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From Vichy to the Sexual Revolution Gender and Family Life in Postwar France. By Sarah Fishman. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2017. xxvi + 263 pp. £ 22.99. ISBN 978 0 19024862 8.

The decades between the Liberation and May 1968 in France have already been analysed in a number of illuminating socio-cultural studies, from Kristen Ross's seminal Fast Cars, Clean Bodies (1995) to, most notably, Susan Weiner's Enfants terribles (2001) on youth and femininity in the period's mass media, and Richard Jobs' Riding the New Wave (2007), on the development of youth culture at a period when 'new' and 'young' became the emblematic adjectives of a self-consciously modern, consumerist France. Sarah Fishman cites many of these preceding studies, but claims that so far insufficient attention has been paid to the Vichy period itself, and to both the breaks and continuities with Pétain's ultra-conservative regime that characterised the post-war era. If the emphasis on the long-term effects of the Occupation years on mentalities is salutary, much of the book's argument on the effects of economic growth and increased affluence on gender roles, and the burgeoning of a mildly oppositional youth culture, confirms rather than revises existing scholarship. The chief originality of this study lies rather in its choice of sources, and the insights they provide into majority assumptions and attitudes at a period of rapid change. Fishman draws on advice books and pamphlets published to disseminate evolving views on (for example) family roles and child-rearing. She consults not only the glossy, sophisticated women's press (Elle, Marie-Claire) but

also the weekly Confidences, lower-priced and aimed at a less affluent and educated readership. Above all, she has gained access to court records that include social workers' reports on children and teenagers deemed delinquent, which provide fascinating evidence of what was considered 'normal' and of changing attitudes to discipline, the relative responsibilities of family and state, and sexuality.

What the book finds, broadly, is that whilst after the disruption and humiliation of the war years traditional gender roles were reaffirmed in a structural sense (the public world essentially masculine, home and domesticity the domain of women), the 'content' of these roles underwent significant change. In some senses modernisation reinforced the policy of separate but unequal spheres so central to Vichy ideology, for a pro-natalist programme of propaganda and financial incentives combined with the new consumerism to cast women as mothers and home-makers, albeit 'modern' housewives supported by a growing panoply of appliances and stylish, labour-saving commodities. Though women had the vote and theoretical access to most professions, the brave new world of modern France was run by men, and legally so was the family: parental authority belonged solely to the father until the law finally changed in 1970. But - and Fishman shows that it is a very big but - the way in which these bifurcated gender roles were understood and lived was changing. Reaction against the extreme, authoritarian patriarchy of Vichy and Nazism encouraged a softer, more liberal notion of the father's role, and the popularisation of Freudian theory encouraged a view of children as emotional subjects who needed love and understanding in their early years rather than discipline. Popular interest in psychology grew, and as elements of Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1949) and the Kinsey Reports (translated into French 1948 and 1954) filtered into popular consciousness, the psychological importance of sexuality for all individuals, including

women and children, gained much wider acceptance - as advisory literature, the popular press and social workers' background reports on minors in trouble with the law all demonstrate. Women's belated access to suffrage was generally welcomed, and the economy needed female labour even if it remained the norm, or for some the aspiration, to relinquish career at the point of marriage: as the 50s moved into the 60s, popular imagery increasingly included the smart, managerial woman-about-town. Fishman draws on Agony Aunt correspondence in the women's press to show how young women were caught between conflicting imperatives: on the one hand near unanimous advice that pre-marital sex for girls was to be avoided (even if this was becoming more a practical issue - the danger of pregnancy - than a moral one), and that monogamous marriage must be their goal, but on the other the powerful if subliminal message of advertising, pop music and films that modern young women were sexy and adventurous. What the book shows is a society that remained conservative and thoroughly patriarchal in its laws, economy and dominant ideology, yet was increasingly fissured by internal contradictions.

It is impossible to avoid a teleological view of these decades, with our hindsight knowledge of the coming explosion of May 1968, and of the women's and gay movements that would follow. Sarah Fishman acknowledges this, but her conclusion - and indeed the book as a whole - refuses any reduction of these years to mere precursors of the real event. The writing of history is a collective, incremental exercise, and this book adds a significant dimension to the cultural history of post-war France by its subtle analysis of the sort of everyday, apparently ephemeral texts that both reflect and shape the collective 'imaginary' (as the French say) of an era.

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