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DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURES AND CULTURAL REGIONS IN EUROPE¹

Alan Macfarlane

There is now a renewed debate within anthropology concerning the relation between 'culture' and the material world. Even those who have been very heavily influenced by Marxist thought now concede a primary, or at least major role to 'culture' however that is defined.¹ The historical and contemporary situation within 'Europe' enables us to speculate further on these matters for there is a vast amount of material already assembled concerning the relations between geography, economy, demography, society and mentality over the last thousand years. This is indeed a rich laboratory for the anthropologist and one that is throwing up some intriguing challenges. One of the curious findings of recent years has emerged as a result of work in demographic history. It is a pleasing irony that one of the 'hardest' of the social sciences, concerned with the analysis of numbers of births, marriages and deaths, should be nudging us towards that realization of the importance of 'culture' which, so some have argued, is the special contribution of anthropology.²

The collapse of many accepted beliefs about the nature of the European past can be seen within the wider context of a retreat from a rigid evolutionary framework in general. It is very tempting for the human mind to think in terms of 'stages', one of which will inevitably follow the previous one. This approach, partially modelled on Darwin's work on the evolution of species, has come to dominate most of the social sciences. In sociology the stages are called 'pre-modern' or 'traditional'. From these societies move through a 'proto-industrial' or 'early modern' phase to that of 'modern' society. Within anthropology the stages used to be called 'lower barbarism', 'higher barbarism' and 'civilised'. These very roughly correspond to the more recent stages of 'hunter-gatherer', 'tribal', 'peasant' and 'industrial' or urban. In the Marxist scheme the stages are some variant, within the context of Europe, of 'pre-feudal', 'feudal' and 'capitalist'. If we add to this the other major theories of the major change from community to association, from mechanical to organic solidarity, from pre-industrial to post-industrial, we have schemes which conveniently map out the past and enable us to pigeon-hole the present.

One related scheme is that elaborated within demography, namely that of the 'demographic transition', an idea that fits snugly into these patterns. In what the sociologists call 'traditional' societies, and anthropologists include under 'tribal' and 'peasant', the demographers find the 'pre-transition' demographic stage. During this phase there is a balance maintained by high birth rates and high death rates. In the next period, when the 'traditional' and the 'modern', or, in the Marxian scheme, the 'pre-capitalist' and the 'capitalist' are in collision, we have an intermediary situation in which demography also combines some of the old and some of the new. Mortality drops to the 'post-transition' level, but fertility remains high. There is consequently a population explosion. But when a society becomes fully 'modernised', fertility also drops and a new, low-level equilibrium with controlled fertility and controlled mortality is achieved.

¹Bourdieu 1977; Sahlins 1976

²Douglas, 1978

Although this model of demographic transition fits so nicely with general theories in the social sciences, the recently acquired information we have concerning the demography both of non-western contemporary populations and of populations in the past suggests that this model is entirely inadequate. We need at least three models to account for the demography of supposed 'pre-transition' populations. There is the classic case, described above, where perennial high mortality balances high fertility. There is a 'crisis' model in which the normal situation is for births to exceed deaths, the surpluses being periodically eliminated by the Malthusian scourges of war, famine and disease. Then there is a 'homeostatic' model, in which both fertility and mortality are maintained below the possible ceiling. Within Europe, it appears that parts of France fit well with the 'crisis' model until the eighteenth century. England from at least the fifteenth century appears to be the best documented example of the 'homeostatic' model, in which both fertility and mortality are maintained below the possible ceiling. Within Europe, it appears that parts of France fit well with the 'crisis' model until the eighteenth century. England from at least the fifteenth century appears to be the best documented example of the 'homeostatic' model. Certain city populations fit the classic model of perennial high mortality. The evidence to support these assertions has been briefly summarized elsewhere.³ If they are true, they have important consequences for the later patterns of population. In the case of the 'classic' pattern, it is indeed likely to be improved nutrition and medical care which will lead to rapid population growth. In the 'crisis' pattern, it is the elimination of war, famine and epidemic disease which will be most important. Hence, for example, the introduction of new staple foods such as potatoes in western Europe in the eighteenth century could be of central importance in eliminating famine. In the 'homeostatic' case, we are more likely to find, as the SSRC Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure are doing, that it is marital fertility patterns, and particularly the reduction in the age at marriage, which is most significant. Until we know what the supposed 'traditional' pattern is, it is difficult to predict the results of social and technical change.

We would be in a better position to understand changes if we knew **why** different parts of Europe and the non-western world have had these different patterns. One theory that has been advanced is that there will be an association between the 'homeostatic' pattern and a certain social formation which we might term 'individualistic'. One manifestation of such a formation is that of modern capitalist countries, another is that of the simplest hunter-gatherers of central Africa. Such societies are characterized by a radical distinction between economic production and social reproduction. In other words the methods of increasing wealth and the ways to continue the society on the one hand, and, on the other, physical reproduction. In such a situation, to maximize happiness, one does not have to maximize childbearing. The contrast to this is a 'group'-based system. This includes both those societies we may broadly term 'tribal', which are based on corporate kinship groups, as in Africa, and also those founded on the domestic group, often termed 'peasantries'. In such case, the basic unit of the social structure is larger than the individual person. In each case the unit of political, economic, social and ritual life is also the unit of reproduction. This means that to increase any 'good', for example political power, it is also necessary to increase reproduction at the physical level. In such a situation, fertility is likely to be at the maximum. It will only be controlled by perennial or crisis mortality. This theory has been put forward in more detail elsewhere.⁴

Unfortunately, the theory still fails to answer the ultimate question of why these different arrangements exist alongside each other. It shows the mechanism whereby a complex set of interlocked features come to bear on fertility. It stresses that we will not understand fertility patterns until we have investigated concepts of ownership, the bounds of the family, the rules concerning the transmission of property, and similar topics. But having tentatively suggested that there were very different patterns in various societies in the past, we need to move further. Here we are speculating at a very high level of abstraction. It is probably of more interest to do this than to keep to the safe but limited ground of one's own regional

³Macfarlane 1976: 403-311

⁴Macfarlane 1978a

specialism, in my case, certain English parishes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and a tribal group in the Himalayas.

Let us begin with a few of the strong impressions we now have concerning the demography of Europe during the five hundred years before the nineteenth century. If we take the whole vast area north of the Mediterranean and stretching from Portugal to Russia and Turkey, there is clearly one huge demographic 'fault' line, running down from north to south. This has been brilliantly demonstrated by John Hajnal, who locates it roughly as 'a line running roughly from Leningrad to Trieste.'⁵ To the east of this line there has for at least four hundred years, between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, been a pattern of early and universal marriage and hence, in the absence of contraception, very high fertility. To the west, there has been a pattern of delayed marriage, for women in the mid-twenties, and with perhaps ten to fifteen per cent of the women never marrying. Hajnal has cautiously refrained from speculating on the reasons for a contrast which must have been related to many other features of the economic and social patterns of the respective areas. At a later point we shall hazard a guess as to why the division between two systems was located along this line.

A second demographic fault line runs across from west to east. It is fairly clear in France, but becomes very complicated when it reaches Germany and Switzerland. It has recently been noted by both Peter Laslett and Jean-Louis Flandrin.⁶ To the north of this line, households in the past were small and nuclear in structure, consisting of parents, some unmarried young children and possibly servants. To the south, households were a little larger and often 'extended' or, as Le Play called them, 'stem'. In this case, one son would marry and stay in the household with his parents. Although there were wide regional differences within each area, it is still possible to speak of two major patterns. It is obvious that such household arrangements, for example the necessity of a male heir, will have considerable effects on reproductive behaviour. As Bourdieu has shown, for example, the extended family situation encourages the search for one male heir, but also reduces the marriage chances of the other children.⁷

We thus have three demographic regions, the eastern, the western (north) and the western (south). Within each of these were considerable differences, for example the patterns in Brittany were very different from those in the Paris basin. These will have to be put on one side for the moment. But it is important to make one more distinction, that between England, and possibly the Netherlands, and the rest of the north-western region. While there are many features in common between northern France and England in terms of household structure, the presence of servants, age at marriage, there is also a crucial difference. Northern France suffered until the middle of the eighteenth century from a 'crisis' demographic regime. That is to say, fertility was directly linked to mortality and both were linked directly to harvests. After an epidemic or other disaster, there would be an upsurge in marriages and hence in fertility. Then another crisis would occur. In other words we have an example of Malthus' limiting case, the kind of world upon which Le Roy Ladurie's models are based.⁸ In England, in contrast, the 'crisis' pattern is hardly discernible, except, possibly, in the Cumbrian fells.⁹ Notably, in the high mortality that occurred in Colyton in the middle of the seventeenth century, people did **not** rush to marry when holdings were freed by the deaths of their owners or occupiers.¹⁰ Malthus' iron law, namely that population would expand to absorb resources, did not operate in the century before Malthus' birth. England grew wealthier for a lengthy period and population either was stationary, or grew less fast than the economy. Put in another way, England and Holland seem to have departed from a subsistence level economy. There was a reasonable buffer of wealth which somehow intervened between grain and

⁵Hajnal, 1965:101

⁶Laslett 1977:15; Flandrin 1979:72

⁷Bourdieu 1976

⁸Ladurie 1974

⁹Appleby 1973

¹⁰Wrigley 1966,1968

harvest variables and the propensity to die or have children.

The importance of the variations in Europe in the past change depending on one's vantage point. From the African perspective of Jack Goody, the whole demographic and social structure is part of an Indo-European pattern, based on plough cultivation. It is the internal similarity of the vast area in contrast to the hoe cultivated, sparsely population, African situation which is striking.¹¹ Looked at from the east European perspective of John Hajnal, western Europe had a 'unique' pattern which set it off from eastern Europe. Looked at from the perspective of northern French demographers, there is a huge contrast between northern and southern Europe. Looked at from England, what strikes one is the immense difference between England and Holland on the one hand, and the rest of north-western Europe on the other, including western Ireland and Highland Scotland. It is obviously partly a matter of level. Yet the differences seem real enough and they need an explanation. For while there is now some consensus on what needs to be explained, there has really been no satisfactory solution to the puzzles thrown up by the growing information concerning past demography.

One problem is that in demographic facts we are merely dealing with epiphenomena. Births, marriage and death rates are the result of individual decisions which are, in turn affected by many factors which have nothing directly to do with 'demography'. We may briefly review some of the plausible factors which could account for the differences we have sketched in.

One candidate which we can rule out immediately is the boundaries of the present nation-states. The only demographic line which also runs along a national boundary is possibly that of England; even here it could be argued that the 'English pattern split over into Lowland Scotland and the Netherlands. France, Poland, Hungary and many other lands are cut in two and Germany is a mess. This is hardly surprising. We are dealing with demographic zones which were present for hundreds of years before nation-states reached their present form. We know that France and Germany, for example, were as different and varied internally in the nineteenth century as they were in the sixteenth. They have only been 'unified' and become meaningful political entities during the last hundred years.¹² It would have been miraculous if the demographic areas had by chance anticipated non-existent national boundaries. It is necessary to ignore the present political geography of Europe if we wish to understand this phenomenon.

Another possible candidate, physical geography, can also be ruled out. It is impossible to explain the north-south line between Eastern and Western Europe by any ecological or geographical features, nor is it possible to explain the line either across France or between England and northern France in this way. The demographic fault lines cross rivers and mountains. People who live in very different ecological situations have similar demographic regimes, while others who live in identical ecological situations have entirely opposed demographic structures. Of course physical features may be extremely important. The peculiarities of England and Holland were probably preserved because of water barriers, as were the peculiarities of the Celtic fringe by mountains and bogs. But these are only necessary, and certainly not sufficient explanations.

The material world could effect demography in a more subtle but equally powerful way by means of technology. The techniques of production, man's tools, would seem a fairly remote candidate for an explanation of demographic differences were it not for the brilliant insights of Marc Bloch who pointed to the existence in Europe of two major, opposed, agrarian civilizations. He was particularly interested in the manifestation of these systems in France. He isolated a set of inter-linked features of the agrarian system which were contrasted in northern and southern France. In the north there was a triennial crop rotation, in the south a biennial one. In the north there were long narrow fields, in the south, irregular rounder fields. This altered the nature of the lay-out of the village and was linked to different attitudes to

¹¹Goody 1976

¹²Weber 1977

communal village land, to the nature of the community, to the patterns of the family, and many other features.¹³ Thus he argued that the economic, physical and social characteristics of these two civilizations were very different. But the reasons for this division were largely a mystery, a puzzle that was particularly intriguing since Bloch's line, 'North of Poitou we enter the domain of triennial rotation', was almost exactly the same as that between the northern and southern demographic regimes discovered by historical demographers.¹⁴

Bloch was fully aware that the differences could not be explained by physical features: 'it cannot be explained by reference to geographical factors in their narrowest sense; the areas concerned are too vast, their physical characteristics too divers. Moreover, the boundaries of both zones extend far beyond the frontiers of France.' Bloch admitted that he was mystified.

The confrontation of the two systems in France represents the collision on our soil of two major forms of agrarian civilization, which may conveniently be called the northern and southern types; how these civilizations came to take their distinctive form is still a mystery, though it is likely that historical, ethnic and no doubt also geographical, factors all played their part.¹⁵

This contrast, 'the coexistence in France of agrarian institutions belonging to both main types of agriculture, the southern and the northern', Bloch believed to be 'one of the most striking features of our rural life.' He made only one serious attempt to explain the difference, in terms of technology. Bloch pointed to the existence in the two areas of two different kinds of plough. In the north the plough mounted on wheels was 'a creation of the agrarian technology which ruled the northern plains', while in the southern region there was the unwheeled plough; 'the area now occupied by the wheeled plough...corresponds very closely to the region of long-furlong open fields; the unwheeled plough on the other hand belongs to the country of irregular open-fields.'¹⁶ He then points out that it was much more difficult to turn the wheeled plough, hence the long narrow strips and the whole differences in the social and economic organization.

It is certainly very tempting to trace the whole chain of causation back to a single technological innovation. The wheeled plough produced long-furlong fields; long-furlong fields provided a powerful and constant incentive to collective practices; and hey presto, a set of wheels fixed to a plough-share becomes the basis of an entire social structure.¹⁷

Yet Bloch is too intelligent a historian to fall into such an easy deterministic trap. He points out that there were other equally attractive solutions to the problems posed by different kinds of plough. Furthermore, there is the problem of why the different ploughs were accepted in the first place. Ploughing reflects the organization of labour as much as the other way round: 'we might say that without communal habits of cultivation the wheeled plough could never have been adopted.' Bloch therefore ends on a more modest correlation, leaving the causal relationship somewhat vague:

¹³Bloch 1967:ch.2; Bloch 1966

¹⁴Bloch 1966:31

¹⁵ibid:35

¹⁶ibid:52

¹⁷ibid:54-55

for as far back in time as we can go, the wheeled plough (parent of the long-furlong field) and a collective habit of cultivation are the twin characteristics of one very distinct type of agrarian civilisation; where these criteria are lacking, the civilization will be of a totally different type.¹⁸

What mystified Bloch leaves us equally puzzled. Bloch was convinced that there were two agrarian civilizations in France, which extended over much larger areas of Europe as well. He rejected geography, politics and also race as explanations. Concerning the last of these, he felt that any simple explanation in terms of Celts, Romans, Germans and Slavs was inadequate in several respects.¹⁹ Unfortunately he also rejected his own suggestion of technology. Thus, while we have seen through his work one demonstration of the fact that the demographic fault lines also run along economic and social divisions, we are little nearer a satisfying solution. If we add to the puzzle which Bloch posed, that suggested by Hajnal's work and Wrigley's work, there is certainly no shortage of problems. Since the most difficult task is to pose interesting questions, we are enormously in the debt of these writers. But the fact that we are no nearer a solution to this type of problem than we were fifteen years ago when Hajnal published his article, or over forty years ago when Bloch first made clear the divisions in Europe, suggests that there is some curious inadequacy in our explanatory framework. We may wonder whether it is possible that a solution is so simple and so outrageous that we are blind to it, exists.

It has been impossible to explain the differences between demographic zones in Europe before the nineteenth century by physical geography, by political boundaries, or by technology. One other possibility we may consider is what may be called the 'ethnic' or 'cultural'. This is an extremely slippery concept and can only be examined indirectly, through its manifestation in such things as law, kinship, religion. Let us therefore briefly look at the first two of these.

Concerning law, I do not know as yet whether legal boundaries coincide with the 'Hajnal line', but there is some evidence that they do fit with the other two divisions. In France, the country was split into two by a line across the centre. To the south was the country of written Roman law, to the north the land of unwritten 'customary' law with a mixture of Roman and German influences. As Ladurie, for example, has pointed out, the possibility of leaving all the land to one child south of this line seems connected to the pattern of extended households earlier described.²⁰ North of this line there was an indeterminate band where the 'egalitarianism' of the north with respect to heirs struggled with the single-heir systems of the south. This band is also the dividing line between Bloch's two agrarian civilizations. North of this band the area of customary law of Northern France, and England produced nuclear households.

There was a further difference, however, which coincided with the gap between England and northern-western Europe. It would be possible to argue that in the eleventh century, the legal systems of the whole of the northern half of western Europe were almost identical, based almost exclusively on the Germanic law of the conquerors. But during the twelfth to sixteenth centuries much of northern Europe was re-conquered by a renovated Roman law. As Maitland put it:

Englishmen should abandon their traditional belief that from time to time the continental nations have been ruled by the civil law' (i.e. Roman law), they should learn how slowly the renovated Roman doctrine works its way into the jurisprudence of the parliament of Paris, how long deferred was the 'practical reception' of Roman law in Germany, how

¹⁸ibid:55-56

¹⁹Bloch 1966:62

²⁰Ladurie 1976

exceedingly like our common law once was to a French *coutume*.²¹

By the thirteenth century, England was beginning to look distinctly different from most of the rest of Europe, not because it had changed, but because Roman law had there made no conquest: 'English law was by this time recognized as distinctively English.'²² This feeling of contrast was heightened because although 'Roman jurisprudence was but slowly penetrating into northern France and had hardly touched Germany' by the thirteenth century, many Englishmen thought that the whole of Europe now had written Roman law, which 'served to make a great contrast more emphatic.'²³ Certainly, by the sixteenth century, England was an island carrying an old Germanic legal system, which lay off a land mass dominated by Roman law. The contrast is obvious in relation to criminal law, the absence of judicial torture, the use of juries, process by indictment. But the consequences for economics and kinship and hence demography are no less striking. We may briefly mention two of these contrasts.

One is in relation to the concept of property, the basis of all the relations of production. The contrast has been described by Stein and Shand:

The civil law tradition, reflected in the Codes of France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and even the Soviet Union, tends to identify ownership with the thing owned, and to limit its definition of things to moveable or immoveable property, as opposed to more abstract rights. The common law, on the other hand, has developed from the tenures of medieval feudalism and has been more ready to analyse ownership in terms of bundles of rights, obligations, and inter-personal relationships arising from the control and enjoyment of property.²⁴

This might appear to be an insignificant difference, but the great comparative jurist Sir Henry Maine rightly argued that it was of fundamental importance. He believed that the modern concept of 'private property', held by the individual, the basis of a capitalist system, arise out of the difference.

Nothing can be more singularly unlike than the legal aspect of allodial land, or, as the Romans would have called it, land held **in dominium**, and the legal aspects of feudal land. In passing from one to the other you find yourself among a new order of legal ideas.²⁵

The basis of this new world was the concept of the impartible, individually owned, estate which could be bequeathed to specific individuals.

There is no symptom that a Roman lawyer could conceive what we call a series of estates - that is, a number of owners entitled to enjoy the same piece of land in succession, and capable of being contemplated together... [a] long series of persons, all having ascertainable rights capable of co-existing in the same property - this long

²¹Maitland 1968:cvi

²²ibid:188

²³idem

²⁴Stein and Shand 1974:16

²⁵Maine 1883:342

succession of partial ownerships, making up together one complete ownership, the feodum of fee - could not have been dreamed of till a wholly new conception of landed property had arisen.²⁶

Thus in England there emerged and was maintained over many centuries a new concept of individual ownership. This was fully established by the middle of the thirteenth century at the latest. It meant that any individual, whether man, woman or child, could have absolute rights in an object. This was in complete contrast to Roman Law.

The link between concepts of ownership and demographic features needs to be worked out in detail, since it is subtle and complex. But it is obvious at a general level that the relations between individuals, and between those individuals and the physical world, in other words the 'relation of production' in Marxian terms, are enormously influential on such matters as inheritance, marriage, returns from children's labour and other features of a society which directly influence fertility strategies. For example, if, as in England, children have a private property in what they earn, which they can defend against all their kin, the attitude towards childbearing will be different to that in a society where the earnings of all the family are held in a common pool. It could thus be argued that the fact that England from the thirteenth century had an individualist legal system, which was not modified in its basic structure before the later nineteenth century, is clearly related to the fact that the demographic structure does not strike us as filling into the classic picture of a 'pre-transition' stage. The arguments in relation to property law have been developed at more length elsewhere.²⁷

The other single feature we may isolate from the complexity of the difference between Roman and customary law is the method of reckoning kinship. It was earlier briefly suggested that where there are groups of kin, formed by some kind of method of tracing descent which leads to permanent group, there the pressure on reproduction will be greater than in systems where the individual forms the constituent unit of the kinship system. Such groups are formed by unilineal systems, which create agnatic and uterine descent groups. They can also be formed by ancestor-focused cognatic descent. That is to say, in some systems one traces descent through both males and females, but combines this with a system of starting at some 'apical ancestor' and then dropping down to the present to see who is descended from him or her. Such a system is also demonstrated in the kinship terminology. In the completely ego-centric system of modern England, one can speak of or refer to 'uncles' or 'cousins', in traditional Gaelic, one had to speak of one's father's brother, or father's brother's son.²⁸ Thus in Scotland one had clans, while in England there were networks radiating out from each individual. The kinship system embodied in the customary law codes of north-western Europe was, as far as we can see, an ego-centric cognatic one. This was the one that was established by the Anglo-Saxon invasions in the sixth century and later and which has changed little since; it once dominated much of France, Germany and even Italy and Spain.

On top of this there was superimposed another system in many parts of Europe with the re-conquest affected by Roman law. Developing out of an original agnatic system, the Roman terminology and descent system was by this period cognatic in the sense that relations were traced through both sexes. But when working out degrees of relationship it operated on a principle similar to the Celtic one, that is to say, the computation was made by tracing up to the nearest common link, and then working down to the relative in question. The difference between this and the Germanic (or canonical) computation can be shown by taking one example. According to the Germanic system, a first cousin was two removes away from ego, to use Robin Fox's metaphor, the cousin was in the second layer of an onion which

²⁶ibid:343-344

²⁷Macfarlane 1978b

²⁸Fox 1967:ch.9

formed radiating rings out from an individual. One did not need to know anything about the exact links or the map of past kinship which connected one to a cousin. But in the Roman computation, a cousin was at four removes, for he was one's father's father's son's son.²⁹ This has elements of an ancestor-focused system. It makes it essential to know a good deal about one's ancestors. Although it may not have been utilized much in daily life in northern France in the seventeenth century, for example, the fact that it was the formal legal system, governing many aspects of criminal and civil law, is likely to have had far-reaching consequences. Its particular strength would vary, as would the hold of those other Roman legacies, Roman language and Roman Catholicism. Thus in the Netherlands, in parts of northern Germany and Scandinavia, the hold may have been light and become even lighter when Catholicism was rejected. But France retained its Roman language and its Roman religion.

Thus, when we speak of 'ethnic' or 'cultural' patterns, we mean this in the broadest sense, for concepts of property or of descent are neither immutable nor in the blood. Even with this caveat, it needs to be stressed that to seek an explanation of the curiously contrasted economic-demographic regimes of Europe in the past in even vaguely ethnic terms is unfashionable. Yet, looking from a very long distance, one cannot help being struck by the association between the map of cultural/ethnic areas which is beginning to emerge and the demographic/economic zones. Furthermore, if we follow the work of physical and cultural anthropologists earlier in this century, we may divide Europe into four separate biological races. To the east are the Slavs, and to the west the 'three European races are the Nordic, the Alpine and the Mediterranean', according to Kroeber and Boas.³⁰ They are differentiated by blood groups, head measurements and hair colour although, in practice, there is obviously considerable overlap. We may leave the Basques aside for the moment, but add the fact that although the Celts are denied the separateness of race, they are certainly culturally distinct. The English, a composite of various types of Nordic peoples, are the extreme example of the northern type.

This leads us to wonder whether it is a pure coincidence that Hajnal's line seems to follow the Slav/non-Slav division, that the extended household region is that of dominant Roman culture, that northern mainland Europe should have features which seem to mingle the south and yet also seem to overlap with England, that extreme example of a stranded Teutonic society? It is clearly neither fashionable, nor, to some people's tastes, wise or politically safe, to even whisper such things. But if we apply Occam's razor, the suggestion is certainly economical. One of its major defects is that it just pushes the explanation back one stage further: what do we mean by 'Celtic', 'Slavic', and so on. Some attempt to begin to answer this has been made in the discussion of property and kinship, but the analysis of such subjects as language, ritual, art and other fields.

Some stimulating suggestions as to what might be done are made by Peter Burke in his survey of popular culture in early modern Europe. He points out that 'there was great regional variation in the popular culture of early modern Europe, but this variation was structured, and coexisted with other kinds of variation.' Unfortunately, no one 'has tried to describe the cultural geography of Europe as a whole', but in two or three pages Burke sketches in some of the possible contrasts. He sums this up by suggesting a 'distinction between three Europes: north-western, southern, and eastern.' For example, 'southern Europe, Mediterranean Europe, was Romance-speaking, Catholic...with an outdoor culture...low literacy...and a value-system laying great stress on honour and shame.'³¹ It is intriguing that these three Europe should coincide with the independently discovered three demographic regions suggested at the start of this paper. If we add kinship, law, technology to Burke's set of variables, it is possible to see how an enormously suggestive and curious set of contrasts would emerge. As Burke continues, 'relatively sharp cultural differentiation could be seen whenever a number of contrasts

²⁹Flandrin 1979:25

³⁰Kroeber 1948:133ff; Boas 1938:139

³¹Burke 1978:56-7

coincided.³²

In one way I am advocating to the kind of problems that interested Bloch. But we are in a better position than Bloch to find solutions. His great work on these subjects was written in the shadow of an aggressive nationalism which stressed the superiority of all things German. Bloch was finally tortured and shot for his opposition to the German re-conquest. It was therefore not surprising that he should feel an aversion for an ethnic explanation. Nowadays the pressures are the other way; all national differences in Europe are collapsed in the sunlight of the Common Market. It is easier for a historian or demographer to speak of these forbidden interpretations. Even so, we might well follow Bloch's advice when he warns that when speaking of the differences in France, "Race" and "people" are words best left unmentioned in this concept of ethnic unity. It is more fruitful to speak of types of civilization.³³ The important point to stress is that whatever we call them, it is absolutely clear that we cannot speak of 'pre-transition' Europe. Just as it is absurd to lump together different peoples on the arbitrary criteria of being 'pre-industrial' or 'pre-capitalist', so it is clear that every aspect of demography varied immensely in various parts of Europe up to the end of the nineteenth century. This, of course, made the general decline in fertility throughout Europe in the later nineteenth century even more mysterious. But the similarities within Europe after 1900 make it even more important to realize the differences that existed before then. It would be extremely misleading to lump England and France together, or even the whole of France together, as if they were all part of some prototype Common Market. However politically desirable it may be for us to think that this was the case, it makes nonsense of the historical record.

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³²ibid:58

³³Bloch 1966:62

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1. This is an amended version of a paper on 'Some features of the early stages of the demographic transition in Europe' presented at the Institute of British Geographers annual conference at Cambridge 1979. This explains the demographic slant to the article. I am grateful to Richard Jenkins and Sarah Harrison for reading the paper and for helpful suggestions concerning it. It should be stressed that it is far from a finished article. It is merely a set of reflections intended to provoke discussion.