
In this book, Todd returns to the by now well-known thesis that the inheritance laws of agrarian societies have important consequences for present day industrial nations. There are some peoples—like the Arabs, French, Romans, Russians, and Spaniards—where family systems are symmetrical.
in the sense that all sons inherit an equal part of the land, and there are other peoples—like the Basques, Germans, Greeks, Israelis, Japanese, and Sikhs—where one person is the prime inheritor. The English are classified as having an asymmetrical family system, since persons have the liberty to bequest their inheritance as they see fit. These differences foster, so maintains Todd in the first chapter of the present book, distinct views of the nature of the human species. A symmetrical system tells the unconscious that if brothers within a family are equal, all the members of a nation are equal and all peoples of the world too (p. 24).

Indeed, the more children are treated unequally, the more the view of the human species is not one of simple dissimilarities, but of inferiority and superiority. According to Todd, the recent abolition of unequal inheritance laws in certain countries, has not eliminated the differentialist view of the human species. Parents still transmit this view by treating children unequally with respect to education. Todd adds that a comparative study of the school level attained by oldest sons compared with the level achieved by their brothers and sisters is not available (p. 35).

In the other chapters of this book, Todd explains the degree of separation of immigrants from the established population in the United States (Chapters 2–5), England (Chapter 6), Germany (Chapters 7 and 8), and France (Chapters 9–12) by way of the inequalities stipulated in inheritance laws and the views of the human species they foster. These chapters turn Todd’s intriguing ideas into testable hypotheses by assuming that the extent of intermarriage furnishes a good indication of the degree of separation or assimilation, and by scavenging the existing sociological literature for empirical information on the extent of various types of intermarriage. It must be said that the way the anthropologist and historian Todd treats these statistics is not up to the standards of the sociological literature he quotes. In fact, Todd remains unconscious of the fact that a higher percentage of intermarriage for a group may be the simple results of its smallness in numbers.

In the chapter on the segregation of Blacks and Whites Todd points out that nowadays, some 25 years after the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional state laws forbidding intermarriage of Blacks and Whites, the percentage of Black–White marriages still is extremely low. Todd takes this finding as supporting his hypothesis of differentialism in the United States. He then discounts measures aiming at equal rights for Blacks. When dealing with the abolition of slavery, Todd maintains that at the unconscious level, the abolitionists were against slavery because slavery encouraged sexual intercourse between Blacks and Whites. It is a pity that in this chapter he does not distinguish the Whites of the United States according to inheritance laws in their nation of origin. Are Italian Americans, stemming from a tradition of equal inheritance, more likely to marry Blacks than Swedish Americans, with their tradition of unequal inheritance? And why were Jewish Americans, with laws favouring the eldest son, prominent in the fight for equal rights for Blacks?

The chapter just discussed is not the only one that turns into an attempt to explain away evidence that speaks against Todd’s main thesis. In the chapter on England, Todd makes clear that the recent migration of Black Caribbean to England has been accompanied by more Black–White intermarriages than are found in the United States. However, Todd is not surprised. The strong class differentialism of the industrial revolution blocks the development of a racial differentialism: a sufficient number of individuals are liberated by their working-class identity from their White identity. The view of racial differentialism is there: the Labour Party accepted the view of irreducible differences between human beings by defining in one of its party programmes integration not as assimilation but as equal opportunity and tolerance of cultural diversity.

Because asymmetry in the German family is much stronger than in the English family, the idea of racial differences in Germany did not depend only on skin colour, an external characteristic. It also included the view that there are human beings with an interior that is inferior to that of other human beings. As in earlier chapters, Todd takes examples from all over. It gradually becomes clear that the present book could do with a proper method for ascertaining the prevalence of specific views on the nature of humanity, just as, when studying the world-views of various brands of Protestantism, the sociologist Weber limited himself to a content analysis of books on the cure of souls.

Although sufficient data are available, Todd does not describe the trend in Jewish–Gentile intermarriage in Germany before the Second World War. Most attention is paid to trends in intermarriage in recent decades between Germans and Turks and between Germans and Yugoslavs. According to Todd, Turkey embraced modernization more than Yugoslavia, but
Germany is assimilating the Yugoslavs faster than the Turks. About 80 per cent of Yugoslavs now marry Germans, whereas for Turks the figure is close to 10 per cent. This would be expected, since Turkey has an asymmetrical family system and Yugoslavia a symmetrical one.

France is the only country treated extensively by Todd that has accepted, in his own words, a principle of equality into its anthropological structures. However, universalism does not cover the whole of France, since the equal treatment of sons upon the death of their father was limited to the Paris basin. Todd maintains that French universalism was slow to be adopted by other European countries (p. 206). He explores the question of the extent to which blood-shedding in France shortly after the declaration of human rights and Napoleon’s somewhat later empire-building contributed to this.

According to Todd, assimilation of Jews went further in France than in England or the United States and much further than in Germany. A comparison of Goldstein’s figures for the United States with those of Bensimon and Della Pergola for France (p. 258), shows that in around 1970 in France Jewish-Gentile intermarriage was more common than in the United States. Todd does not cite the well-known figures for intermarriage in Germany in the interbellum. Without watering Todd’s hypothesis down, they just do not fit.

In contrast to Todd, assimilation of Jews went further in France than in England or the United States and much further than in Germany. A comparison of Goldstein’s figures for the United States with those of Bensimon and Della Pergola for France (p. 258), shows that in around 1970 in France Jewish-Gentile intermarriage was more common than in the United States. Todd does not cite the well-known figures for intermarriage in Germany in the interbellum. Without watering Todd’s hypothesis down, they just do not fit.

In contrast to the North American School (Todd’s words, at p. 266) consisting of Hyman, Marrus, and Paxton, Todd does not regard the Dreyfus Affair and Vichy as indicating that the emancipation of French Jews had failed. These phenomena show that outside the Paris basin, universalism in France had weak roots. Todd buttresses this assertion by referring to a content analysis of the national and regional press by Janine Ponty on the revision of Dreyfus’s conviction. The fact that 25 per cent of French Jews did not survive the Second World War, a percentage much lower than that for Belgium and the Netherlands (p. 273), is taken as telling in favour of French universalism under Vichy.

As to contemporary France, Todd presents figures showing that intermarriage between Algerians and French persons in France is much more prevalent than intermarriage between Turks and Germans in Germany (p. 305). According to Todd, these differences cannot be explained fully by postulating that Algeria is francophone and that Turkey lacks a strong German influence. No further evidence for this assertion is adduced. A high correlation between the proportion of Maghreb persons in a French province and the percentage of votes for the extreme right is discussed. An analysis of residuals shows that in the provinces of the Paris basin the vote for the extreme right is lower than expected on the basis of the percentage of persons from the Maghreb. In these provinces out-marriage is more widespread too. This analysis (pp. 309–12) is reported so briefly that it is difficult to follow.

Todd finishes the present book by maintaining that French society has a false consciousness of itself when it stresses the high percentage of votes for the extreme right; he also argues against what he takes to be an empty notion of a European identity. I would like to conclude this review by stating that the author of the present study sometimes forgets the Austrian-English principles of searching for counter-instances to hypotheses. Because of its strong tendency to make the facts fit better than they do, the book under review sometimes reads as a perhaps unconscious, but to an outsider all too obvious, attempt to legitimate the grandeur de la France. However, the book addresses a worthwhile and neglected question, presents a bold hypothesis—the idea of an unconscious is not necessary to it—and treats it in a comparative fashion. It therefore deserves the critical attention of European sociologists.

Wout Ultee

University of Nijmegen