

NEWSLETTER OF THE *Comparative & Historical* SOCIOLOGY

SECTION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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Dialogue & Controversy

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Good-bye and Thanks

My term as editor of the *Newsletter* comes to an end with this issue and Julia Adams now takes charge. Editing the newsletter has been a rewarding process that has given me a chance to learn from you and to experience first-hand some of the dynamism of our section.

Special thanks to the following colleagues and friends that helped me along the process: Andrew Abbott, Ron Aminzade, John Foran, Bill Hoynes, Barbara Laslett, Susan Lehmann, Ewa Morawska, Harland Prechel, Jill Quadagno, George Thomas, and John Williamson. Also my thanks to Ed Gilliland, Connie McNeely, Mary Voguel and Susan Cotts Watkins who have promised a piece for the coming year.

I look forward to working with the section in the years ahead and want to extend my warmest wishes to Julia.

Lisa Fuentes

Entry for Dialogue

By Susan Goodrich Lehmann
Harvard University

I'd like to take a somewhat different approach from the other essays which have appeared in this newsletter and focus on the subject of the audience for comparative and historical sociology. The issues which I will focus on are ones which I am wrestling with as a new sociologist of Soviet society. Or should I say Russian society? Which brings me to my first point.

I speak Russian and I limit my study primarily to the Russian Republic in the Soviet Union. I have traveled to many Republics however, and I have a sense of the diversity embodied in the term Soviet Union. I have become aware in the course of discussions about my work, that a not inconsiderable proportion of sociologists lack a clear understanding that the Soviet Union is comprised of 15 different Republics, all of which have their own national language and culture. Further, religious beliefs run the gamut from Catholic to Jewish to Muslim to Protestant to Russian Orthodox. For some reason cultural, ethnic, and religious distinctions become a blur once we leave Western Europe.

When I write about my work, I have found it necessary to specify that I study ethnic Russians who live in the Russian Republic. This I hope will give my audience the ability to evaluate the limits to which my study is or is not generalizable. In the same way that someone studying French nationals living in the United States would not be content with merely saying that she studied Americans or Europeans. But just how much background knowledge can be assumed of the general sociologist? For example, will my audience be aware that when I use the adjective "Russian" that that does not mean everyone who lives in the Soviet Union? Can I expect them to know that the Russians comprise roughly half of the population of the Soviet Union?

Can I use common foreign expressions in my article? Slavic journals assume a knowledge of Russian to the extent that they do not translate many common Russian words and expressions. Clearly I don't expect sociologists to know Russian, but what is a good rule of thumb?

Special thanks to Eunice Doherty, Roberta Nerenberg, and Jonathan Duke at Boston College for their assistance in producing this issue of the Newsletter.

Should I expect that sociologists who write about Soviet society *in depth* have visited the USSR or at least speak Russian? Again in the major Slavic association, comprised of social scientists, historians, as well as language and literature specialists, mastering a Slavic language is a rite of passage. In the ASA it is often treated as an amazing eccentricity. However, when most area studies specialists evaluate scholarship, the work's legitimacy may be called into question if the scholar can't speak the language of the region which he or she studies. And this is not pure snobbism. Unlike many Western European societies, the Soviet Union does not translate the bulk of its scholarly publications. Empirical material and historical sources are usually not available in English. For some types of sociological research, a scholar who can't speak Russian runs the risk of cutting herself off from the majority of sources. What is even worse, the scholar can't evaluate which sources or what percentage of sources she has excluded. I would expect this issue to be relevant to comparative and historical sociologist who study most non-Western European societies.

On the other hand, I don't subscribe to the attitude often conveyed by Soviet specialists that sociology has no place in the study of the Soviet Union. There is no need to guard any area of the world as if its uniqueness precludes sociological theorizing. Nor is it necessary to restrict the study of a society to an area studies specialist. If that were true sociological classics such as *The Female World from a Global Perspective* and *Social Revolutions* would never have come into being.

On several recent occasions I have read sociological analyses of the Soviet Union in which the scholar thinks that it is adequate to cite figures from whatever republic he could locate. In some cases the data were presented as coming from a particular republic in the context of a more general discussion of the Soviet Union; the implication being that any republic could serve as a representative of the Soviet Union. In other cases, data from one republic were mislabeled as national data. I realize that access to data is a bigger problem in some countries than others, but mislabeling data leads to confusion and plain inaccuracy. We would never accept a study of American voting habits which gave data for California and presented it as nationally representative.

This misrepresentation, however inadvertent, breaks faith with the sociological audience who looks to the writer as an authority on a particular culture. Secondly, if sociologists want to speak to other disciplines and other area studies specialists, and most of us inevitably do, we should realize that by inaccurately using data, we play into the prejudices of those area studies specialists who think that sociologists are not adequately trained to conduct comparative and historical research. Therefore it is incumbent on comparative and historical sociologists to strive to present research which can meet the reasonable standards of its multifaceted audience.

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The State Versus Society: Controversy and Historical Sociology

by Harland Prechel

University of Maryland Baltimore County

Considerable disagreement exists among historical and political sociologists who investigate the political behavior of business as a determinant of state policy. Some argue that agreement exists within the capitalist class, intraclass conflicts are resolved outside the state, and a coherent classwide rationality influences policy (e.g., Miliband 1969). Others have argued that the state is only semi-autonomous in its relationship with capitalist groups, and that the content of policy is the outcome of the state's efforts to mediate class and intraclass conflict (e.g., Offe 1975; Poulantzas 1978). In rebuttal to these arguments, the state-centered perspective emphasizes the autonomous political action of the state (e.g., Skocpol 1980). Despite the proliferation of research on the state and policy formation, it cannot be demonstrated that the capitalist class is unified or fragmented (Mizuchi 1989), or that states are autonomous or the instruments of the capitalist class. For every empirical study that appears to demonstrate business unity and/or state autonomy, another can be offered that suggests the opposite.

I suggest that the failure to resolve these controversies is hampered by the narrowness of the current theoretical perspectives, which limit the scope of the empirical analysis. There are three important interrelated obstacles to the resolution of these debates. First, the concepts within each perspective are articulated in such a way that they cannot account adequately for historical variation. State autonomy and class unity are too often interpreted as empirical absolutes, rather than understood as theoretical constructs. My point is that the central concepts in this debate—class unity and state autonomy—should be conceptualized as ideal types that exist only rarely at the empirical level (Weber 1949, pp.92-3). Class unity can be seen as existing at one end of a continuum, with class divisions at the other. Likewise, in a separate continuum, state autonomy can be considered at the opposite end of the continuum from the concept of the state as an instrument of the capitalist class. The key to understand capital-state relations is not whether class segments are united or divided, but rather the conditions under which the capitalist class is more or less unified or divided. Similarly, the key issue is not whether states are autonomous from the capitalist class or class segments but rather the conditions under which the state is more or less autonomous. Second, the empirical studies that document the "state-centered," "class-wide" and "class-segment" perspectives lack sufficient historical depth. That is, they do not operate within a sufficiently long time frame to determine the variations in these relationships in different historical contexts. Third, the state itself is too often conceptualized as a close-system with rigid boundaries that are not penetrated by its environment (i.e., state centered), or as having boundaries that are easily penetrated by political actors in the environment (i.e., society centered).

These obstacles can be overcome by adopting a more inclusive conception of the state as an organization that is affected by its own structure and agendas and by political coalitions in its environment. This organizational state environment conception suggests that policy forma-

tion is affected by: (1) the state's internal organizational arrangements and agendas, and (2) changes in the environment, which include the degree of economic power of single capitalist groups, political unity among capitalist groups, and the historical conditions under which these outside groups attempt to influence policy.

Although the state's agendas are defined by its claim to being the guardian of universal interests and its attempt to preserve the state's unity (Rueschemeyer and Evans 1985) and are often generated outside the state and endorsed by the capitalist class as a whole, they may not be shared at all times by all capitalist groups because general policies may undermine the specific accumulation needs of class segments. Class-segments exert their political power to undermine state agendas when they conflict with their accumulation goals (Prechel 1990). However, the capacity of capitalist groups to affect policy does not preclude state structures from affecting policy. Just as changes in the environment affect organizational decisions and structures, existing structures affect future action (March and Olsen 1976; Prechel forthcoming). The state's structure is important because legislation changes laws, rules, and procedures, which simultaneously alter the organizational unites and the parameters of the state's formal authority. Existing structures are important, first, because they establish the parameters for future policy. Second, existing structures affect policy through the alignment they provide for competing interests both inside and outside the state. An inclusive understanding of the relationship between the capitalist class and the state is one that begins by explaining how capitalist groups might come to have different interests, and allowing for the possibility of conceptualizing class power and state power as independent variables whose relationship must be ascertained in specific historical circumstances.

In short, researchers must more specifically address one of the central theoretical problems of historical sociology: the conditions under which groups that share an interest act, or fail to act, on that interest (Tilly 1981). Such studies require historical grounding to identify the means of action that are available to groups. By developing a theoretically explicit conception of the relationship between the organizational state and political coalitions in its environment, it is possible to identify the available means of political action and illustrate the historical conditions that shape and transform policy. For example, an analysis of the steel industry demonstrates that constraints to accumulation compel action of class-segments under different historical conditions (Prechel 1990). That is, significant changes in the accumulation process required a response. Although a response was necessary to ensure or recreate the conditions of accumulation, the character of the specific action taken was shaped by the political and economic context. The historical variation in the conditions of accumulation structured the motives and actions of this class-segment as well as its interests and the opportunities for satisfying them. The specific form of this class-segment's actions were affected by the legal relationship between the steel industry and the state; in the era of global competition the laws governing trade dispute settlements and the organizational structure of the state determined the range of possible alternatives available to the steel industry in the pursuit of its economic interests.

In summary, if historical sociology is to contribute to the advancement of state theories it must begin with a conceptual framework that acknowledges that the condi-

tions of accumulation are both dynamic and reflexive and that business policy changes the state structure, which in turn shapes future action. State structures become the product of past policies, which become congealed and develop a network of interests around them, both inside and outside the state. The structures affect policy outcomes through the alignment they give to competing class-segments, and through their consequences for policy implementation. What is needed, therefore, are studies that investigate the conditions under which class unity and state autonomy exist.

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Theory and History, Culture and State

by George Thomas
Arizona State University

Many of us working in historical sociology have a dual interest guiding our research. We are interested in understanding historical patterns that are intrinsically interesting and in relating these patterns to a more general theoretical understanding of change. Of course, the distinction between "historical pattern" and "general theory" at some point becomes blurred because the trade mark of theorizing—abstraction—is present anytime we speak of pattern and even of such things as the absolutist state or France.

In my own work, I try to use historical cases with intrinsic interest (e.g., the shaping of national ideology in nineteenth-century U.S.) to address important theoretical issues (the cultural aspects of change and their relation to collective action). In *Revivalism and Cultural Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), I begin with a fairly abstract discussion of culture and change. Within the context of this discussion, I draw on comparative-historical work to construct a "middle-range theory" or "interpretive framework" of patterns produced by the penetration of local communities by broader markets and politics and how these patterns differ by different conditions—primarily by whether a market or bureaucratic state is driving local penetration. Both markets and states tend to restructure society as nation and person as individual citizen, although with different patterns. I argue that revivalism was a powerful religious frame of the rules, identities, assumptions, and practices of the expanding market and national polity. By shaping nation and citizen it provided an institutional context for conflict and social movements, including the mobilizing and institutionalization of the Republican Party. The interpretive argument is that petty capitalism, revival religion, and republican ideology were isomorphic in their reconstitution of nation and citizen. I document the phenomenology and structure of these institutions and then pursue the implication that they are found in the same population through quantitative analyses of census and electoral data.

An interpretive framework based on culture-focused theory and comparative-historical work on Europe proves fruitful in interpreting U.S. revivalism and change. The U.S. case is important in its own right and also can be added to the comparative-historical empirical base for further refinement of the theory as I attempt in outline in the last chapter.

In pursuing this dual interest, I have noticed a few things about the way we approach comparisons that I would like to mention for your consideration. Comparisons of moderately similar and moderately different cases seem common. It has struck me that insights can be gained by a somewhat less cautious strategy that might be said to look for the counter-intuitive. One such strategy would be to maximize similarities. An example can be found in Orloff and Skocpol (1984). "Why not equal protection? Explaining the politics of public social spending in Britain and the U.S." ASR 49:726-750). One could complain that British and U.S. welfare states are of the same individualistic model and comparisons should be between more divergent types. Yet, by comparing very similar cases they are able to identify historically impor-

tant differences and make strong theoretical inferences about how different state structures shape movements and policy: subtle differences take on theoretical significance.

An even less cautious strategy is to maximize differences in order to identify similarities that might otherwise go unnoticed. For example, I have done exploratory cross-national studies of state social security expenditures including both "core" and "peripheral" states. Welfare programs in the periphery are very different from those in industrialized countries. By comparing them we attempt to understand similarities that are interesting precisely because the cases are so different: we then can make inferences about the global institutional context of state structures and policies.

As another example of difference maximizing, I have been interested in comparing the religious framing of nation and citizen in the U.S. with other countries. In looking at Catholic Liberalism and the Ultramontanes in the very different case of nineteenth-century France, I was struck by the surprising similarity of goals and themes to those in U.S. revivalism: a disestablished church, individuals freely and rationally choosing Christianity and thereby creating a moral Christian civilization, and issues of moral education. Outcomes differed because in France Christianity meant a transnational, bureaucratic Church and the nation meant the state (i.e., change was driven by a bureaucratic state): the diffuse nation building that had some similarities with the U.S. quickly was mobilized by either Paris or Rome. Thus, one has to dig for the trail of religious nation building. What implications does this have for our interpretation of the U.S.? For conditionalizing our theory? Can we extend such comparisons to the even more dissimilar cases of Islam?

Thus, great historical differences do not mean that general theorizing is impossible. Theories are conditional, and conditions change historically. A theory's conditions might bind it, some of its implications, or specific concrete forms of abstract processes to particular cases because those conditions are found only in those cases. If our theoretical expectations do not hold for certain cases, we can ask under what conditions, if any, they do hold. By comparing U.S. revivalism with French Catholicism or with Islam, we know better what is unique and what is general about the U.S., as well as what conditions might produce the different patterns. This in turn might force us to revise our interpretation of the U.S. or our theory as a whole in order to reassess our understanding of the cultural aspects of nation-state authority. It is disconcerting to find our interpretation wrong, but it is exhilarating if we are able to replace it with a better one.

Announcements

From Ron Aminzade, Chair-elect:

The Best Recent Article Award

In the mid-1980s, our section established an annual award for the best recent article in comparative/historical sociology. This year's award committee - Mehrangiz Najafizadeh, Frank Dobin, David James, and Ron Aminzade, chair - announced the 1990 award winner and honorable mention award at the section business meeting in Washington, D.C.

The 1990 award for the Best Recent Article was presented to Larry W. Isaac (Florida State University) and Larry J. Griffin (Indiana University) for their article "Ahistoricism in Time-Series Analyses of Historical Process: Critique, Redirection, and Illustrations from U.S. Labor History," published in the December 1989 issue of *American Sociological Review*. This article explores the ahistorical premises of time-ordered quantitative studies of macrosociological processes, pointing out that most quantitative time-series research rests on a variety of problematic temporal assumptions. According to the authors, lack of attention to the temporal dimensions of historical processes stems from a variety of conventional premises, which separate theory and history, treat as a qualitatively undifferentiated magnitude, and privilege technical procedures over theoretical and historical issues. These premises, they argue, are evident in the conventional practices of time-series research.

This year's honorable mention award was presented to Jack A. Goldstone (U.C. -Davis) for "East and West in the Seventeenth Century: Political Crises in Stuart England, Ottoman Turkey, and Ming China," published in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* in January of 1988. Goldstone argues persuasively that the major changes of regime and political rebellions that took place in these three geographically and culturally distinct cases were the product of a worldwide crisis of agrarian absolutist states rooted in shared ecological and demographic dynamics.

The changes made last year in the award selection process were discussed by the council, which decided to continue following these procedures. The chair of next year's prize committee is Andrew Abbott, Rutgers University.

From David Zaret, Secretary:

The following decisions were made at the Business Meeting of the Comparative Historical Section: First, the Section will organize the following sessions at the next annual ASA meetings: 1) "Rational Choice Theory in Comparative-Historical Perspective." Organizer: Craig Calhoun (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill). 2) "Social Movements in Comparative-Historical Perspective." Organizer: George Seimetz (U. of Chicago); 3) "Author meets Critics" Session featuring Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*; and 4) Roundtable Sessions. Organizer: Carole Turbin (SUNY—Empire State College). The Roundtable Sessions will last one hour, occupying the second half of the business meeting.

The Nomination/Election Committee will be chaired by Lewis Mennerick (U. of Kansas) who will work with Elizabeth Clemens (Arizona), Harland Perchel (U. of Maryland—Baltimore County), and Rick Rubinson (Emory). The Comparative Historical Prize Committee will be chaired by Andy Abbott (Rutgers). Finally, Pam Walters (Indiana) will explore the use of balloons, buttons and other oddities as recruitment devices for soliciting new members at the annual ASA meetings.

From Barbara Laslett, Chair:

...our Section membership is currently 408 - down by 66 from the same time last year. It's hard to understand quite why, given the lively and thriving state of historical and comparative sociology in the discipline. But, whatever the reasons, we have to do something about it, especially if we want to get another session for the 1991 meetings. (And if we go below 400 members, we will lose one of the sessions we now have.) I have a suggestion. Each section member should sign up one new person. We've all got to have at least one friend/colleague interested in historical/comparative sociology who isn't already a Section member. So - that's my suggestion. It would set us up very nicely for the meetings next year - when our section day will be the first day of the convention.

New Titles:

Time, Place and Circumstance: Neo-Weberian Studies in Comparative Religious History

Edited by William H. Swatos, Jr.

(Contributions to the Study of Religion, No.24)

This book is a collection of essays that explore a variety of topics in religious history, both East and West, using theoretical frameworks derived from the comparative-historical sociology of Max Weber. It breaks new ground, offering substantive new research in the historical sociology of religion. The scope of essays covers both geographical and chronological vistas.

The first section of this contributed volume focuses on Oriental religion. A survey chapter by Gert Mueller on the religions of Asia precedes two more specific studies by Deniz Tekiner and Donovan Walling on, respectively, social conflict and change in Indian religion and Tibetan (Buddhist) patrimonialism. The second section considers the heritage of Occidental religion. Peter Munch analyzes the charismatic authority of the "judges" of Ancient Israel, while Joseph Bryant explores the religion of ancient Greek intellectuals from Homer and Hesiod through the pre-Socratics. A final essay by Donald Nielsen assesses the quality of contemporary efforts to do a "sociology" of early Christianity and makes some suggestions toward improvement. The third section deals with the "breakthrough" to the modern world view. An initial essay by Nielsen treats the Inquisition in its earliest stages as presaging later Western religious rationalization. A chapter by Bill Garrett then assesses two modern attempts (by Guy E. Swanson and Robert Wuthnow) to account for Reformation outcomes. Two essays, by Steve Kent and Fred Kniss, deal with two of the "little" Protestant traditions: the Quakers and various Mennonite strains. A final contribution by the editor examines the role of religion in the creation and maintenance of slavery in the American South. This book should appeal to anyone interested in Buddhism, Hinduism, Ancient Judaism, Ancient Greece, early Christianity, and Protestantism and Catholicism from the 13th to the 19th centuries, and it can ideally be used as a text for teaching Comparative Religions at the undergraduate and nonspecialist graduate levels.