5.3. Social networks in rural society

Panel organizer: Fertig, Christine, University of Muenster, Germany

The panel brings together scholars who research social networks in rural society. Social network analysis has become an important tool of researching different kinds of societies in humanities during the recent years. It provides both theoretical foundations as advanced method to analyse relational structures of society. In the panel, different questions will be approached, from networks of kinship and godparenthood, integration and segregation of local societies, class formation, political milieu, demographic and social reproduction, to organization of collective work. The major objective of this panel is to present research that applies social network analysis in different historical contexts.

Chair: Mathieu, Jon, University of Luzern, Switzerland

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5.3.1. Pyrenean households. Power, family and land

Deering, Dermot, University College Cork, Ireland

The success or failure of a household enterprise in a Pyrenean village community depended on strategic alliances between households in the villages. There was large range of tasks needed to be carried out the course of an agricultural year if a household was to succeed. The tasks were diverse and labour intensive. Before the advent of mechanization and the intensification of agriculture, at mano de obra, the number of bodies needed to carry out a myriad of tasks during the agricultural calendar was large. Family members knew their roles well in advance of commencement of work. Common or routine chores such as the maintenance of access roads, preparing the fields for ploughing in spring, the variety of tasks connected with the harvesting all necessitated large families. As a result, the effort was to succeed. The tasks were diverse and labour intensive. Before the advent of mechanization and the intensification of agriculture, at mano de obra, the number of bodies needed to carry out a myriad of tasks during the agricultural calendar was large. Family members knew their roles well in advance of commencement of work. Common or routine chores such as the maintenance of access roads, preparing the fields for ploughing in spring, the variety of tasks connected with the harvesting all necessitated large families. As a result, the effort was to succeed.

5.3.2. Social Networks and Classes in Northwestern Germany, 18th and 19th centuries

Fertig, Christine, University of Muenster, Germany

In the 19th century, class society emerged not only in industrial districts, but also in the countryside. Two drivers have been identified to explain the development from peasant society to class society. First, it has been claimed that the growth of protoindustrial production in several European regions increased the cleavage between land holders and landless people. Second, population growth put more pressure on the properties to maintain resources, which were necessary to earn a living. Both factors have restricted their social networks to people of similar social standing, preferentially to relatives. Both concepts make statements about the relevance of social relations, especially about marriage relations between people of different social standing. However, there has been very little systematic research on social networks beyond the scope of occasional examples or aggregated data. The paper examines the emergence of social classes in rural society by analysing social networks of relatives and godparents. It shows that formal social network analysis can provide for new perspectives and leads to stronger evidence on the formation of rural society. The paper compares two parishes in Westphalia, a Prussian province in northwestern Germany. We can explore family reconstructions, complemented by data on godparent relations, land holding, credit, and farm transfer contracts.

5.3.3. Sexuality, Networks, and Social and Political Change in a rural Society. Western Valais (Switzerland) in the 18th and 19th centuries

Guzzi-Heeb, Sandro, University of Luzanne, Switzerland

Elicit sexuality has often been interpreted as a problem of the lower classes, mostly as a symptom of crisis or as a consequence of legal obstacles to marriage. In contrast, the sublimation of sexual impulses is typically interpreted as a motor of civilization, capitalism and economic change. My paper, based on a micro-historical approach to social networks, questions these interpretations, showing that social milieu characterized by a tolerance sexual morality played an important political role. They were the social foundations of reformist political factions that contributed to a significant democratization in the Swiss canton of Valais. In this deeply Catholic region, during the 18th and 19th century significantly more children were conceived before marriage and out of wedlock in opposition to the social milieu, than among conservative groups. Comparable networks were also tied to demographic change at the end of the 18th century. The paper focuses on the generation of tourism in the alpine region and to the emergence of new economic activities in the late 19th century. From this point of view non-marital sexuality was a highly subversive force and clearly tied to innovative ways of behaviour, both among the social elites and the common people. This paper will focus on an Alpine valley: the Val de Bagnes, a mountain region where we can rely on excellent sources on local families. Our results can partly be compared with other communities in Western Valais and in other Swiss regions.

5.3.4. Landholding and Kinship Networks in Nineteenth-Century Minas Gerais, Brazil

Mendes, Fabio Faria, Universidade Federal de Viçosa, Brazil

This paper discusses some preliminary results from ongoing research on kinship and inheritance practices in nineteenth century Minas Gerais, Brazil. The unity of analysis is the rural parish of Pringa, at the south Minas Gerais, from 1780 to 1880. Pringa valley was one of the first sites of gold-mining at the end of the seventeenth century. In the last decades of the eighteenth century the region transitioned to an economy centered on farming and ranching to supply food staples to regional markets. We use land records and probate inventories to explore patterns of inequality in land property, networks of kin and neighbours, and inheritance practices not prescribed by the Luso-Brazilian Succession Laws. We also analyze the overlapping of kin, marriage and godparent networks with the economic strategies of large farmers and smallholders.

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