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- 1 It is a little confusing that this book has no country indication in its title: written in German, it is about spousal murder in France. Perhaps the publisher insisted on this unspecificity. It is less of a concern for internationally oriented readers with an interest in the history of crime, justice and its cultural implications. For them, Dorothea Nolde presents a valuable contribution to the study of homicide and marriage. Indeed, her analysis covers a larger field than just criminal justice history in a narrow sense. The book's first half deals with the family, marriage and marital authority in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France. Contemporary moralist writings and, secondarily, narrative literature, constitute the principal sources here. The second part consists of a case study of trials for spousal murder, 1580-1620, at the *Parlement* of Paris – a source pioneered by another non-French historian, Alfred Soman. As many readers will know, the Parisian *Parlement* had appeal jurisdiction over two-thirds of France; a disproportionate share of the defendants came from Paris and its surroundings though.
- 2 The analysis in the opening part looks relatively familiar at first sight. The work of moralists such as Jean Benedicti, for example, has already been studied by Jean-Louis Flandrin almost thirty years ago. The value of the first part lies in its depth. Considerable attention is paid to themes such as hierarchy, marital conflict and power relations. Nolde shows in detail that the nuclear family and the paramount position of the husband/ father in it received a new social and cultural emphasis in the sixteenth century. The theme of the symbolic equation of paternal and political authority, too,

receives greater attention than previous historians have given it. And of course the first part deals amply with the views of moralists and narrative writers about spousal murder. There is a large amount of quotations from the literary sources – in German with the French original in the footnotes. The second part begins somewhat disappointingly with an obligatory discussion of the institutions involved: what did the Parlement do, who were the judges, what were the sentences, etc. These chapters are valuable nevertheless as reference pieces, although readers who wish to quickly consult the tables only would have to know that PAI stands for *plus amplement informé*.

- 3 The second part becomes much more interesting, at least for this reviewer, when it gets to the actual offenses and the circumstances in which they had been committed. Here we also touch on one of the book's major strengths. The discourse analysis of the first part is firmly connected with the study of judicial practices in the second. As Nolde emphasizes, the tales of spouse killing, as they emerge from the trial records, are no straightforward accounts of what had happened. We know they never are, but in this case she is able to reconstruct fairly accurately to what extent the stereotypes inherent in the moralist and narrative literature of the age influenced the magistrates' perceptions and hence the way in which they conducted the trials. A woman who had killed her husband, for example, was often suspected of having an affair and hence the court always inquired about it. Generally, a much greater share of female defendants than male defendants had acted together with an accomplice. Partly, this reflected the reality of the cases, but for another part these statistics were a judicial artefact. Female defendants were always interrogated about male accomplices, whether lovers or not, whereas in case of a male defendant the magistrates did not particularly insist on this point. Even more, in the course of a trial, male helpers sometimes were redefined from mere assistants into co-killers and finally into the sole perpetrators with the woman only encouraging. The fact that women predominated among the poisoners likewise resulted from a mixture of actual behavioral dispositions and judicial expectations. Spousal killings by men more often originated from a too excessive exercise of their customary right to chastisement, although by the late sixteenth century the courts no longer accepted a correction that got out of hand as an excuse for homicide.
- 4 Another important element in Nolde's book is her analysis of power relations and their symbolic representation. Power depended on circumstances, such as the husband's physical strength or the wife's property. Contemporaries were aware of these realities and moralists usually warned against unwanted constellations: don't marry a woman who is richer than you, because she may not accept your authority; and if conflicts escalate, murder may be the result! The point is that marital ideology, based on the strictly hierarchical organization of society at large, and the more fluid actual conditions did not always match. As Nolde explains, contemporary commentators had a dichotomous view of power differences, in marriage and other social relationships. They thought in terms of the dominators and the dominated, without much room for nuances. Hence, every attempt, for example, by a wife to alter the circumstances of her subjection was understood as a challenge to the husband's authority; as the introduction of 'the world upside down.' Nolde further shows that such views loomed large in the perception of the magistrates and influenced the outcome of trials for spousal homicide. Perceptive as her analysis is, it would have benefited even more from a consideration of Elias' theory of power relations. While he is absent from Nolde's bibliography, she turns to Bourdieu's confusing concept of 'symbolic violence' instead. It is also not clear whether French people around 1600 actually knew the concept of

power (*le pouvoir, die Macht*); we just learn that (better not translated) «Macht wurde in der zeitgenössischen Vorstellung mit Herrschaft gleichgesetzt» (128). Elias would differentiate here between the «we-perspective» of contemporaries and the «they-perspective» of later investigators. Both perspectives complement each other, but especially the latter allows an analysis of power differences, power sources and the two-sidedness of power, which was partly beyond the understanding of the very contemporaries who constituted these relationships.

- 5 These minor criticisms notwithstanding, Nolde has made an important contribution to the historical study of homicide and marriage.

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