

1976-01-23a: [FRAUDE] Registration & Fraud (Daumard, *Fortunes Françaises*)

In terms of *pratique* in 19th-century inheritances, the work of Daumard & cie. should soon produce some interesting statistics about the proportion of inherited vs acquired wealth in estates registered at the time of death. This information was gathered in the course of researching *Les fortunes francaises*, but could not be processed in time to be included in the publication of the book. Daumard promises a future publication, however (p. 111, n.2).

What this estate-registration data gives is not what one might think at first would be most desirable--i.e., who is to receive what share of the inheritance--but rather the origin of the estate itself in terms of inherited as opposed to acquired wealth. This discrimination of the origin of goods appears in estate declarations whenever the deceased was involved in a formal *communauté réduite aux acquêts*: gifts received at the time of marriage and afterwards by either one of the couple are specified as such because they devolve by different rules than the community property in which the surviving spouse has continuing rights. The same is true for dowry-regulated marriage contracts where a "*société d'acquêts*" is established for all new wealth the couple may acquire. These figures will allow us to understand the ratio between inherited and acquired wealth, hence some idea of how "wealth breeds wealth". The kind of several-generation study of individual families which would show long-term social mobility will not come out of these statistics, and since the inherited share in the estate declaration will not indicate how many siblings the deceased had, there would seem to be no way of evolving a formula in the abstract of how family fortunes tended to grow over more than one generation. Still, the inherited/acquired contrast will give an insight into the life chances of individuals which could be precious indeed. One of the main issues of calculating the role of inheritance in life chances (my ultimate goal) is to see how earned income varies in relationship to inherited wealth.

The estate registration evidence gives us a retrospective view inheritance. To get a forward-looking view, we would have to have complete notarial record of all the inheritances a given person received. Since the Daumard research was done on the basis of *sondage* for given years, the possibility of reconstructing the total inheritance from estate-registrations for individuals who are the beneficiaries of those estates, is not there.

In another respect, family secrets, the Daumard work is also very instructive. Having examined the extensive literature, not to mention of the laws, concerning registration of goods of the deceased, they have uncovered considerable evidence regarding fraudulent practices. These are important to Daumard & company in so far as they affect the accuracy of the estimation of the estates that are registered; for me, they speak directly about practices of transmission of wealth as a private family affair (in which the deceased would usually have to have conspired to some extent, by rendering the wealth fluid, concealed and easily divisible) from which the state's agents should be excluded. The testimony of notaries themselves indicates that such fraud in declarations is greatest where there are just a few descendants--i.e., a truly small nuclear family arrangement--as opposed to complicated collateral successions.

That is to say. exactly in those cases where direct generational transference of wealth is most likely to be kept intact (because few children), knowledge of the size of the estate is most likely to be obscured. And the higher up one goes, the greater the deception, because one moves into the realm where the wealth can be hidden in foreign accounts & possessions, which is recognized by the authorities as the greatest fraud of all.