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Author(s): Philip McMichael

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INCORPORATING COMPARISON WITHIN A WORLD-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: AN ALTERNATIVE COMPARATIVE METHOD

PHILIP McMICHAEL
Cornell University

Recent critiques of modernization theory have questioned the comparability of its central organizing concept, the "national society." The logic of comparative inquiry requires independent or independent uniform "cases" and formal quasi-experimental designs for comparative generalization. Global conceptions of social change violate formal comparative requirements, necessitating an alternative form of "incorporated comparison," that takes both multiple/diachronic and singular/synchronic forms. Incorporated comparison is used to conceptualize variation across time and space when time and space dimensions are neither separate nor uniform. The fixed units of analysis employed by modernization and world-system theories yield to an alternative strategy of grounding the analytical units of comparison in the world-historical processes under investigation. Recent studies illustrate this alternative to formal comparison and incorporate comparison into the process of substantive inquiry.

The comparative method has been under scrutiny lately as sociologists attempt to clarify its role in social science. Four authors' assessments of its potential divide into questions of rigor versus interpretive scope. On the side of rigor, Skocpol (1984) and Ragin (1987) argue that the comparative method, when used with certain logical strategies, can approach the "scientific" rigor of statistical or variable-based inquiry. On the interpretive side, Wallerstein (1974) and Tilly (1984) argue that comparison, when it reveals the interconnectedness of social phenomena, can advance the cause of historically-grounded social theory. Where Skocpol and Ragin are concerned with the comparative method's formal properties vis-a-vis social-scientific inquiry, Wallerstein and Tilly want to employ comparison to question the positivist¹ categories inherited from nineteenth-century social theory.

While these alternative concerns are recognizable in substantive research, they have not

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¹ The term "positivist" here designates the application of natural-science-like models to social phenomena.

been adequately specified in methodological terms. There is a lack of fit between extant taxonomies of comparative-historical research strategies and recent comparative inquiries that eschew the formal comparative method. The comparative-historical research strategies offered by Skocpol and Tilly (as representatives of the two alternative concerns) display a basic convergence. What is missing is a specification of an alternative non-experimental "historical-comparative" research strategy. To address that alternative, it is necessary to first evaluate the interpretive challenge to sociological positivism.

The perspectives of Tilly and Wallerstein are similar: Tilly urges the development of "historically grounded analysis of big structures and large processes as alternatives to the timeless, placeless models of social organization and social change that came to us with the nineteenth-century heritage" (1984, p. 2). Wallerstein contends: "The fundamental error of ahistorical social science (including ahistorical versions of Marxism) is to reify parts of the totality into such units and then to compare these reified structures" (1974, p. 388). "Society," for example, is assumed to be a self-evident and discrete social unit, and therefore comparable. Both consider such assumptions ahistorical, as modern social change is not simply the property of individual societies.

However, the intellectual goals of Wallerstein and Tilly differ. For Wallerstein, social

change can only be understood as an historical system that operates at a different level from the conventional “national society.” Cross-national comparison must place nations within systemic processes operating at levels “beneath” and “above” the nation state. The world capitalist system, which includes states as its essential political components, is the ultimate unit of comparison (1974, p. 390). Tilly, however, is more agnostic, believing that modern social change arises from two distinct, but interconnected, processes of development of the nation-states system on the one hand and the worldwide capitalist system on the other (1984, p. 147). He details various comparative strategies open to the analyst, including “encompassing comparisons” that situate phenomena within trans-societal structures (1984, pp. 80-3). Where Wallerstein argues that the modern world system with its “transsocietal structures” has been in existence for the last five centuries, Tilly is content to speculate that encompassing comparison will “come into its own” and secure a place in our “intellectual toolbox” as we perceive more clearly the networks ordering social life (1984, p. 147). While cautious about the risks of functionalist explanation in “encompassing comparisons,”² Tilly nevertheless concludes:

Encompassing comparisons, however, deserve more attention than they have received. Encompassing comparisons have twin advantages: directly taking account of the interconnectedness of ostensibly separate experiences and providing a strong incentive to ground analyses explicitly in the historical contexts of the structures and processes they include (1984, p. 147).

I pursue the Wallerstein/Tilly path, but reformulate the character of that which “encompasses,” and distinguish the procedure from extant taxonomies of comparative and historical sociological strategy. An emergent form of “historical-comparative” inquiry parallels the rise of world-system theory and blends the mutual concerns of Wallerstein and Tilly. Systemic phenomena are compared without assum-

² At issue is the question of case independence, which is a formal requirement of theory testing in the comparative method. Thus Collins asks of the world-system perspective: “Such conceptions, however, raise a methodological problem: If there is only one world system, how can we test a theory? The number of historical instances reduces to one case, because everything is connected together” (1984, p. 341).

ing an all-encompassing world system. Rather than using “encompassing comparison” — a strategy that *presumes* a “whole” that governs its “parts” — it progressively *constructs* a whole as a methodological procedure by giving context to historical phenomena. In effect, the “whole” emerges via comparative analysis of “parts” as moments in a self-forming whole. I call this *incorporated comparison*.

“Incorporated comparison” stems from the critique of “modernization theory,” and includes the theoretical proposition that international organization is continually evolving. The goal is not to develop invariant hypotheses via comparison of more or less uniform “cases,” but to give substance to a historical process (a whole) through comparison of its parts. The whole, therefore, does not exist independent of its parts. Whether considering nation-states or a singular world system, *neither whole nor parts* are permanent categories or units of analysis. Generalization is historically contingent because the units of comparison are historically specified. In short, comparison becomes the substance of the inquiry rather than its framework.

This essay proceeds from a discussion of extant taxonomies to a critical review of comparative methodology and the challenge of world-system theory to that methodology. It concludes with an illustration of studies using “incorporated comparison” to develop historically-grounded social theory. I characterize comparative sociology in ideal-typical terms in two senses: (1) by accentuating the formal assumptions governing comparative methodology, and (2) by focusing on macro, cross-national comparison, since this is the comparative sociology that Wallerstein and Tilly address.

CONVERGING TAXONOMIES: SKOCPOL AND TILLY

Incorporated comparison is a research strategy not considered in the individual taxonomies developed by Skocpol and Tilly. Table 1 summarizes Skocpol’s and Tilly’s formulations of alternative research agendas and compares them with one of my own. Theoretical goals are divided into the *application* of theory, such as establishing the plausibility of a causal hypothesis, and the *construction* of theory, such as hypothesis-building via comparative analysis linking causes and outcomes across cases. Research goals are divided into *formal* concerns with the status of causal arguments (i.e., with

Table 1. Typology of Selected Strategies for Comparative Research

Research Goals	Theoretical Goals	
	Application	Construction
Skocpol's research strategies for historical sociology		
<i>Formal</i> (Concern with "state of knowledge")	1 Application of theoretical model to history	2 Comparative-analytic
<i>Substantive</i> (Concern with "state of the world")	3 Application of concept to history	4
Tilly's strategies of comparison		
<i>Formal</i> (Concern with "state of knowledge")	1 Encompassing comparison (juxtaposition of cases in time and space reveal systemic properties)	2 Comparative-analytic: Variation-finding and Universalizing comparison (to establish principle of variation among cases)
<i>Substantive</i> (Concern with "state of the world")	3 Individualizing comparison (contrasting cases of a given phenomenon to reveal particularities)	4
A composite of research strategies for historical sociology		
<i>Formal</i> (Concern with "state of knowledge")	1 Generalizing (use of history to confirm hypotheses)	2 Comparative-analytic (specifies causal regularities in varying or convergent outcomes)
<i>Substantive</i> (Concern with "state of the world")	3 Particularizing (conceptualization of an instance via ideal-typical analysis)	4 Incorporated comparisons (uses comparison in reconstructing an historical configuration posited as a self-forming whole)

"the state of knowledge") and *substantive* concerns with some historical process or situation (i.e., with "the state of the world").

These research strategies can be understood as a set of "moments" in the research process, that may presuppose one another — for example, a focus on the status of a formal theory may depend on prior theory construction via comparative-analytic analysis. On the other hand, they can be understood as relatively distinct research emphases. In the top panel, Skocpol's three "research strategies in historical sociology" can be classified schematically as: the application of a general theory to explain historical phenomena (box 1); the con-

struction of a theory of causal regularities using formal comparative-analytic methods (box 2); and the use of a key concept or set of concepts in historical analysis to meaningfully elaborate a particular phenomenon, whether a case study or informal comparison (box 3). This is a typology of strategies; as Skocpol claims they are not "hermetically sealed from one another" and "creative combinations are and always have been practical" (1984, p. 362). An implicit fourth strategy (box 4), constructing a theoretical account of a recurring or complex historical configuration, is not addressed by Skocpol.

Skocpol's research strategies for historical sociology are quite compatible typologically

with the more focused comparative strategies proposed by Tilly (middle panel of Table 1). I argue that Tilly's four strategies of comparison: individualizing — contrasting "specific instances of a given phenomenon as a means of grasping the peculiarities of each case" (1984, p. 82), universalizing, variation-finding, and encompassing can be reduced to three distinct forms of inquiry. *Universalizing* comparison — establishing "that every instance of a phenomenon follows essentially the same rule"; and *variation-finding* comparison — establishing "a principle of variation in the character or intensity of a phenomenon by examining systematic differences among instances" (1984, p. 82), are in fact alternative forms of comparative-analytic procedure. Both Skocpol, in associating the strength of comparative analysis with a combination of Mill's "method of agreement" and "method of difference" (1984, pp. 378-80), and Ragin, in building what he refers to as a "synthetic" comparative strategy (1987, pp. 82-4), indirectly endorse such a classification. This comparative-analytic type fits in box 2.

"Encompassing comparison," a strategy employing a systemic ideal-type to explain variation among cases "as consequences of their relationships to the whole" (Tilly 1984, p. 125), is placed in box 1. Tilly's depiction of Rokkan's "conceptual maps" and his claim that they "lack dynamism" (1984, p. 139) suggest that this strategy is an application of a theoretical model to history. "Individualizing comparison" is placed in box 3 since the emphasis is on particularizing a phenomenon via informal comparison. Tilly's taxonomy also leaves box 4 empty.

In the bottom panel of Table 1 I present a composite typology that combines the ideas of Skocpol and Tilly. Most important, I consider the meaning of the logical cell (box 4) that neither Skocpol or Tilly address. This cell represents an interpretive approach, focusing on the construction of causal historical analysis without recourse to formal methodological procedures or a formal theory.

A typology of strategies does not mean there is no relation among the types. For instance, some analysts might see a sequence among the strategies where the missing strategy performs a "groundbreaking" role. Thus, box 4 might inform a comparative-analytic construction of hypotheses from additional cases (box 2), or a generalizing theory (box 1), or a more specific conceptualization to be elaborated in a particular instance (box 3). Relations among the vari-

ous strategies may be sequential, supplementary, or complementary. I argue for the relative autonomy of the strategies, especially as I see "incorporated comparison" as an analytical strategy in which theory construction is historically specific. Each strategy pursues a particular level of analysis governing the scope of the data addressed and the claims of the research. In that sense, each strategy has its own research focus.

ENCOMPASSING COMPARISON OR INCORPORATED COMPARISON?

It is particularly important to distinguish "incorporated" from "encompassing" comparison. Tilly defines "encompassing comparisons" as comparisons that "select locations within [a large] structure or process and explain similarities or differences among those locations as consequences of their relationships to the whole" (1984, p. 123). Wallerstein identifies the "large structure or process" as the modern world system: "an alternative model with which to engage in comparative analysis, one rooted in the historically specific totality which is the world capitalist economy." He continues: "We hope to demonstrate thereby that to be historically specific is not to fail to be analytically universal" (1974, p. 391). Demonstrating the existence of the system as an historical entity leads him to employ an "illustrative" method of comparison using a single entity (as distinct from conventional "analytic" comparison of multiple entities), which produces functionalist history (Bonnell 1980, p. 165). Tilly likewise observes that "encompassing comparisons" risk the danger of functionalist explanation where the whole determines behavior of the parts and he concludes: "Lovers of risk should try encompassing comparisons" (1984, p. 124).

The risk, it seems to me, is not in employing a global perspective in which comparison is among components of a larger entity, but in how that perspective is constructed. If we begin, as Tilly suggests, with "a mental map of the whole system and a theory of its operation" (1984, p. 125), then we are likely to proceed with an uncontested unit of analysis. Tilly argues that the map and theory are best left provisional, so that they "will improve in use" (1984, p. 125). Nevertheless, the procedure puts the development of historically-grounded social theory at risk by presuming a systemic unit and unit cases within which historical observation takes place. This is common to formal com-

parative-analytic procedures, which presuppose “cases as wholes, and they compare whole cases with each other” (Ragin 1987, p. 3). Preconceptions about cases as analytical units constrain investigation by shaping conceptualization of causal regularities inferred from common patterns across “cases.” In either mode of comparison, the analyst must assume that common patterning derives from intrinsic properties of either “unit-cases” or the global system encompassing “cases.”

Use of preconceived units is an overriding “experimental” principle of analytic comparison (e.g., Przeworski and Teune 1970). It removes the unit of analysis from theoretical contention and limits the scope and possibilities of historical explanation. As a result, comparative inquiry tends to be constructed around an “external” relationship between “cases” and theory, where “cases” or “wholes” are abstracted from their time/place setting.

As an alternative to comparing discrete “cases” to mediate the (presumed) poles of “the general” and “the particular,” the analyst can use “incorporated comparison” in which interrelated instances are integral to, and define, the general historical process. Put another way, the particulars directly realize the general (c.f. Moore 1958, p. 151), which cannot be abstracted as a formal theory.

The “incorporated comparison” research strategy can take two forms. The first is a *multiple* form, in which instances are analyzed as products of a continuously evolving process in and across *time*. An example might be the development of the state system as an emerging configuration of states interrelated along several dimensions, both contextual (capitalist, or military-industrial epochs) and compositional (economic hierarchy, geo-political relations). Here, comparison reveals and posits a systemic process through the juxtaposition of instances in time.

The second is a *singular* form, analyzing variation in or across *space* within a world-historical conjuncture. This is a “cross-sectional” comparison of segments of a contradictory whole in which the segments (e.g., social units, cultures, or belief systems) “belong” to distinct social times. They are comparable precisely because they are competitively combined, and therefore redefined, in an historical conjuncture with unpredictable outcomes. Examples of such overlapping segments are historical combinations of peasant and market

economies, slave and wage labor systems, metropolitan and colonial cultures, etc. The comparative juxtaposition of these segments reveals the contradictory dynamics (along part/part and part/whole dimensions) that provide their historical texture and that of the whole.

The fact that the first form has a generalizing thrust and the second form a particularizing thrust does not rule out combinations where the particular and the general mutually condition one another. The strategic division lies in the relative emphases on space and time coordinates in the analysis of historical configurations. Overall, this strategy reformulates the role of comparison, subordinating it to a substantive historical problem. Comparison becomes an “internal” rather than an “external” (formal) feature of inquiry, relating apparently separate processes (in time and/or space) as components of a broader, world-historical process or conjuncture. In short, this strategy seeks to avoid the formal construction of units of comparative analysis central to the comparative analytic method.

LIMITS OF THE COMPARATIVE-ANALYTIC METHOD

In comparative analytic inquiry, theory and concepts can only approach “generality” by juxtaposing two or more “particular” units. The goal is to find invariance by analyzing several configurational “cases” (Ragin and Zaret 1983, p. 744). In cross-national comparison, for example, this appears in the procedure of juxtaposing national societies assumed to be unrelated in time and space. This assumption *derives* from evolutionary theory (Bock 1956, p. 90), in which national societies are self-contained systems with common ontogenetic patterns. In this theory, the “national society” emerged in the nineteenth century as a comparative construct, distinguished categorically from traditional societies in an evolutionary sequence. Nisbet writes: “Fundamental to the Comparative Method and its assumed validity as a body of evidence are the very preconceptions — conclusions, too, actually — of the theory of social evolution that the Comparative Method purportedly verifies” (1969, p. 190). Such premises formalize the comparative method in so far as the idea of evolving national societies (each independently replicating a common systemic process) fulfills the criterion of uniformity of unit cases (Zelditch 1973,

p. 282). In principle, it allows indiscriminate cross-national comparison.³

More important, the notion of separate, holistic national societies encourages comparative abstraction. Zelditch claims: "That generalization requires abstraction follows simply from the uniqueness of wholes" (1973, pp. 278-9). But this assumes unique cultural configurations in societies unconnected in time and space. It eliminates the possibility of a *different order* of generalization — an *inverse* procedure that would posit the distinctiveness of modern cultural configurations as products and creators of a connective historical process (see Robertson and Lechner 1985). But to posit historical distinctiveness is a contradiction in terms if the unit of analysis corresponds to the unit of historical variance. One solution is to employ a unit of analysis that is not the national society, as world-system theory has done, by declaring that nation-states are partial institutions of a broader, singular, global economy (Wallerstein 1983, p. 133). The frame of reference for social change becomes a global unit of analysis. Thus Bach claims: "Long-held strategies of concept formation and comparative analysis are challenged by the insistence upon singular processes as the starting point for inquiry . . ." (1980, p. 297).

WORLD-SYSTEM THEORY'S CHALLENGE AND LIMITS

World-system theory's epistemological intervention concerned the specification of the arena of social action.⁴ The shift was from the national society as a self-evident unit of analysis to the world economy as an historical social system. Instead of the "politico-cultural unit —

³ Uniformity of units is a theoretical requirement — it does not mean that all existing (national) societies fulfill this criterion. According to Zelditch, "intelligible comparisons" demand that the methodological rules be complemented with substantive knowledge of the societies under investigation to produce relevant comparison. This includes allowing "unique" transnational or case-specific processes to guide selection of cases (Elder 1976, p. 213; Ragin 1981, p. 114; and see Skocpol 1979, chapter 1). It also includes Weber's ideal-type (1949, p. 93), which mediates theory and history because it is distilled from history and yet is created according to some criterion of rationality not historically given (see Kocka 1985, p. 141).

⁴ The epistemological shift is a substantive revision of Parsons's notion of a social system of socie-

the state, or nation, or people" — the world economy "within which there is an ongoing division of labor" becomes the site of social change (Wallerstein 1983, p. 155). But the shift in levels of analysis is not simply an enlargement of view. The world system is not merely the *site* of social change, it is more the fundamental *source* of social change. One statement of this perspective is the following conceptualization of the state as neither a universal nor a discrete category:

Stateness . . . is not a generic category of political life — whose varied forms are to be traced within and across civilizations — but an historically specific category, one distinctive to the relationally formed jurisdictions — the sovereignties — of the (initially) European-centered interstate system. It is a category conceptually given by, because factually imposed by, the development processes of the capitalist world-economy (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1981, p. 245).

In positing the encompassing world system as the unit of analysis, the theory reformulates the conventional balancing act between generality and particularity. Analytic comparison takes historical diversity as a given and formally juxtaposes such particularity to produce general concepts. However, the world-system perspective offers alternative epistemological assumptions: (1) that we are dealing in social categories of an *integrated* modern world, and therefore (2) that they are not discrete, so the particular expresses the general.

Consider Wallerstein's account of incorporation of the Indian subcontinent, the Ottoman empire, the Russian empire, and West Africa into the world system. He employs an "encompassing comparison" of the four more or less simultaneous processes where each "process derived . . . from the need of the world-economy to expand its boundaries, a need which was itself the outcome of pressures internal to the world-economy" (Wallerstein 1989, p. 129). Determining the point, or event, of "incorporation" in which "some significant production processes in a given geographic location become integral to various of the commodity chains that constitute the ongoing divisioning of labor of the capitalist world-economy" involves identifying responses "to the ever-changing" (Parsons 1973, p. 107), which qualified the original evolutionist premise of national societies as social systems. While Parsons's notion derived from societies themselves, Wallerstein is skeptical of the utility of the concept of "society."

ing 'market conditions' of this world-economy (whatever the source of these changes) in terms of efforts by those who control these production processes to maximize the accumulation of capital within this market" (Wallerstein 1989, p. 130). In concrete terms, in each instance the "emergence of a three-tiered spatial specialization within a zone — 'export' cash crops, 'local market' food crops, and 'crops' of migrant workers — has been a telltale sign of incorporation" (Wallerstein 1989, p. 138).

In world-system theory, social concepts cannot be abstracted from their place/time dimensions as they can in formal comparison.

To focus on certain seemingly similar conditions in various places at various times; to abstract those conditions from their place-time settings; and to inquire, abstractly, into the causes or consequences of the conditions is to proceed precisely in the one way clearly ruled out of court by the world-system or world-historical perspective on social change (Hopkins 1978, p. 212).

From this perspective, comparative generalization loses its point: "It is the *a priori* elimination of each case's distinctiveness that the world system's approach rules out, not the claim that there are comparabilities or similarities" (Hopkins 1978, p. 213). The difference is twofold: (1) in conventional comparison, the units are themselves analytical points of departure, whereas in world-system studies they are units of *observation* of systemic processes (analytically defined); and (2) generalization from the comparative operation is intended to be substantive rather than logical.

World-system theory's limits lie in its formalism. Like formal comparison, it presumes a whole, an historical system "whose future is inscribed in its conception" (Howe and Sica 1980, p. 255). The determinacy of the system is both conceptual and real — an all-encompassing worldwide division of labor. Wallerstein writes: "My own unit of analysis is based on the measurable social reality of interdependent production activities, what may be called an 'effective social division of labor' or, in code language, an 'economy'" (1979, p. 270). In other words, the unit of analysis is equated with the object of analysis (Friedmann 1980). This is the central ambiguity. By merging the concept of the world-system (as a distributional mechanism *in lieu* of a single political center, *qua* ideal type) with its empirical scope, the world-system perspective has no choice but to prefigure history.

INCORPORATED COMPARISON

An alternative to a preconceived concrete totality in which parts are subordinated to the whole is the idea of an emergent totality suggested by "incorporated comparison." Here totality is a conceptual *procedure*,⁵ rather than an empirical or conceptual premise. It is an imminent rather than a *prima facie* property in which the whole is discovered through analysis of the mutual conditioning of parts. A conception of totality in which parts (as relational categories) reveal and realize the changing whole (cf. Green and Fairweather 1984) overcomes the rigidity of world-system theory and builds on its insights. In constructing a holistic interpretation of an historical process, the unit of analysis need not be simultaneously the empirical whole.

As a method of inquiry, a world-historical perspective conceptualizes "instances" as distinct mutually-conditioning moments of a singular phenomenon posited as a self-forming whole.⁶ It is concerned with reducing the "external" oppositional relation between theory and history — an opposition embedded in generalizing strategies and the use of *a priori* units of analysis — and promoting an "internal" relation between theory and history.⁷ It is an alter-

⁵ This parallels Marx's historical method of developing concrete concepts in which a social category is conceptualized as "a rich totality of many determinations and relations" (Marx 1973, p. 100). For example, the concept of "wage labor" (as a component of the "capital" relation) was not an empirical concept — wage labor was not prevalent at the time nor a singular relation. It presupposed a long history of social and political transformation involving dispossession of peasantries and construction of a world market — both of which were decisive and related preconditions of the emergence of capital. The many-sided determinations of the concept of "wage labor" concretized it historically at the same time as it was used in Marx's theoretical schema as an abstract analytical device. The goal of Marx's method is to give historical context to the empirical problem at hand, i.e., to concretize it as a phenomenon in time and space (see Sayer 1987).

⁶ The term "self-forming whole" refers to the dialectical conception of totality in which "the parts not only internally interact and interconnect both among themselves and with the whole, but also that the whole cannot be petrified in an abstraction superior to the facts, because precisely in the interaction of its parts does the whole *form* itself as a whole" (Kosik, 1976, p. 23).

⁷ Developing an "internal relation between theory and history" refers to the conceptualization of his-

native perspective because it views comparable social phenomena as differentiated *outcomes* or *moments* of an historically integrated process, whereas conventional comparison treats such social phenomena as parallel *cases*. The distinction lies in the initial conceptualization of the coordinates of the inquiry, which is the point of the formal/substantive distinction of research goals in Table 1, and which can now be illustrated for the two forms of incorporated comparison.

The multiple form of incorporated comparison. The multiple form of incorporated comparison analyzes a cumulative process through time- and space-differentiated instances of an historically singular process. Barrington Moore's (1967) *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* informs, but does not adequately exemplify, this comparative perspective. Moore's alternative "modernizing" routes/ideal types (democracy, fascism, and communism) are political phases of a combined world-historical process of modernization.

To a very limited extent these three types . . . may constitute alternative routes and choices. They are much more clearly successive historical stages. As such they display a limited determinate relation to each other. The methods of modernization chosen in one country change the dimension of the problem for the next countries who take the step, as Veblen recognized when he coined the now fashionable term, 'the advantages of backwardness' (Moore 1967, pp. 413-14).

Moore's notion of determinacy, the generalizing medium, is quite abstract. It is, in fact, close to a moral vision "of the tidal flow of history, a flow that encompasses crucial passages of violent change in a number of societies" as "the *unique* history of humankind" (Smith 1984, p. 333). As such, it poses no theoretical problem of determinacy, evidenced in his choice of analytical categories and the research design. In a study that potentially could place national cases within a world market

tory from the formative relations among the facts at hand. It is a dialectical procedure in which "logical investigation indicates where historical investigation begins, and that in turn complements and presupposes the logical" (Kosik 1976, p. 29). This refers to the distinction between the method of investigation and the method of exposition in which "that with which science *initiates* its exposition is already the result of research" (Kosik 1976, p. 16), i.e., the theoretical processing of data deriving from phenomena recognized to be dynamically interrelated. Theory is

context, realizing Veblen's insight concretely, Moore represents the transnational extension of commodity relations as "the commercial impulse," a quite abstract ideal-type. Furthermore, such causal generality produces a comparative design that rules out any cumulative interaction between the states concerned (Johnson 1980, p.51). Their individual modernizing phases/sequences are so varied in processual and chronological terms that an implicit world-historical sequence is quite indeterminate.

A better example of the multiple form is Walton's study, *Reluctant Rebels* (1984). It redefines the theoretical field of studies of revolution by reconceiving "national revolts" with a global dimension rather than simply as discrete national events with common conditions. Juxtaposing the Huk rebellion in the Philippines, the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya, and Colombia's La Violencia, Walton characterizes them as "integral parts of continuous struggles that began to take on definable features at the turn of the century (and definite ones by the 1920s) in response to the socioeconomic inequalities and dislocations produced by the incorporation of local and largely precapitalist societies into the global economy" (Walton 1984, p. 169). In effect, Walton addresses related, parallel events in the evolution of the state system as an ongoing, general process manifested in particular national settings (although the feedback effect of the instances on the general process is discounted, perhaps because of the state-building focus).

Walton's reformulation of "national revolts" directly addresses the world-historical dimension, employing a theory of international patterning over time. His study responds to Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions* by broadening her "exacting" definition of "social revolution" to include more recent and more limited rebellions within a broader epochal definition. He concludes: "In the historical process of capitalist revolution that begins with the classical European instances, national re-

a process of abstraction in which the analyst moves back and forth between parts and whole, developing the complexity and form of their interrelations, and in so doing concretizing both. Thus, an "historical fact is in a sense not only the prerequisite for investigation *but* is also its result" (Kosik 1976, p. 25). In the process of conceptualization, facts become historically concrete by locating them in a complex and dynamic context.

volts are another stage that now shades into new forms that emerge with the international political economy of late capitalism" (Walton 1984, pp. 207-8). The difference is that Walton's comparative strategy locates revolts in a cumulative historical context, whereas Skocpol's comparative strategy classifies the three classic revolutions (France, Russia, and China) by isolating their common configurative patterns (cf. Burawoy 1989).

Skocpol's "transnational contexts" that impinge on the three state organizations remain relatively abstract, conceived as "modernization" pressures (Skocpol 1979, p. 286). Maintaining the irreducibility of states and the world market is undoubtedly a theoretical choice, but it also coincides with the formal conditions of the comparative method, which "assumes that the contingent elements observed as part of the phenomena are the same over time and space" (Bach 1980, p. 302). The comparative method specifies the sufficient and necessary conditions for socially-transforming revolutions, but in doing so the states in question are compared as cases with common conditions and destinies (the prototypical modern bureaucratic state). In other words, comparative logic produces a conception of state-formation as historically and theoretically unaffected by the changing organizational principles and structure of the world economy (cf. McMichael 1987a). In short, conventional comparative design discounts the world-historical significance of modern social revolutions.

Arguing that "our interest centers more on understanding national revolts than on classifying them" (Walton 1984, p. 175), Walton employs an alternative form of generalization that is not abstracted from cases but emerges as an historically-situated generalization specifying "national revolts" as particular forms of "capitalist revolution." Generalization depends precisely upon simultaneously locating and differentiating the revolts. Walton offers a formula for "incorporated comparison" in which he maintains that "the most fertile avenue toward greater refinement lies not with the conceptual premise of separate universes but along the same road of continuity marked by differences associated with the nature of the revolutionary situation, class structure, and world system impact" (Walton 1984, p. 188).

Another example of the multiple form of "incorporated comparison" is Anderson's (1974) *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, which

investigates the phenomenon of absolutism as an historical interlude between the feudal and capitalist epochs. Absolutism was not a singular occurrence:

... the story of Absolutism has many, overlapping beginnings and separate, staggered endings. Its underlying unity is real and profound, but it is not that of a linear continuum The first bourgeois revolutions occurred long before the last metamorphoses of Absolutism, chronologically (Anderson 1974, p. 10).

In spite of this, Anderson has a conception of absolutism that he develops through a combination of theoretical and historical analysis. He states: "The aim of this study is to examine European Absolutism simultaneously 'in general' and 'in particular': that is to say, both the 'pure' structures of the Absolutist State, which constitute it as a fundamental historical category, and the 'impure' variants presented by the specific and diverse monarchies of post-medieval Europe" (Anderson 1974, p. 7). Thus absolutism, seen as a politicized form of class rule by the European aristocracy, obtained throughout Europe in various "national" guises.

At the same time, absolutism was intrinsically world-historical. Absolutist states shared processes (of recovery of aristocratic power via political centralization) precisely because they inhabited a relational setting responsible for their creation as territorially-based (as opposed to dynastically-based) regimes in the first place. In these terms, state-building was an international process, with "national" variants shaped by this setting.

The singular form of incorporated comparison. The singular form of "incorporated comparison" analyzes variation in or across space at an historical conjuncture. It differs from the multiple form in that it focuses on the multilayered character of a social configuration rather than on its replication across time. Within the world-historical frame of reference, the singular form has a particularizing thrust, whereas the multiple form has a generalizing thrust. They share the goal of historical specificity, but the former focuses on a cross-sectional analysis in time (e.g., the conjuncture), whereas the latter focuses on process through time (e.g., the era). These foci are not mutually exclusive and a combination is both feasible and enhancing.

Perhaps the best example is Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (1957) which employs both forms of incorporated comparison in its overall critique of the ideology of economic

liberalism. Polanyi reconstructs the nineteenth century as a contradictory conjuncture in which the self-regulating market reorganizes social and political life — from the labor market, through the interstate system, to the international economy. Here the comparison of the substantivist (pre-capitalist) conception with the utilitarian conception of “economy” frames the critique and explains the countermovements to the market system.

On the other hand, Polanyi identifies the institutionalization of the nation-state system with the imposition of the gold standard (although he discounts Britain’s hegemonic role). He views the era as one in which the self-regulating mechanism of the gold standard (as institutional anchor of world commodity markets) subordinated national economic policy to currency stability. This was achieved through the institutional framework of economic (central banking) and political (constitutionalism) accountability — both key elements of state-building. The goal of currency stability forced state managers to internalize the exigencies of world trade through budgetary priorities, which in turn affected domestic politics, generating countermovements to market discipline. The variety of national political responses to the impact of the market and its political management provides a comparative account of the social contention generated in the process of European state-building. In sum, Polanyi’s work combines both forms of comparison in analyzing the period of economic liberalism as both a contradictory conjuncture and a harbinger of political reaction leading to the great transformation.

The singular form of “incorporated comparison” is also exemplified in the work of Friedmann. Challenging world-system theory functionalism in which “the market and the hierarchy of nations are coterminous” (Friedmann 1980, p. 248), she conceptualizes international structuring in terms of “three mutually dependent but analytically distinct factors: state/state relations, transnational economic processes, and class or sectoral relations within nations” (Friedmann 1982, p. S253).⁸ In her account of the

⁸ This kind of *fluid* multilayered analysis captures the interconnections in motion, exemplified in Tomich’s (1990) account of the decline of plantation slavery in the French colony of Martinique. Tomich employs several analytic levels as interrelated determinations of modern slavery. Thus, slave labor dynamics in the French colonies stemmed from the interaction between the French colonial system,

world wheat market between 1873-1935, she argues that capitalist production of wheat was displaced by household production through conjunctural mechanisms in the world economy, including changing technologies of production and circulation and the role of New World state-building in securing frontier lands. “Specialized (household) commodity production” on the U.S. plains successfully rivaled British “capitalist production” in what otherwise was an era of capitalist expansion based on the new social importance of wage labor (both in terms of production and wage-goods consumption).

Proceeding within a world-economic framework, defined empirically as a world market “in which one price confronted producers everywhere,” Friedmann employs a comparative analysis that simultaneously *distinguishes* and *relates* the producing regions conceptually (Friedmann 1978 p. 546). The relationship between the European capitalist producer and the New World commodity producer is mediated by price movements, and the outcomes of this relationship crystallize in and through the national political economy. The whole emerges through the action of its parts, namely, processes of class formation “with origins in the world economy, but a location and political expression within national economies” (Friedmann 1982, p. S255).

Friedmann’s study of the post-World War II international food regime⁹ follows a similar logic of inquiry in which the conjuncture is explicitly defined as a political structuring of the international food order via “complementary national policies.” She examines two moments of the postwar food order: the immediate postwar regime whose “principle axis was food aid from the United States to formerly self-sufficient agrarian societies” (1982, p.

world market relations (including rivalry with Britain), and regional plantation relations. Each set of relationships was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of the character of slave production. The principle relationship — of slaves to masters — actively realized these contextual constraints and ultimately shaped them as an interaction of place in world time.

⁹ For a further development of the concept of the food regime in which the historical dynamic between capitalist agriculture and the nation-state transcends the economic coherence of the state (compelling a rethinking of analytical units), see Friedmann and McMichael (1989).

S248), and the decomposition of this order during the 1970s into a more market-oriented regime characterized by higher food prices. The “world economy” is conceptualized as the interaction of national political economy and international price relations — the latter being concrete expressions of the international division of labor and “the immediate signals guiding and constraining states, enterprises and individuals” (Friedmann 1982, p. S254).

Within the singular form of “incorporated comparison,” multilayered analysis can be spatial or temporal. In my research on settler agro-export systems, I have tried to link both dimensions in establishing the parameters of social change. Accounts of Australian wool-growing (McMichael 1984) and the ante-bellum cotton culture (McMichael 1987b, 1988, forthcoming) are framed in terms of the reorganizing spatial and ideological currents of the nineteenth century world economy. *Spatially*, the transition from mercantile to industrial capitalism set a trade- and price-unified world market against politically-regulated markets of the various colonial systems. The reorganization of London-centered commercial financing, sponsoring new needs for global inputs and markets, spun a web of commercial credit and competitive relations around staple production. On each frontier, commercially-specialized and migratory growers proliferated, challenging the social order of the traditional patriarchal grazier and planter classes. These challenges informed a *temporal* disjuncture between residual traditional-mercantilist and emergent liberal-commercial conceptions of local political economy, shaping the midcentury political struggles over land and labor systems in each polity. In world-historical terms, they consolidated a global wage-labor regime.

Roseberry (1982) extends this conception of a global wage-labor regime to modern peasantries, which he argues bear little relation to the classic European peasantry (see also Lambi 1988). His analysis of Venezuelan coffee producers as products of the uneven development of world capitalism mediated by state and producer politics leads him to reconceptualize “proletarianization” as a *global* process that is heterogeneous and contingent, producing “a variety of forms of labor relations” (Roseberry 1982, p. 206). Methodologically, Roseberry reconstructs the peasant concept in world-historical terms in order to move “beyond the typological exercise by which peasants are rei-

fied as a category among various other categories,” claiming that “reference to history as proletarianization involves an attempt to grasp a totality” (1982, p. 204).

Common to these approaches is an attempt to reconstruct the history of the capitalist world economy as a complex unity of social relationships anchored in wage labor and linked by exchange relations, in which wage labor and other forms of nonwage, value-producing labor coexist in time and space (see McMichael and Buttel 1990). This theoretical perspective lends itself to the methodology of “incorporated comparison”: blending theory and history in such a way to avoid abstract individuality (e.g., perceiving wage, slave, or peasant labor in isolation), and abstract generality (e.g., a world market of undifferentiated commodity producers). The point is to try to perceive the unity in diversity without reifying either. Insofar as incorporated comparison works with units of analysis specified in time and place, it enhances the possibility of approaching this goal.

CONCLUSION

How can comparative analysis capture variation across time and space when time and space are not uniform and cannot be abstracted from the construction of analytical units and categories? Under what conditions can comparison be used to reconstruct changing social relations *in* and *of* time and space? I argue there is a strategy for world-historically-oriented research that reformulates comparison by subordinating it to the development of historically-grounded theory rather than using it to establish a causal logic that is generalizable outside time and space relations. In other words, where general (connective/cumulative) processes of the modern world are organized by time and place, comparison of time and place occurrences reveals continuities and at the same time attaches world-historical meaning to those occurrences.

Neither conventional comparative methods based on modernization theory’s assumptions of relatively uniform and discrete national societies nor a theory of a permanent world-systemic structure adequately accomplish this. The point is to avoid “imperfect empiricism” (Spencer 1987) in which units of analysis are reified as self-evident or fixed entities. However, we can *adapt* the world-system perspective of a theoretically singular, yet historically diverse, global process as an approximate meth-

odological principle. This resembles Laslett's (1980) *inversion* of the conventional inductive procedure, which generalizes outcomes from multiple cases. She proposes applying a theory of general causes to the analysis of "instances" in order to relate theoretically-general processes to historically-particular outcomes (cf. Hopkins and Wallerstein 1981), demonstrating that in history there are divergent manifestations of a singular process (e.g., market expansion, national revolt). Outcomes (as instances) may *appear* individually as self-evident units of analysis, but in reality are interconnected processes.

Breaking out of the "modernization problematic" is a first step,¹⁰ grasping world-historical contingency is the next. I have tried to show that this can be addressed with a multiple or a singular form of "incorporated comparison." The multiple form of comparison addresses the problem of independent units by focusing on continuity across time, while the singular form avoids the all-encompassing unit by inverting the part/whole relation. However, it is not the form that matters so much as the intent — to develop historically-grounded social theory through the comparative juxtaposition of elements of a dynamic, self-forming whole.

PHILIP MCMICHAEL is Associate Professor of Rural Sociology at Cornell University. He has conducted research on settler agrarian systems in Australia and the United States in the nineteenth century world economy, and is now working on the current processes of internationalization of states and agro-food systems.

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- ¹⁰ Wallerstein's distinguishing achievement is his sustained challenge to historiographical and epistemological traditions stemming from Enlightenment thought — in particular traditions matching "societies" to "states" that license the construction and compartmentalization of the social sciences. While there may be doubt about his revision of world history, there is no doubt about his epistemological intervention.
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