

Josef Ehmer, Heiratsverhalten, Sozialstruktur, ökonomischer Wandel. England und Mitteleuropa in der Formationsperiode des Kapitalismus, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlag, Göttingen 1991, 324 S., kart., 56 DM.

First, one might state what this book is not: it is not a history of marriage as a familial institution and the associated interpersonal relationships among spouses, offspring, and kin. Instead it is an examination of the act of marriage and the factors influencing its timing and frequency, that is, age at marriage and numbers of persons ever married. This focus is not so narrow as it might seem at first glance, for the act of marriage is linked directly to many aspects of society and economy: population growth; political, legal, and socioeconomic status; labor supply; social reproduction and class formation; and so on. At least since the writings of H. J. Habakkuk and J. Hajnal in the 1960s, the general thesis that western Europe had a specific marital behavior and family-household structure that was an important component in the development of capitalist industrial society has gained general acceptance and refinement. Ehmer is aware of the broader ramifications of his detailed subject-matter and clearly intends his study as a partial analysis of the rise of capitalist class society in England and Central Europe.

Ehmer's starting point is the startling difference in the development of age at marriage and proportions of lifetime celibates (persons who never married) in England and Central Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the years of capitalist industrialization. Whereas age at marriage fell steadily in England from the early eighteenth century until the 1870s, it rose in Central Europe during the same period; thereafter, from the 1870s to 1914, age at marriage in the two areas converged. The specific purpose of Ehmer's research, then, is to explain these differences.

Ehmer presents his analysis in three equal parts that logically reinforce one another. Part One discusses sociodemographic theories about marital behavior, specifically those of Thomas Malthus, Johann Peter Süßmilch, and Gerhard Mackenroth. All posited, in different ways and to different degrees, a self-regulating – or homeostatic – relationship between population and economic resources of which the key determinant was marriage. For Malthus the final guarantor of homeostasis was the »positive check« – death through starvation; for Mackenroth this check was supplemented by political regulation – laws restricting marriage to those with the necessary economic resources. Ehmer rejects this general interpretation as being over-simplistic. In its stead he posits a model that derives marital behavior from the structures of socioeconomic status, work-organization and labor relations, and social control.

Parts Two and Three test this model of relationships on the basis of English, German, and Austrian census data from the second half of the nineteenth century, using as the primary indicator of marital behavior the proportion of married men in the age-groups 25–29 and 45–49; the first indicates age at marriage, the second the extent of life-long celibacy. For England the model seems to fit very straight-forwardly. A comparison of marital behavior by region and occupational group shows that men married earlier and more frequently when capitalist social structures and work organization were most developed and paternalistic social control was most relaxed. The »English path«, however, does not apply consistently to conditions in Central Europe; it was evident only in areas of East Elbia, Saxony, Thuringia, Bohemia, and Moravia, and not found, significantly, in the Ruhr.

What lay behind this new version of a *deutscher Sonderweg*? For Ehmer the key differentiating element was social control: the long-standing attempt by political authorities, estate owners, and employers to restrict marriage as a mechanism to maintain social discipline and patriarchal labor relations. However, he downplays the actual effect of the restrictive marital legislation (politischer Ehekonsens) that flourished especially from the 1820s to the 1860s in southern and south-eastern Central Europe and emphasizes instead that of restric-

tive marital behavior had become an internalized value for many journeymen in the traditional artisanal trades. Drawing on a case-study of shoemakers Ehmer documents that bachelorhood was considered an integral part of journeymen's lifestyle and self-consciousness; within the handicrafts' world marriage was possible only when advancing to the position of master-artisan; otherwise marriage entailed leaving that world for the lifestyle of an industrial proletarian, whence the section title »Ledige Handwerksgesellen und proletarische Familienväter«. In a brief aside of Gramscian terminology that is regrettably not followed through on in detail, Ehmer notes that the journeymen's attitudes were not »dictated« but were the result of »hegemonial« relationships.

Although Ehmer does not say so explicitly, workers' abandonment of the traditional restrictive attitudes in favor of lower ages at marriage and lower proportions of lifelong celibates is thus to be seen as part of the making of the working class in Central Europe. Ehmer's psycho-structuralist explanation of English-German differences seems rather forced in the end, but he has skillfully and thoughtfully combined theory and empirical evidence to produce a stimulating work that all social and economic historians should ponder.

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Manfred Hettling/Claudia Huerkamp/Paul Nolte/Hans Walter Schmuhl (Hrsg.),
Was ist Gesellschaftsgeschichte? Positionen, Themen, Analysen, Beck Verlag,
München 1991, S. 342, brosch., 48 DM.

Stolze 31 Beiträge umfaßt dieser anlässlich des 60. Geburtstages von Hans-Ulrich Wehler von Kollegen und Schülern herausgegebene Band, mit dem zugleich ein Überblick über Positionen, Themen und Analysen der Gesellschaftsgeschichte im Umkreis der »Bielefelder Schule« gegeben werden soll. Die gewählte Anordnung der Beiträge in fünf Abschnitte, nämlich in »Theoretische Positionen«, »Wirtschaft und soziale Struktur«, »Soziale Bewegung«, »Politik« und schließlich »Kultur, Ideen, Mentalitäten« umreißt in gewisser Weise schon das Programm einer Historiographie, die sich in den Worten der Herausgeber stärker an den systematischen Sozialwissenschaften als den »Geisteswissenschaften« orientiert. Damit verbunden ist das Bekenntnis für eine stärker strukturgeschichtlich angelegte Darstellungsweise, wobei die Debatte über den deutschen »Sonderweg« von Anfang an eine wichtige Rolle gespielt hat. Die Bewertung der »Umbrüche von 1989/90« sind, wie Jürgen Kocka schreibt, gerade deshalb von Bedeutung: Wenn man die zentralen Veränderungen der eigenen Zeit so wenig aus der Kenntnis gegebener Strukturen voraussagen könne wie in diesem Fall, weise dies nicht vielleicht auch auf die begrenzte struktur- und prozeßgeschichtliche Erklärbarkeit vergangener Veränderungen hin? Muß der Begriff der Nation nicht ebenso wie der des Politischen überdacht werden? So nachdenklich die Fragen, so entschieden ist die Antwort. Es gebe keinen Grund zur Kultur- und Diskursgeschichte überzuwechseln; sozial- und wirtschaftsgeschichtliche Ansätze seien alles andere als obsolet; die Veränderungen in Osteuropa seien nichts anderes als eine Bestätigung der Modernisierungstheorie.

Eben mit modernisierungstheoretischen Annahmen unternimmt Klaus Tenfelde eine neue Periodisierung der Zeitgeschichte: Die Jahre von 1914 bis 1990 machen für ihn die »Einheit der Epoche« aus. In seiner sozialgeschichtlichen Analyse thematisiert er den blutigen Weg der Normalisierung der deutschen Geschichte, der Abschleifung »der zentraleuropäischen Sonderstrukturen und Besonderheiten«, namentlich den »Abschied der alten Eliten von den ererbten gesellschaftlichen Positionen, des Bürgertums von elitären und höchst konventionellen Kulturvorstellungen, der Arbeiter von ihrer polit-utopisch eingefärbten Sonderkultur, die Akzeptanz kultureller Pluralität und der Tatsache, daß Men-