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HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY

Used as a category to identify social scientific research that constructs or illustrates theory by careful attention to culturally, geographically, and temporally located facts, historical sociology (or, from the historian's vantage point, sociological history) exists as a self-conscious research orientation within both of its parent disciplines. Popular assertions in the 1950s and 1960s that history involved the study of particular facts while sociology involved the formulation of general hypotheses (see Franzosi and Mohr 1997, pp. 133–139 [for the historians' view]; Lipset 1968, pp. 22–23; McDonald 1996; cf. Mills 1959, pp. 143–164) had turned around by the early 1980s, at which time Abrams claimed that "sociological explanation is necessarily historical" (Abrams 1982, p. 2; see Burke 1980, p. 28). While this integrative interpretation of the two disciplines reflects the attitudes of many researchers in the respective disciplines, a few persons remain extremely cautious about the merits of integrating them (see Ferrarotti 1997, pp. 12–13).

Abrams's claim is true for much of sociological theorizing, and sociologists realize that seminal research in their discipline has been informed by careful attention to historical information. Nonetheless, fundamental differences exist between history and sociology regarding the choice of research strategies and methodologies. Historical research emphasizes the sociocultural context of events and actors within the broad range of human culture, and when examining events that occurred in early periods of the human record it borrows from archaeology and cultural anthropology, two

companion disciplines. Historians, therefore, who examine premodern material often borrow anthropological rather than sociological insights to elucidate areas where the historical record is weak, under the assumption that preindustrialized societies share basic similarities that sociological theory rarely addresses (Thomas 1963, 1971; cf. Thompson 1972). Historians are likely to choose research topics that are culturally and temporally delimited and that emerge "from the logic of events of a given place and period" (Smelser 1968, p. 35; see Bonnell 1980, p. 159). They tend to supplement secondary sources with primary texts or archival data (see Tilly 1981, p. 12).

In contrast, sociological research stresses theory construction and development, and its heavy emphasis on quantification limits most of its research to issues that affect societies after they begin to modernize or industrialize (and hence develop accurate record keeping that researchers can translate into data [see Burke 1980, p. 22]). Many of their methodological techniques—including surveys, interviews, qualitative fieldwork, questionnaires, various statistical procedures, and social-psychological experimentation—have little if any applicability to historians (Wilson 1971, p. 106). (Interestingly, however, a number of historical sociologists are utilizing narratives to elucidate sociologically traditional issues like capital–state relations and urban development [Gotham and Staples 1996; see Isaac 1997; Kiser 1996.]) Given their orientation toward theory, sociologists are likely to choose research topics that are "rooted in and generated by some conceptual apparatus" (Smelser 1968, p. 35; see Bonnell 1980, p. 159). Their data sources infrequently involve archival searches (see Schwartz 1987, p. 12) or heavy dependence on primary texts. Sociologists seem more willing than historians both to "undertake comparative analysis across national and temporal boundaries" and to present generalizations that relate to either a number of cases or universal phenomena (as opposed to a single case [Bonnell 1980, p. 159]). Reflecting these basic differences, social history, which developed out of the historical discipline, concentrates on speaking about lived experiences, while traditional historical sociologists concentrate on analysing structural transformations (Skocpol 1987, p. 28).

Although some historical sociological studies attempt either to refine concepts or rigorously to test existing theoretical explanations, more often they attempt "to develop new theories capable of providing more convincing and comprehensive explanations for historical patterns and structures" (Bonnell 1980, p. 161). When testing existing theories, historical sociologists argue deductively (by attempting to locate evidence that supports or refutes theoretical propositions), case-comparatively (by juxtaposing examples from equivalent units), or case-illustratively (by comparing cases to a single theory or concept [Bonnell 1980, pp. 162–167]). Both case comparisons and case illustrations can show either that cases share a common set of "hypothesized causal factors" that adequately explain similar historical outcomes or that they contain crucial differences that lead to divergent historical results (Skocpol 1984, pp. 378–379). In any case, historical sociologists occasionally need reminding that, in both their quantitative and qualitative research, they must avoid the "common tendency . . . to play fast and loose with time" (Jensen 1997, p. 50), since the temporal dimensions of events have profound implications for the validity of comparisons.

Sociology's founding figures—Marx and Engels, Weber, Tocqueville, and, to a limited degree, Durkheim—utilized history in the formulation of concepts and research agendas that still influence the discipline. In various works Marx and Engels demonstrated adroit sociohistorical skills, particularly in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Marx [1885] 1963) and *The Peasant War in Germany* (Engels [1870] 1926). In these studies they moved deftly among analyses of "short-term, day-to-day phenomena" of sociopolitical life, the underlying structure of that life, and "the level of the social structure as a whole" (Abrams 1982, p. 59) to provide powerful examples of historically grounded materialist analysis (see Abrams 1982, p. 63; Sztompka 1986, p. 325).

Weber, who was steeped in the ancient and medieval history of both the East and West, believed that, through the use of heuristically useful ideal types, researchers could "understand on the one hand the relationships and cultural significance of individual events in their contemporary manifestations and on the other the causes of their being historically *so* and not *otherwise*" (Weber 1949, p. 72). However much contemporary researchers have faulted his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit Of Capitalism* (1930) for misunderstanding

Puritan religious traditions (Kent 1990; MacKinnon 1988a, 1988b) and interpreting them through preexisting philosophical categories (Kent 1983, 1985), it remains the quintessential example of his historically informed sociological studies (see Marshall 1982). Weber's extensive contribution to many aspects of historical sociology (including the linkage between "agency and structure," multicausality, ideal types, and various methodology and substantive issues) receives extensive attention in Kalberg (1994).

Variously assessed as a historian and a political scientist, Tocqueville also contributed to historical sociology with books that examined two processes—democratization (in the United States) and political centralization (in France)—that remain standard topics of historical sociological research (Tocqueville [1835] 1969, [1858] 1955; see Poggi 1972; Sztompka 1986, p. 325). Similar praise for historical sensitivity, however, has not always gone to a fellow Frenchman of a later era, Emile Durkheim, whose concepts were scornfully called by one historical sociologist an "early form of ahistoricism" (Sztompka 1986, p. 324). Bellah, nevertheless, asserted that "history was always of central importance in Durkheim's sociological work" (Bellah 1959, p. 153) and even argued that, "at several points Durkheim went so far as to question whether or not sociology and history could in fact be considered two separate disciplines" (Bellah 1959, p. 154). Indeed, recent research has identified Durkheim's cross-disciplinary sensitivity in his analysis of the history of French education (Emirbayer 1996a) and "the structures and processes of civil society" (Emirbayer 1996b, p. 112). Nevertheless, Abrams's compromise interpretation may be most accurate concerning most of Durkheim's work. He acknowledges that Durkheim identified the broad process of the Western transition to industrialization, even though his "extremely general framework" demands specific historical elaboration (Abrams 1982, p. 32).

Despite the prominence of history within major studies by sociology's founding figures, subsequent sociologists produced few historically informed works until the late 1950s (cf. Merton 1938). Also during this period (in 1958) the historian Sylvia Thrupp founded the *Journal of Comparative Studies in Society and History*, and since then other journals have followed that are sympathetic to historical sociology (including *Journal of Family History*, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, *Journal of Social History*, *Labor History*, *Past and Present*, *Social History*, and *Social Science History* [Bart and Frankel 1986, pp. 114–116]). The output of interdisciplinary books continued growing throughout the 1960s, and by the 1970s "the sociological study of history achieved full status within the discipline" (Bonnell 1980, p. 157, see p. 156; see Smith, 1991 [for a clear historical overview]).

Studies of capitalist expansion examine such topics as the emergence and consequences of the Industrial Revolution, the rise of the working class, population growth, and the developmental operations of the modern world system. Exemplary studies include Smelser's *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution* (1959) and Wallerstein's *The Modern World System* (1974). Basing his middle-range model on Parsons's general theory of action, Smelser deduced a supposedly universal sequence through which all changes move that involve structural differentiation in industrializing societies (see Bonnell 1980, p. 162; Skocpol 1984, p. 363). He illustrated the applicability of his framework by drawing examples from the economic changes within the British cotton industry during the nineteenth century, followed by additional examples of changes to the lives and activities of workers in that industry. These historical facts, however, were secondary to the model itself.

Wallerstein borrowed from Marxism and functionalism to devise a "world system" theory of the global economy that purports to be universal in its interpretive and explanatory power. He argued that after the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a "world economy" developed in which economically advantaged and politically strong areas, called "core states," dominated other economically nondiversified and politically weak "peripheral areas." Through "semi-peripheral areas" that serve as "middle trading groups in an empire," resources flow out of the peripheral areas and into the core states for capitalist development, consumption, and often export back to their areas of origin (Wallerstein 1974, pp. 348–350). Within this model Wallerstein mustered a phalanx of historical facts in order to demonstrate the emergence of the world economy above the limited events in various nation-states, and in doing so he "has promoted serious historical work within sociology" (Tilly 1981, p. 42).

E.P. Thompson's exemplary study (1963) took the sociological concept of "class" and presented its historical unfolding in England between 1780 and passage of the parliamentary Reform Bill in 1832 (Thompson 1963, p. 11). He argued that "the finest-meshed sociological net cannot give us a pure specimen of class .... The relationship [of class] must always be embodied in real people and in a real context" (p. 9). By the end of the era that he examined, "a more clearly-defined class consciousness, in the customary Marxist sense, was maturing, in which working people were aware of continuing both old and new battles on their own" (p. 712). His study stands among the finest examples of historically careful development of a sociological concept.

In contrast to the economic focus on issues involving capitalist expansion, studies of the growth of national states and systems of states examine political topics such as state bureaucratization, the democratization of politics, revolutions, and the interaction of nations in the international arena. Three heralded historical sociology studies in this genre are Eisenstadt (1963), Moore (1966), and Skocpol (1979). Eisenstadt studied twenty-two preindustrial states that had centralized, impersonal, bureaucratic empires through which political power operated. After a tightly woven and systematic analysis of comparative social, political, and bureaucratic patterns, he concluded that "in any of the historical bureaucratic societies, their continued prominence was dependent upon the nature of the political process that developed in the society: first, on the policies of the rulers; second, on the orientations, goals, and political activities of the principal strata; and third, on the interrelations between these two" (Eisenstadt 1963, p. 362).

Moore's case studies of revolutions in England, France, the United States, China, Japan, and India sought "to understand the role of the landed upper classes and peasants in the bourgeois revolutions leading to capitalist democracy, the abortive bourgeois revolutions leading to fascism, and the peasant revolutions leading to communism" (Moore 1966, p. xvii). His own sympathies, however, lay in the development of political and social systems that fostered freedom, and he realized the importance of "a violent past" in the development of English, French, and American democracies (pp. 39, 108, 153). He concluded "that an independent nobility is an essential ingredient in the growth of democracy" (p. 417) yet realized that a nobility's efforts to free itself from royal controls "is highly unfavorable to the Western version of democracy," unless these efforts occur in the context of a bourgeois revolution (p. 418).

Skocpol scrutinized the "causes and processes" of social revolutions in France, Russia, and China "from a nonvoluntarist, structural perspective, attending to international and world-historical, as well as intranational, structures and processes." While doing so she moved "states—understood as potentially autonomous organizations located at the interface of class structures and international situations—to the very center of attention" (Skocpol 1979, p. 33). She concluded that "revolutionary political crises, culminating in administrative and military breakdowns, emerged because the imperial states became caught in cross-pressures between intensified military competition or intrusions from abroad and constraints imposed on monarchical responses by the existing agrarian class structures and political institutions" (p. 285).

Underappreciated by theorists of historical sociology is the growing number of studies that apply sociological categories and concepts to the emergence and development of historically significant religious traditions (see Swatos 1977). By doing so, these scholars have surpassed the traditional sociological and historical colleagues who limit their efforts primarily to political and structural issues, especially ones arising during the late eighteenth to twentieth centuries. Swanson (1960), for example, coded material on fifty hunting-and-gathering societies in an effort to connect religion and magic to social structure, and subsequently analyzed relationships between constitutional structures and religious beliefs around the period of the Protestant Reformation (Swanson 1967). The emergence and early development of major religious traditions has received considerable sociological attention. They include, for example, analyses of early Christianity as a social movement (Blasi 1988), as a millenarian movement (Gager 1975; see Lang 1989, p. 339; Meeks 1983, pp. 173–180), and as a dramatically expansive young religion during the first centuries of the Common Era (Stark 1996). Concepts from sociological studies of modern sectarianism have informed historical studies of Mahayana Buddhism (Kent 1982) and

Valentinian Gnosticism (Green 1982). Weberian examinations continue to influence historically grounded studies of numerous world religions, including ancient Judaism (Zeitlin 1984), Islam (Turner 1974), and other religious traditions from around the world (see Swatos 1990). On a grand scale, religion figures prominently in the work of globalization theorist Roland Robertson (e.g., Robertson 1985; see Robertson 1992).

The historically grounded research in the sociology of religion, along with the works of Eisenstadt and others, suggests that future historical sociological studies will continue pushing beyond the confines of modern, macrosociological topics and into a wide range of premodern historical areas. Likewise, historical issues likely will become more consciously developed in microsociological studies (see Abrams 1982, pp. 227–266), and there will appear more sociologically informed historical examinations of cultural development (still exemplified by Elias 1978). Nonetheless, considerable macrosociological research still needs to be performed on historical issues affecting preindustrializing and Third World countries as well as on recent international realignments between forms of capitalism and communism.

Sometimes coupled with communism's collapse is the reappearance of nationalism and ethnic violence in various parts of the world. The deterioration of the Balkans in what (under Soviet influence) was Yugoslavia, for example, prompted Veljko Vujacic (1996) to develop "a comparative examination of contemporary Russian and Serbian nationalism" by attempting "to demonstrate the usefulness of some of Weber's key theoretical ideas on nations, nationalism, and imperialism"(p. 789). Specifically, he tried "to show how long-term historical and institutional legacies, shared memories, and defining political experiences, played themselves out in the contemporary period, influencing the different availability of mass constituencies in Russia and Serbia for nationalist mobilization under the auspices of new 'empire-saving coalitions'" (p. 789). Despite being faced with the difficult task of utilizing Weberian theory in this comparative context, Vujacic warned, "there is no need to gloss over the frequently bloody and unpredictable consequences of [people's] struggles with unduly abstract sociological generalizations. Instead, we should theorize our narrative, while giving contingency its place" (p. 790). In essence, narrative accuracy must not be compromised by the demands of theory building.

Innovative methodological techniques continue to enter the historical sociology realm. As outlined by Roberto Franzosi and John Mohr, two such methodologies are network analysis (mapping "the connectivities among people, groups, and organizations" [Franzosi and Mohr 1997, pp. 145–154]) and content analysis ("the use of formal methods for extracting meanings from textual materials" [Franzosi and Mohr 1997, p. 149; see Tilly 1997, pp. 219ff.]). These and other methodologies contribute to the production of respected historical sociology studies on such topics as capitalist expansion, "the growth of national states and systems of states," collective action (Tilly 1981, p. 44; and see Tarrow 1996 for a review of Tilly's work), and the sociology of religious development. (Not to be overlooked, however, are studies of both capital-state relations and urban development and poverty [Gotham and Staples 1996].) Discussion will continue over the relative merits of globalization theory, world systems theory, and modernization theories (see Mandalios 1996), and globalization theory likely will expand and modify to include greater emphasis on regional world systems, particularly in East–Southeast Asia (Ikeda 1996). The extent to which Michel Foucault's historically grounded, poststructuralist work on the relationships among cultural meanings, self-identities, and social control extend into the historical sociology corpus (for example, Foucault 1979, 1980; Dean 1994; see Seidman 1994, pp. 212–233) remains to be seen.

As older sociological methodologies disseminate within history and newer ones enter the discipline, we will continue to appreciate "the importance of historical sociology in enlarging our understanding of the historical variations in class, gender, revolutions, state formation, religion, and cultural identity" (Somers 1996, p. 53). On a practical level, the profile of historical sociology in its respective disciplines will be enhanced as universities extend cross-appointments of faculty, cross-list courses in methodologies and other topics, share theses and dissertation supervisory responsibilities among history and sociology faculties; encourage interdepartmental co-sponsorship of visiting speakers, and generally enhance the learning and training environments for graduate

students and staff. On a professional level, the American Sociological Association continues to sponsor a section in its annual conference entitled "Comparative and Historical Society."

(SEE ALSO: *Comparative-Historical Sociology*; *Event History Analysis*)

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