

OTHER REVIEWS

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Men, women and property in England, 1780–1870: a social and economic history of family strategies amongst the Leeds middle class. By R. J. Morris. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. xii + 445. ISBN 0-521-83808-8. £55.00.

The importance of gender relations to the making of the middle class in nineteenth-century England has been recognized by scholars for more than twenty years, since the pioneering work of Davidoff and Hall revealed, through an imaginative use of sources, the gendered organization of middle-class family and business. Morris does not pretend to have produced a comparable gender history, but as the title of this powerful monograph suggests, the two sexes are explicitly included in both its grand narrative and the individual stories within it. Yet the primary material on which this study is built, namely the papers of a small group of eminent Leeds families and a large number of wills, indicate that Morris has been driven more by a desire to analyse middle-class survival strategies, than to reinterpret the marginal position of women within the middle-class world.

Thus it is the ‘property’ component of the title which propels this work. The upper echelons of the Leeds middle class were preoccupied with the present and future well-being of the family. Property, which not only comprised bricks and mortar, but also business enterprise, savings, and investments, was shaped to serve the needs of the family as a whole, as well as individual members of it, at various stages of the life cycle. Through property, and the realization of assets, family position was preserved at least to the next generation, who in turn took responsibility for those who followed. Although the town of Leeds, the focus of this study, was legendary for its economic buoyancy, the vagaries of the nineteenth century meant that wealth creation and maintenance was by no means straightforward. Status and its survival were also complicated by unexpected health problems as well as the predictable physical and mental deterioration that accompanied the aging process. Decline and death prompted financial action and precipitated inheritance responses. Extended families, family networks, and friendship ties at once eased and complicated economic survival. Preservation of property required vigilance on the part of both female and male family members; and it is the analysis of the complementarity of women’s and men’s roles, which constitutes Morris’s contribution to gender history. Morris joins the growing group of historians who have challenged the notion of the ‘separate spheres’ of women and men, and offers a subtle, yet complex, reformulation of the crude dichotomy. Morris describes practices that fit more comfortably into ‘segmented’ or even ‘joint’ gender realms. In his account, much of the activity of the men and women was consistent with received wisdom, namely that men’s contributions were visible and measurable, whilst women’s were low key and lacked definition. Yet, Morris argues, by facilitating kinship and friendship networks, women played a critical, but unquantifiable, role in sustaining business connections. In the nineteenth century, as before and since, women made things happen; and, unacknowledged, they ensured family survival through the hard times. So, unlike contemporary men, Morris explicitly acknowledges women’s contribution and moves

beyond the conventional by providing examples of autonomous female business decisions, and even cases where 'female' strategies were adopted by men. Whilst disappointingly brief, Morris's discussion on gender is refreshing, and historians may be prompted to investigate his lines of analysis further.

If his observations on gender verge on the timid, the same cannot be said for Morris's bullish assertion that his Leeds findings have national application. He skilfully places his local vignettes into a wider context of national commercial networks and such interaction is convincing. Yet although it is implicit that the nature and activities of the Leeds families explored in this study were replicated elsewhere, little justification is provided for such a contention. The evidence for Leeds is robust and may well be repeated in other provincial towns at the time, but Leeds was special, not least in its economic flexibility and diversity. Hence it is conceivable that some facets of its middle-class property survival strategy were configured differently elsewhere: the challenge for other historians is to unearth, digest, and analyse the evidence.

Overall this is an exemplary piece of research constructed with a confidence borne of a working lifetime's acquaintance with the sources and the actors who produced them. Although the density of information potentially threatens the accessibility of the text, one of this work's many undoubted achievements is that its erudition does not interfere with the lucidity of the prose. Morris breathes life into the analysis through a series of character developments and cleverly chosen tales. His sense of the well-placed anecdote, at once entertaining and instructive, is key to his success. The unfortunate haemorrhoids affliction, for example, always good for a laugh, serves as a trope for the serious issue of declining health and contracting economic prowess. Equally, the familiar and amusing negotiations over the family silver highlight the importance of judicious property distribution to the short- and long-term sustenance of the middle-class families and their members. All told, this is a well-written and carefully argued tale of much significance for historians of gender, class, and business.

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Fascism in Europe, 1919–1945. By Philip Morgan. London: Routledge, 2002. Pp. xxi + 216. ISBN 0-415-16943-7. £16.99.

This is a very important book, offering the best survey of interwar fascism since Roger Eatwell's *Fascism: a history* (1995). Indeed, in as much as Morgan provides a serious examination of all the minor European fascist movements, he surpasses Eatwell. Moreover, he does not shy from tackling all the major theoretical issues surrounding fascism, including the very vexed and basic one of 'definitions', offering his own passable working definition of fascism as

radical, hyper-nationalist, cross-class movements with a distinctive militaristic and activist political style. In a climate of perceived national danger and crisis, they sought the regeneration of their nations through the violent destruction of all political forms and forces which they held to be responsible for national disunity, and the creation of a new national order based on the 'spiritual' reformation of their peoples, 'a cultural revolution' achievable only through the 'total' control of their society, and class-collaborative, regulatory socio-economic organisation, often of a corporatist nature. Their aims

of forging national unity were often linked to, and were premises for, national territorial expansion and empire, a connection seen most explicitly in the totalitarian mass-mobilising organisation of their societies for war by the two fascist regimes of Italy and Germany. (pp. 13–14)

This may not be quite as short and snappy as Roger Griffin's definition of fascism as 'palingenetic populist ultra-nationalism' (R. Griffin, *The nature of fascism* (London, 1991), p. 26), but apart from the failure explicitly to mention race, it captures the essence of fascism as ideology, movement, and regime. And as far as fascist ideology is concerned, Morgan will have no truck with those who seek to deny or to minimize the coherence and uniqueness of the inspiring ideas of fascism. He argues that fascism had an ideology 'understood as body of ideas or principles inspiring and informing political action, and political programmes and policies which embodied ideology. This history will bring them out' (p. 5). Thus Morgan is extremely sceptical about both the 'cudgel and castor oil' school of thought regarding the nature of fascist ideology and Zeev Sternhell's idea of a pre-war 'fascist' ideology in search of a movement (Z. Sternhell, 'Fascist ideology', in W. Laqueur, ed., *Fascism: a reader's guide* (Harmondsworth, 1979), p. 333). But when Morgan goes on to say that '[t]he argument so far is that to understand fascism, you have to write its history, or histories' (p. 7), one hears a strange echo of the maxim of Renzo De Felice, the Italian biographer of Mussolini, whose work he so criticizes, that to interpret fascism you have to write its history (R. De Felice, *Fascism: an informal introduction* (New Brunswick, 1977), p. 46).

Morgan's account of interwar European fascism is brilliantly contextualized in domestic and international terms, and unlike Hobsbawm, for example, who discounts the importance of fascist movements, including Italian fascism, in the 1920s, he presents the original emergence and triumph of fascism as part of a broader crisis of the Versailles system – the failure of democracy in most of the successor states to the three pre-1914 empires. Morgan argues, however, for *two waves* of fascism, which accompanied, and were the product of, the periods of most acute crisis in Europe: the post-war crisis and threat of Bolshevism from 1919 to 1929 and the structural crisis of the European political and social order from 1929 to 1940. To my mind, there was arguably a 'third wave' from 1939 onwards involving the creation of independent Slovakia under a 'clerico-fascist' regime in 1939, the government of Quisling and the Norwegian Nazis in 1940, Pavelić's Ustasha regime in Croatia in 1941, and Szalasy and the Arrow Cross government in Hungary in 1944, which were all products of Hitler's foreign policy successes or victories in war. Even Mussolini's Salo regime from September 1939 onwards was the result of Hitler's intervention and thus essentially a client state of Nazi Germany. On the other hand, Morgan offers very convincing explanations of why fascist regimes were not established in Denmark, the Netherlands or Belgium where, for economic and strategic reasons, Hitler was unwilling to allow local fascists much power.

Morgan firmly refuses to take his narrative beyond 1945, or beyond the geographical boundaries of Europe, for that matter. Yet in his analysis of Hitler and Mussolini's 'new European orders' and, in particular, the co-option of various national groups (including a tiny band of British traitors) into the SS, he helps to explain the present-day 'Europeanism' of neo-Nazi groups throughout the continent, exemplified by their chant of 'Our race is our nation' and their annual gatherings at the Diksmuide war memorial in Belgium to commemorate the dead of the Waffen SS. *European fascism* is the best short account of interwar fascism available today. Though it lacks a post-1945 dimension, it is both scholarly and highly readable and thus an excellent starting point for undergraduate studies of fascism.