

1984-02-17: [FAMILY SIZE & EXTENSION] *Lignage--Ménage*

In terms of family structure, the lineage-to-menage shift that is supposed to have occurred within the past two centuries may be defined as change from a diachronically extended family to a synchronically nuclear family that is manifested in two ways: first, in the nature of familial resources and the management of them; second, in the way that individuals typically regarded their obligations towards ancestors and descendants. The first of these is economical in the original sense of that word (Greek *oiconomia*, meaning household management), the second psychological. This is obviously fundamental for students of family history, for, without trying to say that this change from lineage to menage has any special advantage over other ways of analyzing family history, it is one for which the evidence is beautifully well stated (i.e., in the law) and which, if falsified, would have repercussions on many of those other ways of analyzing family history.

The main elements of the lineage concept are as follows. There exists an element of familial wealth that travels through the generations relatively unchanged. It consists mostly of real property (*immeubles*), above all else land and houses; they take on an almost sacred aspect in the mentality of the family: a sacred treasure of the past that the present generation must transmit to the future. The precise identity of the land and house may change, but the notional value, which counts most, endures. The lineage concept, therefore, is more than just lineage property, or patrimony, in a physical sense; it embodies, also a way of regarding that property that touches, the relationships of family members to one another in a vital way: respect for parents, and ancestors, consideration of siblings, obligations towards descendants. In this sense it has a profoundly moral value, and those who cherish the respect-consideration-obligation elements in the family attach great importance to the function of patrimony, in the old lineage concept manner, in promoting these values. It is., if one reflects, a rather bizarre mating of mere matter--earth, wood, and stone--with transcendent social values. Lastly, in functional terms, this lineage property must not be confounded with other resources of family subsistence. Not only is it clearly defined in the law and declared in law to be quasi inalienable, but also it must be such in family thought and deed.

The main elements of the menage concept are as follows (set forth so as to underline differences). All parts, of familial wealth are at every moment potentially at the disposal of the current possessors. Most of it consists of fluid wealth, capital worth, or even if land and houses, are the largest part of the family wealth they are regarded as marketable items in terms of the family's needs. Whatever preferential sentiment there may be for this or that piece of family property, none of it is sacred

but all is potentially expendable if the needs of the family are great enough. In short, the rational needs of the moment override any consideration of the ancestral derivation of a certain *richesse* as well as the notion that a given *richesse* must be saved intact for the future use of children. (The provision for children, as soon to be set forth, is far from inoperative, but it is not done directly in a given mass of riches.)

Comparing the two concepts, it is clear immediately why the lineage concept has such alluring moral stature compared with the menage concept. The latter seems to have as moral element only that of immediate self-gratification. The law does not call for a patrimonial element to be distinguished, and the family does not have a sentiment of piety towards whatever it possesses of inherited wealth. Everything is there for the critic to pronounce the death of the family in an organ of immediate self-gratification. The situation is quite analogous to the scenario of doom for the family that Le Play set forth, or the theme of the absence of paterfamilial control of inheritances, even though in terms of the laws of succession that proceed from quite opposite premises, the doom of the menage concept supposedly emanating from the total disposability of the patrimony by the current family heads, the doom of Reforme Social from the inability of the head of the family to control the destiny of the patrimony. Both are wrong for the same reason: they presume the predominance of evil drives in man that only good laws can check: let children be guaranteed an inheritance and they will be indolent; let the family regard all its wealth as amenable to immediate disposal and it will be profligate. Between them they cancel each other out, for one of them presumes that virtue lies where the other, finds it wanting, and vice versa.

The true menage concept of *oeconomia* is not that of instant gratification but of a training regime to allow the children to live a life at least as good as their parents'. All the family wealth is potentially disposable for this purpose, although sentiment enhances the value of particular things beyond their market worth and a certain part of the whole should be set aside as savings, so that there is a "capital worth" which is the equivalent of the patrimony in the lineage concept. These things the parents would probably concede to be true. The "training regime" notion, however, would puzzle if not offend them, but it can be argued in socio-psychological terms that that is what they are up to.

There are, as said above, two aspects to be considered, the socio-psychological and the merely economical, in the first of these we assume that parents may hope their children will enjoy a better life than they do but will not brook the notion that it will be a worse one. The socializing of children occurs largely in the milieu of their upbringing, where behavioral patterns in social relationships, cultural preferences, and the like are imbibed by imitative experience

and carried over into later life. Children are thus made capable in living in a certain social milieu--class, if you will. They may aspire to higher, but will usually accept what they've grown up in as decent. Expectations, too, get fixed during the socializing process of youth, and achievement later is closely related to expectations. You may hope for a better life than your parents knew, but you expect you will have one at least as good. In brief, the parents' lifestyle is a strong determinant of the level of social attainment the child is capable of and the minimum at least of what he expects. These things may be taken as universally true, operating equally on all levels of society. They provide at the same time a powerful cohesive force for class stability and a great impediment to social mobility even when other, factors in society seem so amenable to class fluidity.

On the merely economical side things do not operate equally on all levels of society, but vary directly according to the family's niche--class, if you will. The super-rich not only raise the children in a condition of great material and cultural advantages but then provide them by inheritance with the means to continue that life and raise their, children in it, and so on. Higher. education is almost always a part of that upbringing, and an income-producing profession result, but that in itself is not vital for. the perpetuation of the merely economical side of the family. What is important, if the family is not to skid socially over time is that each generation acquire a good sense of how to perpetuate the family fortune--at least to see that sound management of the estate is maintained. All these things are quite the reverse on the lower depths of society, in the merely economical terms. The family subsists entirely on earned income, there is never any significant surplus, and hence nothing of material value to transfer to the children when they are adults. This does not mean that there are not pleasures and happiness in this life, that it is not decent if earned income is regular, and that the children may be the morally superior to the highly advantaged ones in their, cohort.