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Leslie Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime: Pronatalism and the Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern France*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. x + 247 pp. Figures, appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$49.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-19-538160-3.

Review essay by Katherine Crawford, Vanderbilt University.

To my mind, gerunds are rather useful words. As Leslie Tuttle's gerundive title reminds us, so much of history is on-going process—both in so far as history marches on and because the profession does too. One of the comparatively recent developments in French history is taking seriously the relationship between the monarchy, gendered male at its apex by virtue of "Salic Law," and the dynamics of gender and sexuality that formed part of the cultural specificity of France.[1] It is not that the two have never met, but Professor Tuttle reveals how we can learn more about both state building and gender through her analysis of old regime population politics. In her measured analysis, Tuttle suggests a number of dimensions at least briefly, and I use these suggestions as opportunities to invite her to speculate, or at least to ruminate, on several less tangible, but nonetheless culturally powerful, aspects of the debates and developments she has traced.

While accounts of the monarchy often discuss its shortcomings, historians less often follow the intricacies of a piece of legislation from its beginnings to attempts to apply it on a local level, as those efforts encounter the idiosyncrasies of individuals and the variety of unanticipated difficulties of enforcement. Because studies of early modern French government have revealed the problems of tax collection and the uneven distribution of privilege, some of the failings of the Edict on Marriage (1666) seem predictable.[2] Indeed, even before measures to encourage large families were enacted, some limitations that appear obvious in hindsight evidently were not so at the time. Colbert's plans to discourage vows of celibacy, for instance, had to be curtailed severely before the Edict could gain the force of law. In terms of its execution, I think it is not surprising to find, as Tuttle demonstrates, that the cooperation of the localities with a measure that gave tax exemptions to fertile and often relatively well-off families met with significant resistance. While the ambiguities of key aspects of the Edict—what happens when a family with twelve children as required by the statute to secure tax exemption loses one or more of those children to the ravages of early modern mortality—are within the realm of expectation, the abrupt and relatively ignominious withdrawal of the legislation in 1683 is a bit more startling. Moreover, seeing all of these pieces in detailed operation is both informative, and as I suggest below, stimulating.

Tuttle is resolutely in the revisionist camp when it comes to interpreting the efficacy of the French monarchy. At least since William Beik's *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France*, historians have questioned how much the rhetoric of absolute monarchy matched the efficacy of government on the ground.[3] The scarcity of royal officials, the reliance on local elites to keep order, and the lack of direct control over the tax structure were among the features of Louis XIV's government that significantly inhibited the top-down, authoritarian rule trumpeted in the language of absolutist theory. Less discussed in the evaluations of the functional problems of the old regime is the government's ability to learn from its mistakes. One of the illuminating aspects of Tuttle's study is watching the government learn from Colbert's first failed attempt. The shift from pulling taxpayers out of the pool

to rewarding the *famille nombreuse* based on need indicates that the often ossified structure of the monarchy could change and adapt—albeit, as we know from hindsight, too slowly to avert catastrophe.

As for questions of gender and sexuality, procreation has long been a concern of gender historians.[4] Marriage and inheritance are recognized as gender-charged issues, and here, Tuttle provides a new dimension to our knowledge. Pronatalist legislation of the sort that Colbert initiated rested on patriarchal gender ideology, and Tuttle emphasizes the iterations of the paternalist metaphor of king as father in the shaping of French pronatalism. The stubborn recurrence to the *père de famille* without a corresponding *mère de famille* is only one of the more obvious manifestations of patriarchal authority cast as (benevolent) paternalism. Tuttle identifies a series of intertwined political positions, rhetorics, and logics around procreation that supported Colbert's pronatalist politics. The familiar issue of royal fertility—especially with the relatively recent failures of the late Valois kings to reproduce—was only one kind of political concern. The notion of the king as father caring for his subjects/children; the conviction that fertility is a sign of divine blessing and reflects obedience to the Biblical requirement to “be fruitful and multiply;” and the understanding that a burgeoning population is good—all these factors worked to support pronatalist thinking. Gently but firmly, Tuttle signals the gender asymmetry of pronatalism. The stunning math she provides of a woman pregnant for 126 months out of the 184 months of her marriage offers a cogent reply to the presumption that pronatalism was an obvious “good” (p. 136). Pronatalism was by men, for men, at the physical expense of women.

As Tuttle understands, the gory details were part of what made early modern pronatalism an aspect of gender ideology, with all the stickiness that makes ideology omnipresent, inescapable, and, paradoxically, largely invisible. I found myself wondering about the relationship of pronatalism—both as an emanation of the monarchy and in terms of the local responses that Tuttle documents and analyzes—to cultural fantasies. Two rather different but interrelated fantasies seem to me to be quite related to pronatalist political logic. The first is domesticity as fantasy. Literary critic Wendy Wall has argued that domesticity functioned as a fantasy that supported national identity in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Her review of conduct guides, cookbooks, and theatrical representations of domesticity supports her contention that English identity rested on nostalgic notions of bourgeois self-sufficiency centered on the home as the locus of production and cultural reproduction.[5] Domesticity is not pronatalism, of course, but the domestic is both the locus of pronatalism at its reproductive core and the space in which the analogies of family/state patriarchalism are elaborated. This sort of argument is not Tuttle's aim, but domestic fantasies popped up occasionally in the course of her argument. How might pronatalism and domesticity coalesce into a French national fantasy? Was the failure to impose marital order in New France an indication that such a fantasy was not available in France? Does considering the different sites—New France and France—in terms of domestic fantasy tell us anything about pronatalism?

The second fantasy—that of the happy patriarchal home—can also be considered a nightmare, depending on one's perspective. As historian Laura Gowing has argued, women's bodies were the key locus around which intimacy was figured. Gowing analyzes the remnants of experience of ordinary people to understand how (female) bodies were culturally constructed.[6] I am curious about how the culturally constructed female body disrupts the patriarchal fantasy. After all, all the aspects of embodiment in fertility—pregnancy, giving birth, nursing—entail physical intimacies with others. The French insistence on separating nursing and care-giving (p. 136) seems to me a manifestation of acute concern about the power entailed in intimacy of the female sort. How much did functional reproductive intimacy rest not just on resigned acquiescence, but also on willing acceptance of the dangers and possibilities entailed in such intimacy? After all, the reproductive body is at once physically integral and a form of fundamentally alien labor in the context of pronatalist production.[7]

I recognize that I am doing that thing we all hate: I am asking Professor Tuttle to talk about the book (or aspects of the book) that she did not write. I do not mean that she should have written a different

book. The one she wrote raises questions because she has teased out another dimension of the world of gender and procreation that is usually seen as either insignificant to the grand narratives of history or as a depressing tale of social pressure and economic hardship. The dynamics of pronatalism—fathers eager to secure tax exemptions, localities anxious to prevent the destruction of the tax base, family strategies that kept women nearly eternally pregnant, the evident persistence of unsanctioned unions as matters of expediency and desire in New France, a state that learned too slowly from its mistakes—reveal perpetual negotiations around priorities of bodies and families and the state. Whether these confrontations are species of cooperation or conciliation or domination, I want to suggest, are cultural fantasies with which we are still living today.

NOTES

[1] There has been some discussion about the origins of Salic Law. Sarah Hanley has termed Salic Law “fraudulent.” Sarah Hanley, “Identity Politics and Rulership in France: Female Political Place and the Fraudulent Salic Law in Christine de Pizan,” *Changing Identities in Early Modern France*, ed. Michael Wolfe (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 78-94 and “Social Sites of Political Practice in France: Lawsuits, Civil Rights, and the Separation of Powers in Domestic and State Government, 1500-1800,” *AHR* 102, no. 1 (February, 1997): 27-52. Craig Taylor has demurred. See his “The Salic Law and the Valois Succession to the French Crown,” *French History* 15, no. 4 (2001): 358-77. Regardless, by the sixteenth century, the exclusion of women under the rubric “Salic Law” was accepted as fact.

[2] See for instance James B. Collins, *Fiscal Limits of Absolutism: Direct Taxation in Early Seventeenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Martin Wolfe, *The Fiscal System of Renaissance France* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972); and Michael Kwass, *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation in Eighteenth-Century France: Liberté, égalité, fiscalité* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[3] William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). See also Collins, *Fiscal Limits of Absolutism*, and Albert N. Hamscher, *The Parlement of Paris After the Fronde, 1653-1673* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976) for different dimensions of the limits on royal power.

[4] For a variety of perspectives, including but not limited to France, see for instance *Family and Sexuality in French History*, eds. Robert Weaton and Tamara K. Hareven (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Heidi Wunder, “*Er ist die Sonn’, sie ist der Mond*”: *Frauen in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich: Beck, 1992); *Marriage and Sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*, ed. Eukene Lacarra Lanz (New York: Routledge, 2002); and Katherine A. Lynch, *Individuals, Families, and Communities in Europe, 1200-1800: The Urban Foundations of Western Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[5] Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See also Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), which analyzes the estrangement that often marks domestic intimacy.

[6] Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003).

[7] Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare’s Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). See also Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 22-29. Gowing emphasizes the aporia in analogies that undergird domestic patriarchy.

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