

Doing House. Social, Cultural and Political Practices in Early Modern Europe*

Place: Stockholm

Organization: Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities Gender and Work Research Project, Uppsala

Date: 11.06.-12.06.2018

Author: Heinz Nauer, Department of History, University of Berne

For a long time, household, family and kinship were conducive to historical research as a basis to explain how society worked in a faint *before*. This narrative often maintained that social change was paralleled by a loss of significance of family and kinship structures. The past two or three decades saw a shift. Numerous historical studies have since described household, family and kinship as an impetus, evoking social change rather than being subjected to it. (1) In the course of the “cultural turn“, a large number of these studies attributed greater weight to historical actors and their habits than to structural history.

Three research groups, from Switzerland, Sweden and Denmark, which, in projects stretching over several years, have been trying to gain a new perspective on household, family and kinship in the transition from the premodern to the modern era, discussed the social role of household and family in history during a conference entitled “Doing House. Social, Cultural and Political Practices in Early Modern Europe“ taking place at the “Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities“ in Stockholm, June 11 and 12.

The project “Gender and Work“ led by MARIA ÅGREN (Uppsala) explores everyday work of women and men and their mutual support in Sweden in the era between the 16th and 19th century. In her introduction, Ågren emphasized that their aim was to find answers as precise as possible. For this purpose, a data base was set up in 2010, containing more than 20'000 examples collected since, mostly court records containing descriptions of everyday work by historical actors dating from the 16th to 19th century. This data base serves as a basis for the “verb-oriented method“ which does not focus on generalizing job designation. Instead it places value on the present participle of “doing“ and pays attention to the verbs used by historical actors to describe everyday work. (2) The project “Doing House and Family“ based in Berne, Basel, Lausanne and Lucerne is heuristically less aimed toward a singular research question. Like the Swedish project, it focuses on historical practices in and around the “domestic sphere“, as pointed out by JOACHIM EIBACH (Berne) in his introduction. The Danish project “Lutheranism and societal development in Denmark“, which is part of the research network “Lutheran Mentality“ (LUMEN), is more strongly oriented toward the history of ideas. It explores the impact of the Lutheran body of thought on the household, which was considered as “the most important societal entity“ by Lutherans in the 18th century, emphasized NINA JAVETTE KOEFOED (Aarhus).

The main focus of the conference was, however, placed on the junior researchers of the respective projects who presented their sources, questions and methods or results,

depending on the current stage of their research. Due to reasons of space, only a subjective selection of the presentations can be referred to hereafter.

ERIC HÄUSLER (Berne) and ARNO HALDEMANN (Berne) put the results of their case studies from the Canton of Berne in the 18th and 19th century forward for discussion. Häusler's research work focuses on the institution of the "Geltstag" (bankruptcy), the day on which the creditors of a bankrupt household met in order to recover their receivables in the form of an auction. The "Geltstag" was a socially widely recognized way of dealing with economic failure, explained Häusler. He emphasized in particular the surprising persistence of this institution, which subsisted in Berne for five centuries, ending in the last third of the 19th century. Haldemann presented results from his research on the practice of marriage, which he described as a negotiation process including various actors: exponents of the authorities who tried to put an abstract population policy into practice; family members; neighbors, acquaintances; and finally the "Heiratslüstigen" (those eager to get married), as they are sometimes called in sources, themselves. With reference to Alf Lüdtke's concept of "Eigen-Sinn", Haldemann elaborated that in the centuries before 1800 those who wanted to get married and had impediments to marriage were able to enforce their interests in court in more than 50 percent of all cases.

ANETTE LARNER (Aarhus) and MARIA NORBY PEDERSEN (Aarhus) also based their project essentially on court papers. In her presentation, Larner pointed out the important role of Christian upbringing – in families, and by analogy with prisons and workhouses – for the ideological construction of a "good household" in the early modern period. The fourth commandment "Thou shall honor thy father and mother" served as a model for social relationships, explained Larner. Pedersen's research evolves around the impact of Lutheran thinking on poor relief in Denmark between the 16th and 18th century. Preliminary results of her research point to the fact that the poor – similar to England in the early modern period – were always judged according to their affiliation to a household the head of which, the "Hausvater" (house father), represented the highest authority in Luther's thinking. Clear results were also presented for the Swedish project "Gender and Work". Based on a case study on the economic situation of elderly people in the parish of Vendel in northern Sweden, CAROLINA MENKER (Uppsala) was able to show that most of the men and not rarely also the women above the age of 60 were the heads of an own household. Financial independence only subsisted partially and would sometimes go hand in hand with different forms of support, e.g. by the parishes. One of the key aspects of the "Gender and Work" project can be summarized as to: gender was not a decisive factor in the division of labor in the early modern era in Sweden. Both men and women often engaged "multiple employment" at the same time. The boundaries between work in and outside the home were utterly fluid.

It is in the nature of a conference of this type that not all of the project spaces are equally suitable for cohabitation. But it resulted in numerous fruitful interconnections. The project of DAG LINDSTRÖM and GÖRAN TAGESSON (Uppsala) and that of ANNE SCHILLIG (Luzern) in the field of "material culture studies" both evolve around the question of how constructed living space and the communal life of its inhabitants relate to each other. The concept of the "open

house“ (Joachim Eibach) constituted a base for several projects. In her presentation on the upbringing of children in the bourgeois milieu of Basel around 1800, ELISE VOERKEL (Basel) additionally integrated the anthropological concept of "child circulation" (3). The upbringing was often shared between several persons inside and outside of the so-called nuclear family. The principle of "doing family in different houses" was applied, said Voerkel. The parents would, however, remain involved in the upbringing from distance.

LUCAS RAPPO (Lausanne) focuses on marriage and mortgage in the light of kinship and neighborhood in French-speaking Switzerland. In a case study on the Protestant parish Corsieur-Vevey in the Canton of Vaud, he ascertained a significant intensification of endogamic marriage practices during the saddle period. On the one side, there was an increase in marriages among near relations. This phenomenon has barely been explored in relation to Protestant regions so far. (4) On the other side, there is also evidence of a practice of marriages among unrelated members of the village community, stated Rappo. It is difficult to deduce from the sources whether the direct neighborhood – one of Rappo's main categories of interest in his research – played a role.

On the whole, it became apparent that the approaches and the focal points of the three research groups differed substantially depending on their respective national traditions and institutional environment. Therefore, this report ends with a plea for multivoicedness of historical actors which barely allows a generalization; as well as with the observation that a confrontation with multiple traditions, approaches, methods and terminologies at an international conference increases the individual consciousness in terms of decisions on the content when working with ones own material. However, a conference which places a special emphasis on the exchange among young historians could go one step further and, based on the diversity of the sources, the methods, the historiographical practice, attempt to identify the unifying and the divisive aspects of the projects and thus create new points of reference, which could be valuable, in particular for the qualification works.

* This report was first published in German on: www.infoclio.ch, 19.07.2018. The author of the report is coordinator of the research project "Doing House and Family" at the University of Berne.

Annotations

(1) Vgl. David Warren Sabean; Simon Teuscher, Kinship in Europe. A New Approach to Long Term Development, in: David Warren Sabean; Simon Teuscher; Jon Mathieu, Kinship in Europe. Approaches to Long-Term Development (1300-1900), 1-32.

(2) An introduction to this methodology can be found on the project website: <http://gaw.hist.uu.se/what-is-gaw/The+verb-oriented+method/>

(3) For use in Latin America cf. Nara Milanich, The Casa de Huerfanos and Child Circulation in Late Nineteenth-Century Chile, in: Journal of Social History 38/2 (2004), 311-340; Jessaca B. Leinaweaver, The Circulation of Children. Kinship, Adoption, and Morality in Andean Peru, Durham 2008; an adaptation for the European early modern era by Joel F. Harrington, The Unwanted Child. The Fate of Foundlings, Orphans, and Juvenile Criminals in Early Modern Germany, Chicago 2009.

(4) For Spain, Francy, Italy cf. Jean-Marie Gouesse, Mariages de proches parents (XVIe-XXe siècle), in: Le modèle familial européen, Rom 1986, 31-61; for Switzerland cf. Jon Mathieu, Kin Marriages. Trends and Interpretations from the Swiss Example, in: David Warren Sabean; Simon Teuscher; Jon Mathieu (cf. Annot. 1), 211-230.

Conference Overview

Introductions:

Joachim Eibach (Berne, Switzerland)

Doing House and Family: a brief presentation

Nina Javette Koevoed (Aarhus, Denmark)

Lumen (Lutheran Mentality): a brief presentation

Maria Ågren (Uppsala, Sweden)

GaW (Gender and Work): a brief presentation

Key Lecture:

Jon Mathieu (Lucerne, Switzerland)

The Family in Early Modern State Theories

Project Presentations:

Elise Voerke (Basel, Switzerland)

Child Circulation and Shared Parenting in Bourgeois Families in Switzerland around 1800

Anette Larner (Aarhus, Denmark)

The Good Household in Prison, the Bad Household Imprisoned

Arno Haldemann (Berne, Switzerland)

Making a Marriage: Precarious Marriages between 'Eigensinn' and Population Policy in the Canton of Bern (1743-1865)

Christoffer Åhlman (Uppsala, Sweden)

By her own hand – women's writing and counting in 18th century Sweden

Anne Schillig (Lucerne, Switzerland)

House Histories: Material Culture and Domestic Life in Rural Switzerland (1700-1900)

Carolina Menker (Uppsala, Sweden)

Supporting oneself or being supported? Old age in eighteenth-century rural Sweden

Maria Nørby Pedersen (Aarhus, Denmark)

Begging in conflict with the household society

Eric Häusler (Berne, Switzerland)

Shifting Assets and Liabilities of Households: Bankruptcy Proceedings and the Transformation of Urban Bern (1750-1900)

Andres Wulff Vissing Christensen (Aarhus, Denmark)
Interpreting and Mediating. Political Culture in the Ecclesiastical Administration of Denmark-Norway, 1700-1746

Caroline Lindroth (Uppsala, Sweden)
Mining Men and Working Women: Making a Living in a Swedish Mining Community, 1770-1890

Lucas Rappo (Lausanne, Switzerland)
Constructing and Using Kinship and Neighborhood in Corsier-sur-Vevey: Marriages and Mortgages (1770-1840)

Marie Ulväng (Uppsala, Sweden)
Housework in change – Housing and domestic work in rural Sweden 1850-1910

Sophie Ruppel (Basel, Switzerland)
Nature Indoors: Cultivating Plants Inside Houses (18th and Early 19th Centuries)

Dag Lindström & Dr. Göran Tagesson (Uppsala, Sweden)
Doing flexibility: Houses, households and cohabitation in 18th century Linköping