

NEWSLETTER OF THE
Comparative & Historical SOCIOLOGY
 SECTION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Spring 1990

Dialogue & Controversy

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News from the editor:

This is the next to the last issue of the *Newsletter* that I will edit. I would like to encourage you, once again, to send me your ideas and responses to some of the pieces that have appeared in the *Newsletter*. In this issue we have contributions that join the ongoing debate from Andrew Abbot and John Foran. Have a pleasant and productive summer!

The Professions and Historical Sociology

Andrew Abbott
 Rutgers University

The comparative and historical study of professions has been marginal both to the Section and to the ASA occupation sessions more generally. This disattention goes beyond the ASA. On proposing a professions session to the labor history network of the Social Science History Association I was told that "professionals don't really work and therefore aren't part of labor history." In part, this marginalizing reflects disunity among students of professions themselves. But it also reflects a somewhat surprising disinterest in an important sector of the modern division of labor.

The historical sociology of professions began among historians. The 1970s saw definitive monographic studies of a few American professions and of a wide variety of English and continental ones. At the decade's close the Davis Center at Princeton spent two years examining the history of professions. This interest among historians was echoed only weakly among sociologists. Rueschemeyer's book on German and American lawyers and Joseph Ben-David's various works were conspicuously rare examples of comparative study. As for historical work, a few dissertations were under way by 1980 but little had appeared in print.

Sociological theorizing about the professions was murky. Although the Davis Center sessions opened with a prominent sociologist discussing "what is a profession and what is professionalization," the historians concluded two years later that sociologists couldn't answer these questions and that they were probably bad questions anyway. The problem started with Parsons, whose monumental microanalysis of professions (in *The Social System*) assumed away macro change. Parson's view had been replaced by the theory of "professionalization," one of the many stage theories with which the 1960s historicized the endless summer of structural-functionalism. But stage theories, as modernization theory showed all too well, are not really historical.

Two strands of sociological thinking introduced a history of contingency and action into studies of professions. One was the Chicago tradition in the sociology of work, pioneered by Hughes and carried to fruition by Becker, Strauss, Bucher, and above all Freidson. Although not very comparative (most of their work concerned American medicine), the Chicago writers repeatedly emphasized the accidental and conflictual aspects of professional development. Freidson's (1986) review is the best short summary of traditional theoretical issues in the professions literature.

The other source was Marxism, particularly the theoretical work of Terence Johnson and Magali Larson. Scholars like Berlant on American medicine, Parry and Parry on English medicine, and Auerbach on American law carried Marxist or Marxist-Weberian work to the empirical level. Other Marxist writers (e.g., Derber) studied deprofessionalization, rekindling

an interest in professionals (rather than professions) dormant since the "professionals in bureaucracy" literature of the 1950s and 1960s. Another group looked at the "erosion of professional authority." Although many Marxists defined professions' histories with stage theories resembling modernization or professionalization, much Marxist writing was more complexly historical.

By 1980, then, history was reentering sociological thinking about professions. Comparison was not. Empirical studies continued to focus on individual professions, with problems illustrated by Starr's much-celebrated study of American medicine. A well-written book, it examined a familiar example and said little or nothing new. Although its history was contingent and active, its theory was merely stirring admonitions about cultural authority and predictable fulminations about Marxism. And by summarizing so well the atypical case of American medicine, it reinforced the professionalization model and undermined comparative study. Although to be sure other case studies at least contributed new information, the continuing focus on individual professions in individual countries slowed theoretical advance. The comparative work that did exist focused on particular periods (e.g., the work of J. Child and his collaborators).

Fortunately, the dominant theoretical book in the 1980s was Larson's (1977), filled with both comparison and history. For Larson, history meant different "regimes" of professionalism (aristocratic, democratic, bureaucratic) that dictated different organizational structures possible for professions attempting a "project" of market domination. With all its strengths, her view left unexplained much of what the historians' case studies revealed: the vast competition between professions, the importance of non-market professional work (e.g., military work), the diversity of organizational structures under common "regimes," and above all the continuous and complex changes in what professions actually do for a living.

My own (1988) attempt to address those unresolved issues grew out of the Chicago tradition and emphasized the professions' contingent interaction within a loose structure. Since each profession's work history affected those of "adjacent" professions (because professions compete for work), the real history of professions could not be written one profession at a time, but only across whole "arenas" of professional work. This interdependence meant that regime changes would have idiosyncratic effects (as they obviously do). So I retained Larson's breadth of comparison, but attempted to theorize the history more contingently.

The 1980s also brought a concern with the relation of professions and other social structures. Johnson and other British writers considered the relations of professions and the state, just as the deprofessionalization writers had begun to theorize that of professions and classes. In part this development reflected the newly obvious (because newly studied) importance of the state in French and other continental professions. But it also reflected the growing focus of British Marxism on the state as the work of Miliband, Poulantzas, and others began to affect theories of professions.

There are three important directions for comparative and historical studies of professions at this point. One concerns the culture of professions. While in many cases we have good studies of professions' knowledge systems (e.g., law, medicine,

and psychiatry), in others (e.g., accounting) we desperately need such studies. We also need comprehensive studies of the ritual life of professions. (To my knowledge, there are no such studies.) More than other groups, professions have preserved and mimicked the ritual life of work in the old regime; study of these changing rituals could tell us much about changes in professions and work more generally.

Another needed set of studies would examine interprofessional contests over work. Especially important would be studies comparing major areas of work across countries. Among the areas that seem particularly exciting are the provision of tax and financial advice, the generation of information, and the provision of advice about personal problems or disputes. We could also use comparative studies of how general social forces (like bureaucratization) and general cultural forces (like the rise of universities) had differential impacts on various professions in various countries. And we could use systematic study of how problems (1) get taken over as areas of professional work (about which there's some good but pretty ideological work) and (2) get lost to lay people (about which there is next to nothing, and not because it doesn't happen.)

Finally, as the British theorists have shown, we need extensive studies of the relation of professions to other institutional orders in society. The British have focused on the state, and comparative historical studies of state/profession relations are indeed essential. But essential too are serious empirical studies of the relation of professions and class (e.g., as in the work of Steven Brint). And while there is some work on professions and gender, little is seriously comparative. A particularly useful theoretical book would analyze the concept of profession(al) as one of the archetypes establishing the division of gender labor in the 19th century.

I have said little about region. Studies of professions in America and England are, as one might expect, relatively common. France is also surprisingly well covered, even in English-language sources. Other European countries are less studied in the English-language literature, and beyond Europe there is precious little about individual professions, much less comparative work. This lack of work on second and third world professions (other than the military) is predictable but still astonishing. There are some non-historical attempts at general comparison; the American Bar Foundation, for example, is spearheading a worldwide comparison of lawyers. But in general we need much more study of professions beyond the first world if we are going to see the category "profession" (or the preferable category of "experts" — "profession" being the modern Western version) as part of a global history.

This is a large and interesting agenda — too large for the few people working on it and too interesting to be left to them alone. We welcome recruits.

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- Abbott, Andrew. 1988. The System of Professions. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Freidson, Eliot. 1986. Professional Powers. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson, Terence J. 1972. Professions and Power. London: Macmillan.
- Larson, Magali Sarfatti. 1977. The Rise of Professionalism. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Comparative-Historical Sociology: Methods, Fields, Paradigms

John Foran

University of California, Santa Barbara

It has been a pleasure to read the various contributions to this newsletter's "Dialogue and Controversy" of the past year or more. For anyone working on or pondering the fundamental antinomies thrown up by our vast, multi-sided common enterprise it is salutary and encouraging to find others travelling kindred paths. Large and persistent questions surface again and again, refusing to go away: are we searching for causal explanations, or better interpretations of given events and processes? What is the proper role of, and balance between, structure and agency? Similarly, what weights should be accorded political economy and culture, values or discourse in explaining social change? Does our field encompass microsociological realities in addition to the long accepted macrosociological puzzles of our main exemplars? Methodologically, there are the perceived tensions between qualitative and quantitative approaches, as well as the knotty epistemological chasm apparently separating the generalizing theories of sociology and the particular narratives history tells us are important.

There is no singular, royal road into and through this thicket of methods, fields and theories in comparative historical sociology, as the several contributions to this debate make clear in their variety. And I would argue that this plurality of views is healthy and dynamic, rather than cause for concern and premature closure. Lisa Fuentes (Newsletter, March 1989) noted that attention to historical specificity often reveals the importance of the unique features of a particular case, while careful chronological investigation helps get at causal implications, pointing to a rich and fruitful dialectic between our theories and the case studies that both "test" and in the process modify them. Richard Lachmann (June 1989) raised the issue of structure and agency, seeing structure as the outcome of various actors limiting each other's actions, and in terms of "past chains of agency." Lachmann still seems primarily a structuralist at heart, and seems to believe that comparative-historical sociology is strongest at studying long-term structural change. Does this go far enough in showing how agency makes a difference? And if we want to go further, how do we do so?

Ron Aminzade (January 1990) observes that comparative and historical approaches appear inherently complementary, but that in practice one or the other gets short shrift. It is difficult to take issue with his call for "an historical sociology that embraces the logical rigor of the comparative method." Finally, Ewa Morawska (January 1990) takes a more controversial stand in arguing that our enterprise is properly historical sociology *tout court*, claiming that comparativists' tacit bias is for *macro* comparison, whereas she wants to carve out a space for microlevel processes and social history, whether comparative or not.

Despite the merits of this case, I feel that for all its ambiguity the broader term, comparative and historical sociology, is the more inclusive of our various projects—both micro and macro, whether comparative and/or historical. Indeed sociology must logically be both historical and comparative to be theoretically

sound. That is, theories must be tested in different societies and settings if they are to be claimed as universally valid (more likely, such tests will delimit their range and shed us of our illusory claims to unlimited generalizability). And most human processes have a built-in temporal dimension, only most obviously in the case of social and personal change.

In my remaining space I would like to focus on some of the other large antinomies noted above, and in particular to suggest and illustrate some relationships between causality and interpretation, and political economy and culture, from my own work on Iran and social revolutions. My 1988 dissertation, "Social Structure and Social Change in Iran from 1500 to 1979," offered what I took to be an *interpretation* of the history of social change in Iran in light of theories of underdevelopment—dependency, world-systems, modes of production—to explain long-term structural transformations, leavened by considerations on the state and political cultures of opposition to explain more sudden, short-term social movements along the way. Structure and agency were brought together particularly in the conceptualization of such major upheavals as the 1905-11 Constitutional Revolution, the 1951-53 oil nationalization movement and the recent "Islamic" revolution as the products of an explosive encounter of "structural" elements such as the political economy of dependent capitalist development under the Shah and the several oppositional political cultures through which various groups and classes filtered and experienced these changes as threats to their material or spiritual well-being.

Methodologically, instances of social change in several different periods within a single country were compared and contrasted to highlight the salience of various independent variables—dependency, the nature of the state, political cultures of resistance, and so on.

By the conclusion of this case study, a *model* of social revolution had been deductively suggested by reflection on the sociology of development, and inductively arrived at by consideration of the case of Iran. This moved the methodological circle another half-turn from meaningful interpretation of a historical case toward a hypothetically more general model of social revolutions in the Third World, and has set the stage for my present research on the origins of social revolution in Mexico, Cuba and Nicaragua as well as Iran. Both dependent development and political culture may now be tested as important explanatory variables on a much wider scale. World-historical time enters into play too, as does the importance of favorable historical conjunctures such as the effect of Carter's human rights policies and divisions in the U.S. administration with respect to the events of 1979 in Iran and Nicaragua. (In passing, it would be fascinating to puzzle out how the recent changes in Eastern Europe offer us a new research agenda in comparative-historical studies of social change.)

In sum, the single case, pursued over a long period in rich historical detail, offers an opportunity for testing new theoretical syntheses and simultaneously suggests new hypotheses for future studies involving more cases. The case study allows the full play of agency to reassume its coequal place with structural conditions, and for political economy and culture/discourse to be brought into fruitful proximity. In this way, our methodological strategies, fields of study and theoretical commitments evolve in new directions, allowing us to think on the old oppositions handed down to us.

References:

John Foran, "Social Structure and Social Change in Iran from 1500 to 1979," Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley, 1988.

John Foran, "Toward a Theory of Third World Social Revolutions: Iran, Nicaragua and El Salvador Compared," paper to be presented at the annual meetings of the International Sociological Association, Madrid, Spain, July 1990.

FROM THE CHAIR

Doing section business through the year depends on the good spirited work of many. This has been moving ahead since our business meeting at the San Francisco meetings and there are several pieces of news to pass on to you.

ELECTION

RESULTS: 173 ballots were returned and counted by Carole Turbin, Chair of the Nominations/Elections Committee. On the basis of the votes cast, our Chair-elect is Ron Aminzade of the University of Minnesota, our Secty-Treas.-elect is David Zaret of Indiana University and our new Council members-elect are Joanne Nagel of the University of Kansas and George Steinmetz of the University of Chicago. CONGRATULATIONS!

Many thanks to the Nominations/Elections Committee: Carole Turbin, (Empire State College, SUNY), Chair, Lew Mennerick (University of Kansas), John Williamson (Boston College) and Lia Greenfield, (Harvard University).

AN INTERIM REPORT FROM THE PRIZE COMMITTEE

Ron Aminzade, Chair of the Prize Committee, reports that there were twenty-seven submissions for the Section prize. Of that number, 20 (74%) have already been published and 8 (30%) have appeared in the ASR or the AJS. Obviously, the quality of the work being considered by the Committee is very high indeed. Ironically, however, such high quality makes choosing between the submissions difficult for the committee members who, in addition to Ron, are David James (Indiana University), Frank Dobbin (Princeton University) and Mehrangiz Najafizadeh (Mt. Saint Mary's College). When the final decisions are reached for this year's competition and announced at the Washington meetings in August, the Committee will also make a report which may have some suggestions for revising the competition for the future.

SECTION PROGRAM FOR THE 1990 MEETINGS IN WASHINGTON

Just so you can mark your calendar to be sure you attend our excellent sessions in Washington, I thought I would announce them to you now. They are:

Session Title: Gender and the State in Historical/Comparative Perspective.

Organizers: Ann S. Orloff (University of Wisconsin) and Ewa Morawska (University of Pennsylvania)

President: Cynthia Truelove, (University of Wisconsin)

Papers:

1. "Gender, Social Policy Regimes, and the Welfare State." Sheila Shaver, Macquarie University.
2. "Sisters and States: Gender and Political Culture in the United States and Australia, 1830-1930." Desley Deacon, University of Texas.
3. "Feminism, Militarism, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Cuba, Nicaragua, and the Philippines." Maureen Dolan, University of Wisconsin.
4. "Gender, Class and Partisanship: Progressivism and the Politics of Representation." Elizabeth Clemens, University of Arizona.

Discussants: Robin Leidner (University of Pennsylvania) and Julia O'Connor, (McMaster University).

Title: Class and Culture in Comparative/Historical Perspective: Boundary Formation and the Mobilization of Meaning.

Organizers: Mabel Berezin, (University of Pennsylvania) and Nicola Beisel (University of Michigan)

Papers:

1. "Clans, Classes and Protestants in the Institutionalization of the Cherokee Democratic State." Duane Champagne (UCLA)
2. "Status Group Politics and the Formation of the Cultural Boundaries: The Case of the Chicago Art Museum." Paul DiMaggio (Yale University)
3. "The Spectacle of Exotic Worship: Laborers and the Antebellum Church." Karen V. Hansen (Brandeis University)
4. "The Revolt of the Intelligentsia: The Origins of the Prague Spring and the Politics of Reform Communism." Jerome Karabel (UC, Berkeley)
5. "Art and Politics in the Historical Avant-Garde: Italian Futurism (New School for Social Research)

REFEREED ROUND TABLES

Organizer: William H. Sewell, Jr. (University of Michigan)

1. The Origins of Democracy in England. Edgar Kiser, University of Washington; Yoram Barsel, University of Washington.
2. Engineeringism: The Discourse of Engineers. Patrick Ball, University of Michigan.
3. Forgetting and Remembering 'Kristallnacht': Jews, Germans, and the Politics of Commemoration in West Germany. Y. Michael Bodemann, University of Toronto.
4. Seeing Beneath Appearances: The Emergence of Psychiatry and Radiology and their Place in the Evolution of Expert Evidence. Marvin Prosono, UC, San Francisco.
5. Split Labor Markets in the Nineteenth-Century Anthracite Coal Fields. Thomas J. Keil, University of Louisville and Wayne M. Usul, University of Louisville.
6. The Spread of Unemployment Compensation Among American States: Toward a Diffusion Model. Robert Biggart, University of Wisconsin.
7. Political or Global Economics: Which Contributes More to the Diversification of the Brazilian and Mexican Economies? Kathleen C. Schwartzman, University of Arizona.
8. Comparative Historical Research on State Capacity, Government Intervention and outcomes. Bruce Rankin (University of Maryland).
(a) State intervention in the Sugar Industry in Brazil, 1930-

1990. Paulo Ortiz Rocha de Aragao, (Universidade Federal da Paraiba).

(b) Comparative Research and Causal Inference: State Actions and Union Power in Germany and France. H. Lovell Smith (University of Maryland)

9. Economy and Household in the Postbellum South
Presider: Jill Quadagno, Florida State University

(a) Race, Gender and Household Structure in the South during Reconstruction: A Case Study of Atlanta. Ella Dennis, Florida State University.

(b) Apalachicola, Florida, 1880-1900: Family Structure in a Southern Seaport. John Teichnor, Florida State University

And last, but certainly not least, OUR PARTY. We had such a good time last year in San Francisco that we're going to do it the same way again, i.e., rent a suite for one night and bring in our own booze and food. Since our program is the last day of the meetings, our party will be the preceding day: Tuesday, Aug. 14. Keep your eyes open for further announcements.

BUT, we need some local help to shop for and arrange the party goodies. I would very much appreciate some volunteers who know the D.C. area, will have some transport, and could help us out. Needless to say, all expenses are reimbursed.

Well, it's been a newsletter issue full of information. But little discourse. Perhaps we can get back to that with the next issue, which will be last under the editorship of Lisa Fuentes (Boston College). We thank Lisa for her good works. Ron Aminzade, the Chair Elect, is now busy trying to twist another set of able hands to which Lisa can pass the reins.

SEE YOU ALL IN WASHINGTON!!!

Barbara Laslett

Enjoy a laugh and support the ASA Minority Scholarship Fund at the same time!

*Reserve your seats now for the
Capital Steps Comedy Hour*

Come laugh with the Capitol Steps as they prove that political funding did not end when Ronald Reagan left office. Based in Washington, D.C., this troupe of political satirists performs song parodies poking fun at current events. Since 1981, the Steps have done almost 1,000 shows, produced seven record albums, and sung over 300 different parodies. Current songs include *Stand By Your Dan*, *Fifty Ways to Hide New Taxes*, *I've Grown Accustomed to This Base*, *Ollie Would*, and *Thank God I'm a Contra Boy*. Money collected will be used to cover benefit costs and to support the ASA Minority Scholarship Fund (i.e., \$15 per person contribution would cover \$6 toward benefit costs and a \$9 tax-deductible donation to the Minority Scholarship Fund).

Co-sponsored by Sociologists for Women in Society and the American Sociological Association.

DATE: Sunday, August 12, 1990

TIME: 9:00 p.m.

PLACE: International Ballroom, Washington
Hilton & Towers

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| Suggested Contribution : | \$10.00 Student |
| | \$15.00 Advance |
| | \$20.00 At the Door |

