parisons interesting and manageable, providing a good balance between detailed single-country descriptions and more generalised overview of dozens of nations. Even though each empirical chapter deals with one country at a time, the common comparative conceptual framework and the harmonised research design are meant to contribute to the *coherence* of the book. Moreover, the introductory and closing chapters seek to provide a common background and synthesise the findings. However, the volume also proves that one size does not fit all – not only in the case of work–family reconciliation policies but also when one tries to select theoretical concepts and research methods for several country studies. As a result, some chapters use additional theories, like the capability approach of Amartya Sen for Sweden and Hungary, the theory of social production function complemented by the life-course approach and new home economics for Germany, and the preference theory, gender equity theory and social capital theory in the case of Poland. Moreover, childbearing choices and the employment situation of women are conceptualised and measured somewhat differently in each of the five countries, and the Hungarian analysis is the only one which makes use of qualitative data. However, these differences do not endanger the comparability of the findings across countries.

Lívia Murinkó

TOMKA, BÉLA (2013): *A Social History of Twentieth-Century Europe.* London – New York: Routledge, XIX + 526 pages.

Béla Tomka's monumental summary of Europe's twentieth-century social history was published in English in 2013, four years after the Hungarian original. It seems quite natural to see such a volume, dealing with urgent problems European societies have had to face for decades, finding its way to a broader audience in Hungary and Europe. Tomka's book focuses on the following issues: gloomy demographic trends, 'lowest-low' fertility, ageing of the population, migration that is hardly controlled and all of its resultant social, political and cultural consequences, changing family life and interpersonal relations, altering gender roles, values and norms, weakening social cohesion, individualism, secularism, post-industrial and/or post-modern societies, post-materialism, the future of the welfare state, consumer societies and Americanisation, urbanisation and the mass media. It is obvious that all these trends and concepts are vague, controversial and sometimes rejected by experts. Writing such a comprehensive volume calls for a brave heart and deep knowledge, yet such an endeavour frequently results in criticism that mostly focuses on specific details. So it is not surprising that few books with such ambitious goals make it to the market.

In addition, Tomka's book is the only one to cover both Western and East Central Europe (mostly the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), sometimes reaching into South-Eastern Europe too. In this respect it is unique, as it contains all the important aspects of twentieth-century social history connecting it to Eastern European developments: divergences and convergences, the dynamics of which differ by subject, regime changes more broadly and Eastern European capitalism over the last 25 years.

Besides an introduction and conclusion, the book consists of eight chapters on population (covering trends and theories such as population size, fertility, mortality, changing age composition, migration and the theories of the two demographic transitions); family and households (contraction and nuclearisation of the family, replacement of marriage by cohabitation, increasing divorce rates and more frequent extramarital births, changing interpersonal relationships between partners, changing attitudes toward children, growing individualism and secularism, as well as theories, such as the Hajnal line dividing Europe into two marriage patterns, Laslett's household typology, and theories on intra-household relations by Philippe Aries, Lawrence Stone and Edward Shorter); social stratification and mobility; the welfare state; work, leisure and consumption; politics; urbanisation; and education, religion and culture. In every chapter the author describes the main trends based on the most general indicators of the subject and surveys the usual interpretations. I find this to be one of the book's most important advantages: it assesses interpretations of economic, social and cultural processes that are unfolding even now, the consequences of which we cannot see and are difficult to foresee or predict.

Every good history book contributes to the interpretation of the present, but in this case the connection is particularly direct and alive. The closing section of the chapter on families and households (*Families in the new millennium: the post-modern as a return to the pre-modern?*) is particularly interesting in this respect. Here, the growing uncertainty of families is discussed as a kind of revival of pre-industrial characteristics. The growing rate of dissolved unions and frequent remarriages (or new extramarital unions), and the various forms of co-residence (and to some extent the decreasing nuptiality and the rising age of marriage) do indeed resemble pre-industrial times – though with some notable differences. In the pre-industrial era it was high mortality that caused the high frequency of union dissolutions, uncertain family relations and less predictable family life courses, whereas in our age it is the increasing frequency of divorces that produces comparable results. The development of European societies appears to be non-linear and reversible, though different causes and conditions may lie behind these seemingly similar processes. The same problem emerges again in the discussion of social stratification and mobility, where the author speaks about 'purer' forms of capitalism of the post-industrial or post-modern

era, but in a different context. Such discussions make the book a particularly exiting read.

The immense reference list and the wide selection of further readings grouped by chapters and topics give the reader a chance to deepen his or her knowledge and to form his or her own interpretation. Tomka's volume is not really an essay on Europe's twentieth century and the present day but a scientific monograph, one that can be treated as the starting point for further studies or as an aid to those wanting a comprehensive view at a more advanced level. Its target audience is primarily university students studying twentieth-century history but should also be of interest to anyone who is interested in understanding of our present-day problems better and their roots and prospects in the future.

Such a comprehensive book always raises the question whether it would have been better written as a collaboration of field experts. More authors usually know more. Yet single authorship has its advantages too: a consistent concept, methodology, structure and style. I think that the end result justifies the means. In writing this book the author truly performed the job of an entire expert team. Naturally, there is always something missing from a work of synthesis such as this. It is indeed not possible to include everyone's hobby horse in such a 'concise' history and there are always controversial statements or even errors. Fortunately there are not many in this book. However, for students' sake, it would be worth collecting and correcting them chapter by chapter. Here I provide examples of all three from the chapters on population and family.

In discussing recent demographic trends (lowest-low fertility, the decreasing popularity of marriage, the growing rate of union dissolution, the preference for less stable forms of living together), many important aspects are highlighted, for instance decreasing mortality, changes of values, interpersonal relations, attitudes, changing gender roles, female employment, the prolonged process of education, etc. However, globalisation and the resulting uncertainty in the labour market would also be worth mentioning as factors that hinder people from shaping long-term relationships and making irreversible decisions that influence the rest of their lives. In other chapters (e.g. the one on the welfare state) globalisation does have its own place in the discussion. As for disputable or oversimplified statements we can give an example from Chapter 3 (p. 70): "*In most regions in East-Central Europe and the Balkans, there were no traditions on family farms for employing non-relatives who would also integrate into the household, like in many parts of Western Europe*". In fact, such traditions *did* exist. There are similar percentages of servants, lodgers and employees in Hungarian peasant households in the nineteenth century as in Western Europe. No doubt the context or the type of that kind of servitude differed, but the simplification of households (the gradual disappearance of lodgers and employees) in the twentieth century was a similar process in both Western and East Central

Europe. Finally, there is a mistake or misunderstanding. According to the author, Peter Laslett and his colleagues provided a large body of evidence on pre-industrial household structure and family life, which refuted the traditional evolutionist model of family and household formation (a development going from complex forms towards simpler ones in parallel with modernisation). So far, so good. However, for Tomka these efforts were based on family reconstitution, a method developed by the French demographer Louis Henry. A bit later on: "*when such data collection is performed on a mass scale... and is complemented by other sources, an accurate image of the major characteristics of family structure in the past can be gained*" (p. 61). This is incorrect. Family reconstitution is based on the information gained from the lists of marriages, births and deaths in parish records, which contain no information about households (persons actually living together). It was developed primarily to analyse long-term demographic processes in the pre-statistical era, when only the long series of demographic events were at our disposal. One of the great disadvantages of the method is that we know nothing about the household in which those events took place. So the inclusion of household context into the analysis of fertility or mortality (which would otherwise be highly important) is not possible. Laslett and his successors used other sources mentioned by Tomka, namely household lists or population censuses, which also included the composition of households and families. The name of Henry's method can cause misunderstandings, but family reconstitution data do not give any clue as to family structure on their own. We can see here that there are also some disadvantages to being a single author of such a comprehensive piece of work. All in all, these small errors and deficiencies do not seriously diminish the value of the book and the merits of the author. In my view this is a book that should be included in the libraries of all scholars studying social history and all persons interested in our past and present problems alike.

Péter Őri

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