of "apply[ing] family reconstitution techniques to parish register data" (p. 29). His conclusion is that "reductions in early child mortality cannot fully explain the scale of [English] population growth in the eighteenth century" (p. 42).

Chapter 3 presents a history of adult mortality from 1600 to 1850. The author begins by mentioning the major problems for study in this area, the main one being "variations in burial registration reliability", well known since John Graunt's 1662 work. He concludes that there is no convincing evidence to prove that life expectancy was extremely low in the early eighteenth century and before. He

also discusses the impact of the fall in male adult mortality on rates of widow remarriage.

Chapter 4 presents a history of marriage in England from 1550 to 1850 in parallel with a history of fertility. This is far and away the longest section of the book (36 pages). One of the author's conclusions is that English women's universal propensity to marry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries declined significantly over the eighteenth. Fertility, largely shaped by nuptiality during the period, fell; English population growth can therefore logically be understood as an outcome of falling child and adult mortality.

In Chapter 5 the author undertakes to explain the afore-cited changes in mortality – in an extremely brief account (8 pages) that is quite inadequate given the potential difficulties raised by his explanation.

In Chapter 6 he associates population growth with the development of capitalism. As he sees it, the weight of demographic growth must be understood in terms of the particular political, social and economic context of England during the period under study. On this basis he can put forward a general conclusion in Chapter 7, wherein he recalls that the relationship between economic development and demographic growth has long elicited controversy. He purports to claim on the basis of the English case that since the early modern period – from approximately 1600 – demographic trends have been largely independent of economic development. He also argues that population growth contributed to the growth of capitalism by increasing labour supply and aggregated demand. In this last chapter, he sketches a parallel between the earlier situation and the current one, where multinational companies exploit labour surpluses created by the demographic situation.

The interest of this work lies primarily in its vast number of tables – no fewer than 53, slightly more than one every two pages – and therefore the data. However, with regard to the above-cited controversy, the book is so concerned to synthesize that it seems impossible to either endorse or contest the author's positions. The most striking example of this cursoriness is Chapter 5 on changes in mortality: the chapter adds nothing to existing literature on the subject, and the author seems to have felt obligated to discuss the question. Furthermore, choosing to oppose the Cambridge Group whatever the cost precipitates him into precisely the methodological trap he denounces at the beginning of the book with his categorical rejection of mathematical modelling: data are presented only to support his thesis and he regularly fails to back up his viewpoints with convincing reasoning. While the book is easy to read, it sorely lacks the means for achieving its stated, contentious purpose.

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