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## Editor's Introduction

With this issue, my term as section newsletter editor begins. By way of (brief) introduction, I am a "new Ph.D." and assistant professor at the University of Michigan. My dissertation addressed the classical sociological problem of the causes of the differentiation of states from economic institutions. By means of a comparative analysis of the Dutch, French and English East Indies companies in the early modern period (1500-1800), I argued that developing metropolitan states and mercantile/colonial initiatives shaped each other in ways that structured this process. The central puzzle was raised by the "zigzag" pattern of development of the Netherlands, where precocious politico-economic differentiation was blocked and reversed. I then used the Dutch case as an entree to reanalyzing the more familiar French and English trajectories.

Besides revising the thesis for publication, I am also working on a comparative-historical analysis of the impact of early modern European family practices on state structures and policies.

In the past year, under Lisa Fuentes' able editorship, the newsletter has functioned as a forum for substantive debate as well as a bulletin board. I would like to see these debates continue. Please send your comments and announcements to me at the University of Michigan Sociology Department; 3012 LS&A Building; Ann Arbor, MI 48109, or call 313-936-0785. The next newsletter will be out in the spring.

Julia Adams

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## A Marriage Made in Heaven: Demography and Comparative & Historical Sociology

By Susan Cotts Watkins, University of Pennsylvania

Demography, said Marion J. Levy, is wasted on the demographers. He is not, of course, entirely right, but I think that demography could be more useful to those interested in historical and comparative sociology

than has usually been the case. Although demography has long been accepted as a respectable subfield of sociology, it has been ghettoized. Sociology departments (other than those with demographic centers) seem to feel that it is a good thing to have one demographer, but one is enough; rarely are either demographic methods or subjects (births, deaths, marriages) of interest to anyone but demographers. Yet demography would seem to have much to offer other areas of sociology, including comparative and historical sociology.

In what follows I will show connections from my own work on demographic change in Western Europe between 1870 and 1960 and one of the concerns of historical and comparative sociology: the issue of the appropriate unit for analysis. I will also suggest that this work raises questions about the centrality of the rational actor framework for accounting for demographic change, and, by implication, for other kinds of changes as well; rather, it suggests paying attention to the institutional environment, and how it changes over time.

Consider first the issue of the appropriate units for comparison raised earlier in these pages by Ewa Morawska (1990). Candidates range from a small group (e.g. a village) over time to the familiar macro-level cross-sectional comparisons of nation-states. The use of the latter can, and has been, criticized on the grounds that nation-states are too internally diverse to be considered "societies"; rather, it is argued, they are collections of sub-societies which may lie within the same territorial boundary, or fall under the same political authority, but have so little in common with each other, and so little interaction among themselves, that what we have are "phantoms", not societies (Eberhard, 1964).

The results of my examination of demographic change over the course of the last century suggests that nation-states have become an increasingly appropriate level of analysis. Using measures of marital fertility, illegitimacy and marriage for sub-units (e.g. counties, departments, cantons) of 15 western European countries between 1870 and 1960, one can show that at the former dates most of the countries were demographically quite heterogeneous, while by 1960 the countries were demographically more homogeneous (Watkins, 1990). Another way of saying this is that on a demographic map of western Europe in 1870, national boundaries would be rather faint, but by 1960 demographic boundaries would be more deeply etched. This has implications for comparison. As late as 1870, comparison across countries would be somewhat dubious because they were so heterogeneous. By 1960, this heterogeneity had diminished substantially, thus making it more reasonable to compare national units. It is not possible to do the same sort of comparisons for sub-national socio-economic groups, because adequate data are not available early enough; it is likely, however, that the story would be much the same. A more general implication of this work is that it may be reasonable to use demographic behavior as a way of defining societies. If, for example, demographic behavior is relatively homogeneous within a group but distinctive from another group, we could draw the social boundary between the two.

I suspect that these findings would be generalizable to other kinds of behavior as well. We usually consider births and marriages to be among the most private of behaviors. There is now almost no state regulation of marriage or birth (with the exception of regulating age of marriage at a level that is in any case well below historical ages of marriages for western populations), and there is widespread support for the belief that when and whom one marries (or if one marries at all), and how many children one has, are decisions that are properly left to the individual (or couple).

Against these assertions of the primacy of individual choice (both in rhetoric and in regulations), it is rather surprising to find so little variation in behavior. Analysts of modern demographic behavior make much of the slight variation that remains: we usually overlook the fact that we are playing with a much smaller deck than in the past. If this is the case with demographic behavior -- that intensely private domain

-- is it not likely to be the case also with other sorts of behavior? It seems to me at least reasonable to argue that if demographic behavior is similar across subgroups in a society, then it is likely that other kinds of behavior are at least as similar as well. Thus, since the demographic data show that the nation-state has become a more appropriate unit of analysis over time, it is likely that the nation-state has become a more appropriate unit for other analyses as well.

A second theme of relevance to comparative and historical sociology that this work raises is that of connections between macro- and micro-level changes. The decline in demographic diversity is paralleled by national market integration, state expansion, and nation building, all topics that have been of interest to comparative and historical sociologists. The problem is how to connect these macro-level structural changes with what went on in the bedrooms and courting parlors of western Europe.

One way of providing this linkage is to look at the effects of market integration, state- and nation-building on personal networks. These personal networks seem to be important in both spreading information about new practices (for example, contraception) but also in legitimizing their use. I think women talked to other women about private matters, and in doing so reached a consensus with friends and neighbors about what was appropriate behavior -- the right age to marry, whether or not it was proper to use contraception, how many children was enough. What market integration, state expansion and nation-building did was to expand the geographic range of these personal networks. In the mid-19th century, most conversations were likely to be with members of the local community; by 1960, many more were likely to be with those outside the local community, both in face-to-face interaction and indirectly through metaphorical conversations, such as with advice columns in the national press.

Lastly, this analysis suggests modifications to the rational actor framework that has dominated recent accounts of demographic behavior, as well as in other areas. In these accounts, individuals are apparently not only rational but also isolated. I do not wish to suggest that we replace an assumption of rationality of rationality with one of irrationality. It does seem, however, that individuals are far less isolated, far more subject to social control than our theories usually assume. We rarely examine the influence of "others" on demographic behavior. On surveys, women are asked how many children they expect to have. They are sometimes asked about their spouse, but not about what their parents, siblings, friends or neighbors had to do with the decision. Indeed, it would probably be somewhat embarrassing to respond that these others did have an influence -- reproduction is supposed to be a private individual or couple decision. The responses from these surveys are then analyzed as if what mostly mattered were the characteristics of the individual woman (e.g. years of education, whether she worked or not) or perhaps those of her husband (e.g. his occupation). The role of networks in accounting for the greater demographic uniformity of nations in western Europe suggests that we should also ask about her (or his) significant others -- those whose opinions on these issues would matter.

In other words, rational actors should be embedded in communities. If this is true for behavior as private as marriage and reproduction, it is likely to be true for other behavior of interest to sociologists as well.

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## CONFRONTING DUALITIES: INHERENT COMPARISONS IN HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY

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Not so long ago comparative sociologists vigorously defended the uniqueness of their subdiscipline against those who claimed that since all sociology sought to explain variation all sociology was comparative. Articles concerning comparative sociology gave way to books; the leading champions might be Ragin's *The Comparative Method* and Tilly's *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*. Yet in legitimating comparative sociology, Ragin, Tilly and others cast the subdiscipline largely as the contrasting of macro-level cases to infer causality from similarities and differences. This emphasis on cross-national comparison has led some to conclude that it is the "historical" rather than the "comparative" that forms the core of our section (Morawska, 1990).

Historical sociology is not inherently comparative if by comparative we mean only contraasting macro-level cases. But historical sociology employs a comparative logic because it emphasizes conceptual dichotomies like time and space, and does not evade research dilemmas like missing data and historical possibilities. My remarks on these dualities parallel Isaac and Griffin's (1989) criticism of ahistoricism in time-series analysis, particularly the advantages of an inductive approach to time and place. My point is that induction means working from diversity to generality, but conceptualizing diversity requires constructing cases, and cases can only be constructed through comparison.

Historical sociologists agree that time is a basic ingredient of their analysis. The measurement of time involves at least two points, thus imparting a duality to historical research. Although "periods" are constructs, for historical sociologists a new period provides a case to compare against an earlier period. From this perspective even anachronisms ("those things which seem to have lost all authority over the present") can be useful (Bloch, 1953: 42). Contrast this approach to "sociology of the present's" concepts of "random error", "deviant case", and "the atypical": while historical sociology depends on duality and comparison, presentist sociology results in singularity and linearity.

For a "sociologist of the present", a new period is valuable primarily because it increases the sample size. In a recent critique of comparative historical sociology, Lieberson (1990: 1-2), following Smelser (1976: 157-8), argues: "If data were available with appropriate depth and detail for a large number of cases, obviously the researcher would not be working with these more limited cases." Yet it is history rather than simple data availability that limits case selection. As Isaac and Griffin (1989: 878 n. 5) note, one cannot arbitrarily include years in time-series analysis simply to obtain an adequate sample size. Dealing with time as the source of cases rather than as a source of N generates an inherent comparative logic in historical sociology.

Historical sociologists also agree that the analysis of place is a basic ingredient of their work. Like time, place is a duality, since space must be measured at least two points. And like its approach to time, historical sociology retains the duality of place through the development of cases. The "sociology of the present" collapses this duality into the search for more N. In historical sociology, however, places are generally not substitutable; they are unique. To use my own research as an example, adding a third country to a comparison of the French and American resettlement of Indochinese refugees since 1975 would alter the nature of the comparison, since no other country admits these refugees due to prior imperialism in Indochina. For a "sociology of the present" the addition of countries would not alter the research design.

The uniqueness of place also means that some locales are more significant than others, such as France in 1789 or Russia in 1917. Because historical sociology does not eliminate the duality of place it must continually revisit some places.

Braudel's (1982) explanation of why Paris and not Lyon became the center of France is a classic example. This work illustrates the comparison of place without chronology (the discussion leaps between events hundreds of years apart) and the significance of some particular places. In historical sociology, place becomes case, fostering an inherent comparative logic.

The combination of time and place is an "event". But historical sociologists who are familiar with primary documents are acutely aware that history is not simply a series of events; some events are recorded and others are not. The "silences in history" result form the destruction of primary sources and the absence of documents from people who did not have the skill or power to record events. Even the best reconstruction of the past is always incomplete, and this leads to a tension between the discovered and the lost (or in the case of oral history, the remembered and the forgotten).

Missing data is a problem for all forms of sociology. However, for the "sociology of the present" data is presumed to be "out there". Access issues are technical and financial for surveys, and interpersonal for participant observation. For example, the problem of non-respondents in surveys is solved by random sampling. Historical sociology cannot so easily resolve the dilemma of the written and the unwritten, the remembered and the forgotten, and our assumption is that our data is scarce and partial. These two approaches promote very different uses of data. Historical sociologists use data to reconstruct, while "sociologists of the present" use data to sample. The logic of sampling seeks to eliminate the duality of present and absent data, and thus presents data that is self-contained and "speaks for itself". A reconstructive logic accepts duality, comparing what has been found to what remains missing.

A final duality resolved differently by the two forms of sociology is "the hypothetical". Historical sociologists acknowledge both the actual and the possible, leading to such comparative techniques as counterfactual examples (Tilly, 1981), imaginary experiments (Weber, 1949), and historical alternatives (Moore, 1978). In explaining how Paris became the metropolitan center of France, Braudel (1986: 306-7) notes: "To try to imagine a different history for France is one way of trying to understand what history did have in store for it." My favorite example comes from Fredrickson's comparative history of South Africa and the American south (1981: 246-7). He "creates" apartheid in the U.S. by having Native Americans outnumber European colonists, turning reservations into homelands, and making a "red" rather than black source of cheap labor.

This approach to the hypothetical contrasts with the "sociology of the present's" reliance on a null hypothesis. Counterfactual cases are not universally accepted by historical sociologists. But they indicate our realization that history is never filled with inconsequential moments. Presentist sociology asumes that it is possible to dip into social life, find "nothing happening", and confirm the null hypothesis. Historical sociologists combine attention to substantive particulars and an awareness of alternative outcomes, articulating the two through inductive reasoning, which requires case construction and comparison.*

*I would like to thank Julia Adams, Ron Aminzade, and Charles Ragin for their helpful comments on this paper, although they are not responsible for any shortcomings that remain.

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## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS AND NOMINATIONS

### ASA Comparative Historical Sociology Prize

The section on Comparative Historical Sociology will award a prize for the best article in historical and/or comparative historical sociology published in the last two years (since January 1, 1989) or not yet published. Papers may be submitted by the authors or by others. The committee for the 1991 prize consists of Andrew Abbott, Liah Greenfeld, Thomas Hall, and Larry Isaac. Four copies of papers submitted should be sent to Andrew Abbott, Rutgers University, Department of Sociology, PO Box 5072, New Brunswick, NJ 08903-5072, to arrive no later than 15 March 1991.