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Gender and Communal Longevity among Hutterites

How Hutterite Women Establish,
Maintain, and Change Colony Life

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Gender and Communal Longevity among Hutterites

– How Hutterite Women Establish, Maintain, and Change Colony Life –

By Hanna Kienzler

“Gender and Communal Longevity among Hutterites: How Hutterite Women Establish, Maintain, and Change Colony Life“ (Hanna Kienzler 2005) is the first comprehensive work on Hutterite women for over tow decades.

In the first chapter “Communal Longevity: the Hutterite Case”, ethnographic studies on Hutterite society are reviewed in order to convey an overview of the ethnographic writs released during the past thirty years. Thereby the focus is on factors that have been found to be related to the group’s long-term survival. In order to not only describe and analyse an arbitrary accumulation of such factors, Kienzler applies Christoph Brumann’s concept of assessing and analysing communal longevity onto the Hutterite case. In his book “Die Kunst des Teilens: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung zu den Überlebensbedingungen kommunitärer Gruppen” (1998) he points out that the circumstances leading to communal long-term survival largely depend on the impact of different cultural domains. Since Brumann and most of the other ethnographers who are concerned with Hutterite society and culture mainly focus on institutions so as to provide answers to their respective research questions, the reader primarily learns about census data, formal institutions, social organisation, and norms, rules, and regulations. Little information is, however, provided with regards to how individual Hutterite women and men actively participate in colony life and thereby ensure communal survival. By way of focusing and providing information on how Hutterite women influence everyday colony life, Kienzler is determined to complement and supplement Brumann’s analysis of communal durability.

However, in order to adequately describe and analyse her data on how Hutterite women actively participate in colony life and thus ensure communal survival, Kienzler first develops a theoretical framework of actor and agency oriented feminist theories. In the second chapter “Gendered Places”, Kienzler therefore leaves the terrain of Hutterite culture in order to provide an outline of feminist (anthropological) theories and approaches that focus on how individual women establish, maintain, and change the places they live in. The interrelation of the various theories reviewed is thereupon presented in an abstract model which Kienzler terms ‘model of concentric circles’. It serves as a tool to analyse and present her ethnographic data in a detailed and structured manner.

In the third chapter “Communal Longevity: How Hutterite Women Establish, Maintain, and Change Colony Life”, the ‘model of concentric circles’ is applied to the

ethnographic data which Kienzler gathered during field work so as to provide answers to the two following questions: how do Hutterite women establish, maintain, and change colony life? And, how do they, thus, contribute to communal longevity? The chapter's basis is constituted by an oral history which Kienzler undertook with Martha, a 39 year old Hutterite lady living at the *Warner Colony* in Warner, Alberta, Canada. Proceeding from the topics discussed by Martha and herself Kienzler develops and turns to more general research questions in order to show how Hutterite women actively participate in communal living. In doing so, she exclusively draws on her own field data. Concluding the thesis, she summarises the research results, represents them graphically, and connects them to both Brumann's theory of communal longevity and feminist theoretical outlines referring to the interconnection of gender and place.