

*Prolonged Connections; The Rise of the Extended Family in Nineteenth-Century England and America.* By Steven Ruggles. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987. Pp. vii, 282.

As the subtitle shows, this book is about the rise of the extended family in the nineteenth century in England and America. Contrary to the widely held theory (promulgated by the Structural Functionalists) that the Industrial Revolution brought with it a revolution towards nuclear family living, there is now growing evidence (thanks to Peter Laslett and the Cambridge Group, amongst others) that the extended family household actually increased in frequency from 1750 to 1900. It was only during the twentieth century that the extended family households declined to below the pre-Industrial level.

How did it happen? Ruggles hypothesizes this to be due to three factors, namely, economics, demography, and culture. As the author himself points out (p. 11), the primary focus of this book is demographic. His argument, in a nutshell, is that *more people* lived in extended family households in the nineteenth century than before because demographic conditions (rising life expectancy and falling age at marriage) were such that there were more relatives available to form extended households. To quote Ruggles, "at the very least, demographic change may be viewed as a necessary condition for the rise of the extended family in the nineteenth century. . . . the supply of kin is highly sensitive to variations in demographic conditions" (p. 125). Refuting historians' argument that extended family living was an adaptive strategy adopted by the poor, Ruggles argues that taking on extended relatives is rarely mutually beneficial, hence those who are in a position to take in such relatives must do so out of non-economic motives (p. 58). Evidence from Victorian Lancashire, England, and Eyrie County in New York in the United States show that extended family living was a luxury afforded only by the wealthy. Economic theories of the family, however, fail to take into consideration such non-materialistic motives for sharing residence as

altruism and social obligations. To Ruggles, the increased proportion observed in the nineteenth century was, besides the availability of extended relatives, due to the relative prosperity of the era. Victorian ideology, the important cultural factor in Ruggles's reckoning, also favoured extended family living — which is why the frequency of extended households declined in the twentieth century in spite of even greater prosperity and more favourable demographic conditions (p. 115).

Ruggles bases his arguments of the primacy of the demographic factor on a series of micro-simulations combining various demographic scenarios with assumptions about residential propensities. Residential propensities refer to the extent to which people co-resided with various categories of extended kin among those who are “exposed to the risk” of doing so. Micro-simulation is a computer-based technique used to create individual life histories by assigning demographic events (such as marriage, divorce, birth of children, death) to individuals according to a set of predetermined probabilities. The model operates as follows:

Each family group begins with a female ancestor who is born as many as 160 years before the present. The ancestor marries and has children in accordance with observed probabilities and each of her children in turn is exposed to the risks of marriage, childbirth and death. In this way, the model generates groups of related individuals. When each group is complete, all characteristics — including the timing of all events — are tabulated or written on tape for later analysis and the process begins again with a new ancestor. The procedure is repeated until an adequate sample of families is generated. (appendix C, p. 157)

When a sufficiently large number of people have been thus generated, summary statistics such as the proportion of individuals living in horizontally and vertically extended families, the relationship of the extended kin to the head, and the age, sex, and marital status composition of the extended relatives are then computed. As the author

himself recognizes, this technique involves a number of potential errors, particularly error due to the assumption that the characteristics of members of a kin group are unrelated (the “Whopper Assumptions”, p. 89). A particularly important drawback for the purpose of this study is that age at marriage is unrelated to parental death as this assumption tends to overestimate the potential for formation of the extended family where, as in pre-Industrial Eastern Europe, marriages were typically contingent upon the inheritance of property which typically occurred after the parents’ death.

To test the relative contribution of the demographic factor, the author adopted two strategies. First, residential propensities are held constant at the 1900 U.S. level while demographic conditions, corresponding to regimes in 1900 England and America (the standard population), pre-Industrial England, mid-twentieth century Western societies, current Third World countries, were allowed to vary. Second, hypothetical residential rules were used to isolate the relative importance of residential preferences *vis-à-vis* demographic constraints in determining the extent of stem living. The basic rationale of the comparisons is direct standardization, a standard analytical tool of demographers.

In these simulations, Ruggles made several departures from earlier works which he considers his “most practical contributions” but which he also admits, render his works less comparable (p. 11). First, the unit of measurement adopted is the individual rather than the household: “. . . instead of measuring the percentage of households containing extended kin, (1) measure the percentage of persons who are residing with extended kin”. Second, the study focuses on *family*, not *household* structure, and non-relatives of household heads are considered to constitute families of their own. Third, classification of family structure does not depend on the household heads listed by census takers. Instead a single individual within each family is designated to be the reference person for that family on the basis of consistent criteria (the eldest adult male if available, otherwise the

eldest adult female), thus ensuring that biologically identical families will be classified consistently (p. 12).

The book's organization is unusual, to say the least. About half of the total number of pages contained therein (pp. 3–135) is devoted to text and the remaining half to appendices (pp. 139–235), bibliography (pp. 237–74), and index (pp. 275–82). The appendices are useful for the technical grounding of the simulations. Besides the six appendices, the book also contains abundant lengthy footnotes and references, some unduely long, rambling, and often a distraction to the reader's train of thought. By the same token, the book is also very informative for a newcomer into the area for the abundant background materials, references, and wide overview provided. The author, however, tends to be too apologetic, and even appears to be making excuses, for some of the technical decisions that he made in carrying out the runs. On other occasions, he also tends to lapse into colloquialism and melodrama (see, for example, p. 59).

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