

Et si le menu — et moins menu — peuple des villes et des campagnes de la France moderne avait éprouvé un besoin analogue et s'était partiellement extirpé de son soi-disant immobilisme pour redéfinir ses interprétations de la nature, de l'au-delà et des rapports de l'homme avec l'une et l'autre, tenant compte des glissements qui se produisaient dans son vécu de producteur et de consommateur, aurait-il eu besoin de se faire parachuter des valeurs et des justifications de groupes qui lui étaient étrangers et qui s'apprêtaient à profiter de sa vulnérabilité?

En redécouvrant de façon bien intentionnée des civilisations de jadis, l'historien des années soixante-dix ne manifeste-t-il pas une malencontreuse tendance au paternalisme à l'endroit d'un objet d'étude qui, pour le plus grand confort de l'universitaire, n'a plus guère la possibilité de le rappeler à l'ordre? La bienveillance, même encombrante, vaut certainement mieux que le mépris; celui-ci peut d'ailleurs se reporter sur les médiateurs qu'il est facile de charger de... malveillance.

À notre avis, *Culture populaire et culture des élites...* va demeurer un produit de librairie éminemment lisible, car Muchembled a la plume alerte, ce qui n'est plus un préalable chez les historiens contemporains. Il a publié un ouvrage de synthèse bien mis en marché qui, au surplus, reflète l'ampleur de ses intérêts sur l'Ancien Régime français. N'y cherchons ni percée conceptuelle ni innovation méthodologique. Il figure à un rang tout à fait respectable parmi les productions « culturalistes » de l'« entre-deux-Mai ». La tendance se prolongera-t-elle chez les historiens pour lesquels la « nouvelle histoire » s'est déjà défraîchie?

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JACQUES DUPÂQUIER, ÉTIENNE HÉLIN, PETER LASLETT, MASSIMO LIVI-BACCI and SØLVI SOGNER, eds.—*Marriage and Remarriage in Populations of the Past / Mariage et remariage dans les populations du passé*. London: Academic Press, 1981. Pp. 633.

The theme of the 1979 Kristianstad colloquium on historical demography was remarriage. The proceedings are presented here in what may be considered a *tour de force* in English/French bilingualism. The general introduction by Sølvi Sogner and Jacques Dupâquier is provided in full in the two languages, as are the commentaries of Philippe Ariès and Eugene Hammel on laws and customs relating to remarriage, of Ansley Coale on methodology, and of Étienne Hélin, Ad van der Woude and Roger Schofield on different aspects of the relationship between remarriage and fertility. A summary in the other language is provided for each of the forty-two papers; there is one index in French and another in English; and the translations are nearly flawless.

Publication in Canada's two official languages does not mean that Canada, or North America for that matter, is well-represented in the volume. Only Hubert Charbonneau reports on the fertility impairment of widows who remarried in New France. None of the papers deals with remarriage in the United States. The main focus is on Europe. Eight papers are based on Scandinavian data, six on French data, and three on Italian and British data respectively. Many of these national studies present findings for several different regions or localities, and there are as well one or more accounts of remarriage in Eastern Europe, China, the Islamic world, Africa and Latin America. The essays make use of a wide variety of sources, from parish registers to censuses to village genealogies, and of statistical techniques from simple cross-tabulation to multivariate analysis. All this makes for a comparative

perspective that is particularly appropriate for a relatively neglected demographic phenomenon like remarriage.

As a general indication of the trend over time in remarriages, several commentators cite Roger Schofield and E.A. Wrigley's estimate that in England the proportion of all marriages involving a widower and/or a widow declined from 25-30 percent in the sixteenth century to 10 percent by the mid-nineteenth century. The frequency of remarriages for twelve German villages (John Knodel) and eighteen French parishes (Guy Cabourdin) between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries fall for the most part within the 25-30 percent range. However, there are striking exceptions: in 1631-33, as Cabourdin also shows, war and epidemics pushed remarriage rates as high as 62.1 percent in Vézélise and 56.4 percent in Nancy; and Hans Oluf Hansen calls attention to the demographic catastrophes in late eighteenth-century Iceland causing the remarriage rate to jump from 25 to 40 percent. At the other end of the range, remarriages accounted for only 20.7 percent of all marriages in seventeenth-century New France and 12 percent in the German village of Hesel. The latter lost less than one percent of its population during the Thirty Years' War. Villages which had suffered population losses on the order of 30-50 percent had remarriage rates surpassing 30 percent. Particular "biological, socio-economic and ecotypological reasons" may partially explain the wide variation in German remarriage rates, Arthur Imhof admits, but a "more thoroughgoing explanation seems to lie in the history of attitudes, formed by . . . situations which had threatened the survival of the populations and fundamentally affected patterns of demographic behaviour" (p. 344).

Just as it may be advisable to posit a wider range of variation in *ancien régime* remarriage patterns than 25-30 percent, so it may be necessary to temper Schofield and Wrigley's estimate of a decline in remarriages to 10 percent by about 1850. Massimo Livi-Bacci's statistics on the situation in nineteen European countries from the 1860s to the 1880s show that nowhere had they fallen to less than 14 percent. In England and Wales the frequency of remarriages remained at 18.1 percent of all marriages from 1865 to 1882. On the eastern fringe of Europe—in Finland, Austria-Hungary and Russia—it continued to exceed 20 percent, and in Croatia and Slovenia 30 percent (p. 348). Several authors observe a higher incidence of remarriages in cities than in rural areas. If so, urbanization may have acted as a brake on the decline in remarriages in the nineteenth century.

The twentieth century has witnessed an important modification of remarriage patterns. As divorce rates have risen, so has the ratio of divorced to widowed persons who remarry. Robert Horvath traces the change in Hungary since 1854: from less than 1 percent before 1900, the proportion of divorced men and women among spouses remarrying has risen to 15 percent in the 1970s, reversing the decline in remarriages in that country. However, in societies with less progressive divorce laws, the nineteenth-century decline in remarriages has continued. Carlo Consini's statistics for Italy show a reduction in the percentage of remarriages from 12.5 for men and 7.1 for women in 1871-73 to 4.3 and 2.1 respectively in 1971-73. Apparently, variations remain as substantial in the twentieth century as in pre-industrial Europe.

Even seemingly constant features of remarriage like the more frequent remarriage of widowers than widows are subject to considerable variation. With the single exception of Argenteuil from 1740 to 1790, all the pre-industrial communities studied in the volume show more widowers marrying single women than widows marrying bachelor men. Nevertheless, the ratio of male to female remarriages varied from near equality to 3:1, and the interval between widowhood and remarriage, average age at remarriage, and the handicap that children represented in contracting a second marriage also fluctuated in time and space.

When practices in non-European societies are also taken into account, the variability of remarriage seems even greater. St. and V. Pascu note that marital behaviour in some parts of eastern Europe was affected by special rules in Orthodox ecclesiastical law governing

divorce and remarriage. In present-day Latin America, as Lira and Héctor Pérez Brignoli reveal, consensual unions are commonplace. Soliman Huzayyin and Alfred Ukaegbu examine how multiple marriage and polygyny complicate remarriage in the contemporary Islamic world, with different “Muslim” and “African” patterns. Arthur Wolf describes how the ideal of loyalty to one husband limited, though not absolutely, remarriage among widows in pre-modern China.

These variations, to many demographers, are like ciphers to decoders: they may hide a pattern that, if only the right equation is found, can be made to fit into a model of population dynamics. Hervé Le Bras, James Smith, Hansen and Henri Léridon investigate the relationship of remarriage to other demographic variables through the use of simulation models. With less sophisticated techniques, many of the essays investigate, or simply raise, the possibility that remarriage obeys the laws of supply and demand of a “marriage market”. Unfortunately, the analogy involves formidable methodological complications such as the definition of the marriage market’s geographical boundaries. Louis Henry cautions that the pool of potential spouses was always larger than a single village (p. 192). And, disconcertingly, on the two large questions that all the essays address in one way or another—the causes of variation in remarriage patterns and the effect of remarriage on fertility—not even the beginnings of a consensus are detectable.

On the causes of variation, the essays differ first in the relative importance attributed to demographic factors. On the one hand, many accept as axiomatic that remarriage compensated for high mortality. Sune Åkerman, through a comparison of three areas with different levels of mortality in mid-eighteenth century Sweden, describes a striking instance of correlation between mortality and remarriage. On the other hand, Schofield advances an equally convincing argument against explaining the declining frequency of remarriages in the nineteenth century by declining mortality. Most of the fall in mortality in Victorian times was due to changes in child mortality. Adult mortality rates fell less sharply and “not by so great a margin as to account for more than a small fraction of the overall fall in the proportion of remarriages” (p. 212).

The concept of a marriage market, which presupposes the interaction in predictable fashion of several demographic variables, invites some form of multivariate analysis. However, more powerful statistics have not as yet made much headway against the complexity of remarriage. The analysis of variance by Le Bras shows that, holding fertility, mortality and female nuptiality constant, the ages of the spouses at marriage, the age difference between them and the age distribution of grooms all influence the proportion of remarriages, but in a manner that makes this dependent variable “difficilement *impuable*” (p. 204). Schofield’s multiple classification analysis enables him to explain only 5 and 9 percent of the variation in remarriage intervals of men and women respectively.

Nor does the volume reveal agreement on the impact of remarriage on fertility. It is difficult to ascertain how much it compensated for the high mortality of *ancien régime* societies by extending “procreative careers” (a concept proposed by Peter Laslett, p. 461) that otherwise would have been terminated at the death of the first spouse. Even without the remarriage of widows, according to Ansley Coale, overall fertility would have been reduced by only 10 percent. If female remarriage cut that reduction in half, “variations in remarriage would be limited to reducing fertility by about 5%—comparable to the effect of a difference in age at first marriage of about one year, and constituting only a small fraction of the differences to be found in natural fertility between different European populations before the widespread practice of contraception and abortion began” (p. 156). Jacques Houdaille’s calculations of how much the negative effects of widowhood on fertility were actually compensated by remarriage in Champetières between 1670 and 1789 range from 0 to 38 percent by two-decade period. Estimates for different European countries range from 1 percent in nineteenth-century Denmark to 40 percent in Italy in the same century. Furthermore, interpretations of the significance of the same level of compensation differ: while Jean-Pierre

Bardet judges 6 percent of all births in two Normandy parishes accounted for by widows as “loin d’être insignifiant” (p. 543), Alain Bideau and Alfred Perrenoud draw the opposite conclusion from a proportion of 5.6 percent in Geneva: “globalement le rattrapage est peu important” (p. 554).

One reason that analysis solely in demographic terms may never satisfactorily explain variations in remarriage is that choice of a spouse is also influenced by a host of socio-economic and cultural factors. Among those discussed in the volume are land-tenure systems, inheritance practices, social class, residence in an urban or rural setting, community constraints (manifested, for example, in the *charivari*), war, mass emigration, and the nineteenth-century shift from economic to romantic norms of marital selection. Cultural norms are especially invoked to explain the unequal chances of remarriage of widowers and widows. Take the answers to the question with which Corsini entitles his paper: “Why is Remarriage a Male Affair?” He himself attributes the apparent masculine advantage to the patriarchal character of the household in pre-industrial societies, male predominance being “based on the biological fact that only women can bear children” (p. 388) and leading to a sexual division of labour regarding the care for children. This meant that the widower with children could do without a spouse less easily than a widow in the same situation. “Many remarriages”, he remarks, “were those of fathers of young children whose mother had died in childbirth and who, therefore, needed not only a sexual partner, but a nurse and a housekeeper as well” (p. 390). But looking at remarriage from the female perspective leads L. Henry to question Corsini’s implicit assumption that widowhood was a plight to which women were condemned: “Cette inégalité entre hommes et femmes ... [r]ésultait-elle, au contraire, d’un libre choix de femmes qui, passé la quarantaine, jugeaient que les plaisirs du mariage n’en compensaient pas les contraintes et préféraient jouir d’une liberté qu’elles n’avaient jamais eue jusque là, ni comme fille, ni comme épouse?” (p. 195)

Henry’s question points in the direction of the roles assigned to individuals of different marital statuses in past societies. Community pressure to conform to roles associated with marriage, widowhood and celibacy may help to explain their relative frequency. Drawing on the popular culture of Western Europe, Martine Segalen imaginatively reconstructs such roles (for example, of the stepmother as represented in fairytales like “Snow White” and “Cinderella”) and analyzes in their light how fundamentally pre-modern experience in remarriage differs from our own: “Nous avons totalement perdu le sentiment de ce que pouvait être ces familles instables, couples formés et vite rompus par la mort, ces ménages où les enfants des différents lits devaient apprendre à cohabiter ensemble ou laisser vite la place à la venue des plus jeunes” (p. 75).

In the final analysis, remarriage may be too marginal and too unpredictable to make its study rewarding for the analytical demographer primarily interested in phenomena that can be fitted into a determinist model; but it will remain of interest to historical demographers with the more modest goal of empirically describing the behaviour of real populations. And because remarriage touches on topics like popular culture, sexual mores, family life, the history of ordinary people and class-related social behaviour, it is a dimension of reality that has much to contribute to social history (see, in this context, the articles by Yves Landry and Jacques Légaré, by John Crowley and by Bettina Bradbury in this issue of *Histoire sociale—Social History*). Precisely because of the variety of sources and approaches and the conflicting interpretations in the papers presented at the Kristiansand colloquium, the proceedings will stimulate research on remarriage for years to come.

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