

REVIEW ESSAY

“Shall I Compare Thee ... ?” Problems of Comparative Historical Analysis

MICHAEL HANAGAN

History Department, Vassar College

E-mail: mihanagan@vassar.edu

Comparative and Transnational History. Central European Approaches and New Perspectives. Ed. by Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka. Berghahn, New York [etc.] 2009, viii, 294 pp. \$90.00; £55.00.

Work in a Modern Society. The German Historical Experience in Contemporary Perspective. Ed. by Jürgen Kocka. [New German Historical Perspectives, Vol. 3.] Berghahn, New York [etc.] 2010. 221 pp. \$60.00; £35.00

Although Enlightenment European historians were comfortable working on a world-historical scale, their nineteenth- and twentieth-century successors felt most at home writing histories of the consolidated state – the centralized, territorially bounded state with a monopoly of violence, then growing up in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the US. Historians and history departments in the last two centuries have focused their work on the consolidated state, organized their discipline around the stages of its growth, and concentrated their research on questions concerning its uniqueness and accomplishments. Many historians wrote in praise, some in criticism, but almost all were agreed that the consolidated state captured the major political features of their world and represented at least the immediate future of humankind.

To understand the peculiar features of an individual consolidated state or the common elements in consolidated state formation scholars turned to the “comparative method” derived from John Stuart Mill. This method claims to generate the logical conditions for comparing multiple cases of a phenomenon.

Recently, practitioners of comparative history have begun to question core assumptions about aims and methods. The two books considered here, a collection on *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European*

Approaches and New Perspectives, edited by Heinz Gerhard-Haupt and Jürgen Kocka and a collection on *Work in Modern Society: The German Historical Experience in Comparative Perspective*, edited by Kocka alone, introduce English and American historians to an important series of conceptual and methodological debates among, comparative, global, transnational, and world historians in Germany.¹

Two distinguished senior German historians, both eminent social and political historians, Haupt and Kocka, seek to make non-continental historians more fully aware of current debates among German historians. The essays in these collections are largely based on the work of professional historians, men and women intimately familiar with archival research and historiography, active participants in their fields of historical inquiry. Portions of the present debate over the possibilities of global and transnational histories originated in the pages of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, a well-known journal that has published many articles on social and comparative history.

The essays in these two collections reveal important bodies of scholars dissatisfied with such consolidated-state-centered history and with the methodologies on which it is based. One group feels that the system of consolidated states is collapsing and a new global history is necessary for a new global age. Globalization theorists typically portray the rise of a new world order characterized by non-territorial, functionally independent, multi-level transnational organizations.² These new global historians often look at the era of high imperialism with its transcontinental cultural exchanges, large transnational corporations, and communications' revolutions, to find the origins of a new world order. In this collection scholars such as Sebastian Conrad and Andreas Eckert show that even Germany with its relatively modest colonial possessions was influenced by colonial visions.

Other scholars, advocates of an even more thoroughgoing transnational history, argue that a single-minded focus on states, whether empires, city states, or consolidated states, has always been inadequate, that border crossings are as old as borders, that the rain forest and steppe have histories, and that current debates on world history provide an opportunity for creating a new world history, not just from Plato to NATO, but from Enkidu to Honolulu.³ Suggestions for new approaches abound. Jürgen

1. A recently published edited collection that takes up many of these same themes is Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor (eds), *Comparison and History* (New York, 2004). On comparison and comparative method: James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (eds), *Comparative Historical Analysis* (Cambridge, 2003); Charles C. Raglin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Berkeley, CA, 1987).

2. James Rosenau, *Distant Proximities: Dynamics Beyond Globalization* (Princeton, NJ, 2003).

3. Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison, WI, 1990) Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

Osterhammel raises, although does not pursue, the idea that “[a] radical solution would be to abandon national history altogether in favor of a history of exchanges, networks and hybridities”. For this suggestion he draws on the work of the sociologist Friedrich Tenbruck who decades ago urged historians to “study the connections between local phenomena and global contexts”.⁴

Not completely uncritical of these new approaches, Haupt and Kocka seek to reconcile some past practices with the new comparative and transnational histories, variously described as transfer history, entanglement history, or *histoire croisée*. In the process this collection identifies and allows us to overhear some central debates among German comparative and transnational historians, debates about the importance of intensively researched local studies, the value of comparison with few cases, the use of typologies, the Millian comparative method, and the very nature of the historical enterprise.

Perhaps the greatest danger they see in the new transnational history is the loss of rootedness in a historical milieu and the increasing lack of a profound base in archival research. They differ with those scholars who dismiss comparisons with only two or a handful of cases as too small to yield interesting conclusions. As Haupt and Kocka explain:

The more comparative cases are included, the smaller is the opportunity to adhere to the sources and the greater is one’s dependence on secondary literature [...] if one does not want to uncritically repeat the vision a certain historiography is presenting on a certain problem or country, one has to immerse oneself thoroughly in the historiographical debates.⁵

Haupt and Kocka urge historians to resist the unthinking adoption of paradigms and methodologies from other social sciences. For example, Haupt and Kocka are concerned with the practice of what they identify as “asymmetrical comparison”, in which “the cases used for the comparison merely get sketched in as background”. This is one of the commonest forms of comparison and the most easily abused. Asymmetrical comparisons occur when historians seeking to overcome the problem of small cases expand their comparison by “sketching” developments in other countries, relying on sociological models or political theories. There are undoubtedly benefits of such comparisons, but it must be noted that historians become prisoners of the social scientist on which they draw. For example, drawing on Max Weber, historians and sociologists long portrayed Calvinism as

4. Jürgen Osterhammel, “A ‘Transnational’ History of Society: Continuity or New Departure?”, in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (eds), *Comparative and Transnational History*, pp. 39–51, 43.

5. Haupt and Kocka, “Comparison and Beyond: Traditions, Scope and Perspectives of Comparative History”, in *idem*, *Comparative and Transnational History*, pp. 1–32, 13.

promoting the spread of a work ethic. The economic roles of religious groups almost everywhere in Europe and North America have been measured against these allegedly Calvinist standards. But as historians pointed out long ago, Weber seriously erred in conflating seventeenth-century English Puritanism with sixteenth-century Calvinism, which typically distrusted personal wealth as a temptation to pride. Even in the English case Weber based much of his study on highly selective quotes from Richard Baxter, a leading seventeenth-century Puritan.⁶

In an age when contemporary comparative and transnational historians are generally suspicious of any history that assumes typologies of development, Haupt and Kocka argue that there might be life in the old paradigm yet. But Shalini Randeria emphasizes the dangers and shows why so many have become skeptical. Looking at civil society, caste councils, and legal pluralism in post-colonial India, she uncovers political strategies for incorporating diversity into civil society that have proved effective in these venues and that deserve the attention of Westerners dealing with these same problems. Unfortunately, their study is neglected and possible contemporary relevance is dismissed because they do not follow a European model. Randeria shows that the concessions to ethnic groups and lower castes contained in the Indian constitution and in regional practice may represent genuinely viable options worth consideration not only by Indians but by universalist Westerners. Paths that practice universality are designated modern and applauded, because they follow Western precedent, but paths that preserve diversity, even when improving the condition of minority groups, are labeled traditional and dismissed because they go against the grain of Western history.

Finally, as Haupt and Kocka show, the expansion of comparative history, particularly in Europe, has forced historians to confront the insufficiencies of positivist methodology particularly the methods of comparison proposed by John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) who more or less claimed that his methods of similarity and difference formed the logical basis of all comparison.⁷

Haupt and Kocka seek to synthesize new and old approaches but the case against Millian methods developed by the contributors to this collection seems much stronger than the defense.⁸ In most cases this method requires assumptions about context and correlation that seldom obtain in history. In order to make comparisons Mill stipulates that “we must

6. Winthrop S. Hudson, “Puritanism and the Spirit of Capitalism”, *Church History*, 18 (1949), pp. 3–17.

7. In addition to his principles of comparison, Mill advocated a “method of residues” and a “method of concomitant variation”. Our discussion pertains only to his principles of comparison; John Stuart Mill, *Philosophy of Scientific Method* (New York, 1950), pp. 221–228.

8. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York, 1994), pp. 1–53.

decompose each chaos into single facts". He requires the clear identification and clean separation of all important elements involved in explanation. Under these conditions he derives a "method of agreement": "if two or more instances of the phenomenon under investigation have only one circumstance in common, the circumstance [...] is the cause [...] of the given phenomenon". Alongside it he set a "method of differences": "if an instance in which the phenomenon under investigation occurs and an instance in which it does not occur have every circumstance in common save one, that one occurring only in the former [...] is the effect [...] or the cause of the phenomenon".⁹

But the contributors to this collection suggest that the chances of isolating historical factors in an interactive and entangled world are quite slim. Mill stressed the importance of our ability to distinguish clear factors; both phenomenon and circumstances, must be based in real world differences: "we must endeavor to effect a separation of the facts from one another not in our minds only but in nature". Unfortunately historical evidence seldom presents itself in such discrete temporal units. For those who would explain the French Revolution, peasant revolts, urban unrest, and upper-class dissent are really and truly interrelated. To deconstruct them into separate factors would be to distort our understanding of these events. Also the order in which events occur matters. Had peasant unrest preceded noble discontent or unrest and not followed it, the French Revolution might have taken a different course.¹⁰ As the advocates of *histoire croisée* claim, comparisons with individual states, such as France and Germany, only serve to individualize states while concealing the many factors that these states, territories that have been part of a larger European world for many centuries, share in common.¹¹

On some points there seems general agreement; along with the majority of the new transnational and entanglement historians, Haupt and Kocka assert a fundamental difference between history and other social science disciplines.¹² According almost all the historians in this collection, the idea of explanation as constituted by the unceasing repetition of cause and effect, an idea subscribed to by many social scientists, is profoundly ahistorical. Instead, as Haupt and Kocka claim, historians are committed to the proposition that "while new events occur over the passage of time,

9. Mill, *Philosophy of Scientific Method*, pp. 209–215.

10. Ronald Aminzade, "Historical Sociology and Time", *Sociological Methods and Research*, 20 (1992), pp. 456–480, and Paul Pierson, "Not Just What But When: Timing and Sequence in Political Processes", *Studies in American Political Development* 14 (2000), pp. 72–92.

11. Michael Werner and Benedict Zimmerman, "Beyond Comparison, *histoire croisée* and Reflexivity", *History and Theory*, 5 (2006), pp. 30–50. This point has also been made by Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York, 1984), p. 90.

12. Mill, *Philosophy of Scientific Method*, p. 209.

the new is not a repetition of the old but, rather, emerges from the old".¹³ Correlations can be the beginning of wisdom but an approach based on correlations is misleading if it does not require further specification of the mechanisms at work.¹⁴ Some pitfalls of Millian dependence on correlation are exemplified in the case of the alcoholic empiricist.¹⁵ Our empiricist, a good Millian, drank a lot of Scotch on the rocks one night and had a terrible hangover in the morning. The next night he drank vodka on the rocks with the same result, and the third night, bourbon on the rocks. He ceased his investigations with the decision to omit the offending ingredient – and gave up ice. Of course the correct explanation is that the common presence of alcohol explains the outcome, not the presence of ice, but a full explanation also requires some understanding of the physical processes that produce hangovers.

Most comparison is not the “comparative method”. Comparison is one of the most powerful tools in the historical arsenal but it is at its most powerful as wise suggestion – not as scientific decree. When it encourages students to think broadly, when it stimulates students to consider heretofore unknown factors, and when it produces unexpected juxtapositions that fire the imagination, comparison is most valuable.¹⁶

Fortunately, among German comparativists, the bursting of the dam of Millian methodology has loosed a real flood of new ideas and new methodologies, variously labeled as “history of transfer, entanglement, connected history, *histoire croisée*, *Verflechtungsgeschichte*”. According to Haupt and Kocka, all these approaches share a common interest in looking at multiple cases but they do not stress comparing clearly defined case against clearly defined case but in the “crossing of borders between nation, regions, continents or other spaces, in all kinds of encounters, perceptions, movements, relations and interactions between them and in the way they perceived, influenced, stamped and constituted one another”.¹⁷ Entangled history represents a variety of approaches, many of which seem entirely persuasive. Describing entanglement history Haupt and Kocka write “While the comparative approach separates the units of comparison (in order to bring them again together under the viewpoints of similarity and difference) entanglement oriented approaches stress the connections, the continuity, the belonging together, the hybridity of observable spaces or analytical units and reject distinguishing them clearly.”¹⁸

13. Haupt and Kocka, “Comparison and Beyond”, p. 13.

14. James Mahoney, “Beyond Correlational Analysis: Recent Innovations in Theory and Method”, *Sociological Forum*, 16 (2001), pp. 575–595.

15. Cited in Larry B. Christensen, *Experimental Methodology* (Boston, MA, 1997), p. 78.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

17. Haupt and Kocka, “Comparison and Beyond”, pp. 19–20.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Even in terms of traditional comparative analysis, an exciting event-full comparative labor history combining large-scale structural changes with local-level narratives is found in the essay by Thomas Welskopp on American and German labor in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Welskopp bases his study not so much on the existence of separate and enduring factors, such as an allegedly higher US standard of living, the early existence of manhood suffrage, or the absence of a feudal past, but rather to a sequence of events that lead to deviations or approximations from a common path, such as the failure of the Knights of Labor in the US while very similar organizations succeeded in the German states.¹⁹ While German and US class formation were the product of some similar processes – proletarianization, state expansion, class polarization – they were also the product of other processes – cross-class coalition formation and identity formation – cumulatively differentiating German and US labor movements. As Welskopp argues

[...] the history of labor in Germany and the US cannot be portrayed as a linear development of divergence or as a continuously widening gap that has led to almost polarized or antagonistic systems of industrial relations in the respective countries. Rather, it will attempt to document and explain this parallel history as a sequence of much more subtle mutual approximations and deviations.²⁰

In Welskopp's narration, at various times over the last century, disparities in trade-union structure, legislative regulation, and the American practice of the union shop have played key roles. The failure of the American Knights of Labor contrasts with the relative success of similarly organized groups in Germany. Factors and events that shaped the growth of unionism pre-World War I diminished in importance after 1918. Absolutely unpredictable events such as the triumph of Stalinism in East Germany and the survival of capitalism in West Germany shaped West German labor conditions in the immediate post-World-War-II world. Fear of East German communism made employers more tractable to worker demands in the Federal Republic.

Portents of a new transnational cultural history may be found in Dirk Hoerder's fascinating survey of migration which concludes this volume. Hoerder develops an idea of transcultural space in which migrants from different cultures manage to operate independently in two cultures, developing a distinctive cultural space of their own, one that transcends state boundaries.

19. On the defeat of the Knights of Labor, see Michael Hanagan and Charles Tilly, "Introduction" to a special issue of *Theory and Society*, on the theme of "Solidary Logics" (1988), pp. 309–327.

20. Thomas Welskopp, "Birds of a Feather: A Comparative History of German and US Labor in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", in Haupt and Kocka, *Comparative and Transnational History*, pp. 149–177, 149.

Edited by Kocka, the volume on German labor history, the second volume we are examining, takes up many of the same themes as the first. But it focuses much more on questions of work; despite the title of this second book and unlike the first, only a few essays are truly comparative. Although the essays are Germano-centric the context is often vaguely or implicitly European. There are some excellent essays on labor history here. The opening piece by Josef Ehmer on changing definitions of work in early modern Germany is a splendid essay, of interest to all labor historians. The following work by Gird Spittler on evolving attitudes towards work among nineteenth-century social scientists should also be of wide interest. The essays that touch on or deal with comparative labor history are, however, exceptionally rich.

Particularly interesting, although only partially comparative, is Karin Hausen's contribution on the relations between gender and labor history. Touching on the different experiences of East German and West German women she draws heavily on the work of the American historians of gender and labor, Sonya Rose and Kathleen Canning, as well as German historians, Brigitte Kassel and Ursula Nienhaus. Hausen critiques main-line historians for efforts to avoid confronting the knotty relationships between labor and gender. Instead of focusing on "class formation" as the central element of proletarianization, Hausen argues that German historians should "reduce the focus on class formation still further and devote more attention to gender hierarchy, which is effective across class lines".²¹ The role of government in shaping gender is shown by the interventions of German imperial, republican, and Nazi governments into the work situation to protect the male breadwinner wage – a wage based on the premise that the male household head should earn a wage sufficient to support his family. She contrasts the policies of the GDR, which put women to work while leaving them with domestic responsibilities, with the policies of the Federal Republic that encouraged and sustained a male breadwinner family economy; in this model the adult male worked for a wage, and the wife and mother raised the children and maintained the home. The two Germanies' very different heritage of child-care practices still creates misunderstanding and controversy between women from the different states.

Hausen's challenge to Germany labor historians, that gender is more "effective" than class, has great rhetorical value in forcing historians to deal with issues once too lightly dismissed. Gender may well be more effective than class, as she claims, but one still wants to know more about exactly what it means to be "effective". Effectiveness may not be the only

21. Karin Hausen, "Work in Gender, Gender in Work: The German Case in Comparative Perspective", in Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Work in a Modern Society*, pp. 73–92, 80.

reason for studying a social identity. Precisely because it is more tractable, class may provide insight into how significant social identities are formed and maintained and why they can decline.

While explicit comparisons and transnational analyses actually play a rather minor role in the second book under consideration here, the biggest exception is Andreas Eckert's essay on global history. Following the pioneering critique of globalization theory by Frederick Cooper, "What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective", Eckert makes the important point that global history should be more than the study of accelerated mobility, of nodes and flows, but it should also have a place for the less mobile and the unfree, those unable to enter into the accelerating speed of modern markets.²² In short, historians must recognize the law of uneven development in which growth not only creates new connections and expands to greater distances but recreates backwardness in new forms, often in new geographic spaces where it disrupts prior relationships and diminishes flows. Neither class- or gender-consciousness typically develops in a unilinear fashion. Eckert asserts that interaction might be a central phenomenon of the modern world but interaction does not necessarily presume equality or mobility. Eckert calls for a global labor history that will incorporate both the history of free and unfree labor, not as part of a continuum, but as twin phenomena, continually reproduced components of the capitalist world order. Uneven development is a key element of social change.

Eckert joins with American historians in his interest in an interactive history that deals with both slavery and freedom. In the pages of the *American Historical Review*, already a decade ago, world historians Jerry Bentley and Patrick Manning debated the merits of interaction as key tool for demarcating historical eras.²³ The US is also the home of Immanuel Wallerstein's world system theory, a classic example of a world history that stresses the unevenness of development as a central concept in world history.²⁴ Influenced by Wallerstein, Donald R. Wright wrote his remarkable study of *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa*.²⁵ It shows how a

22. Frederick Cooper, "What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective", *African Affairs*, 100: 399 (2001), pp. 189–213.

23. See Jerry H. Bentley, "Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World History", *American Historical Review*, 101 (1996), pp. 749–770, and Patrick Manning, "The Problem of Interactions in World History", *American Historical Review*, 101 (1996), pp. 771–782. See also Patrick Manning *Navigating World History* (New York, 2003), and Philip D. Curtin, *The World and The West: The European Challenge and the Overseas Response in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, 2000).

24. See Marcel van der Linden, "Global Labor History and 'The Modern World System': Thoughts at the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Fernand Braudel Center", *International Review of Social History*, 46 (2001), pp. 423–459.

25. Donald R. Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa: A History of Globalization in Niimi, The Gambia* (Armonk, NY, 2004).

concentrated focus on the small nation of Gambia in West Africa (population c.1.8 million) not only reveals key structures of imperial affairs but also helps us locate mechanisms to understand them. This is welcome news. Today more than ever, American historians can be found debating how to locate the US in the larger context of world history and regretting that so few non-US historians seem much interested in the problem. Looking at the world from a very small place in America might be helpful.

While there is no dearth of contemporary American scholarship in world history the issues that Haupt and Kocka and many of the other authors in these collections raise are of great interest not only to German but to American historians. For American historians to fully consider and respond to the issues at stake here it may be worth returning to an older body of American work on world history, the work of Eric Wolf and Louise Tilly. Wolf and Tilly are worth re-examining because they deal with so many of the concerns of the authors and editors in these volumes. Both Wolf and Tilly attributed a great deal of importance to structural change, particularly to modes of production; both tried to build a world history around relations that connected communities and individuals across borders; both emphasized the uneven character of economic development, and both were committed to the narrative historical tradition.

An interesting aspect of Wolf's work was his emphasis on uneven development. His classic, *The Sons of the Shaking Earth*, emphasizes in several contexts the centrality of uneven development.²⁶ The triumph of the Aztec state incorporated much of central America under Aztec rule but they remained military plunderers offering little benefit to their subjects. Similarly, central America's Spanish conquerors might have brought capital to reinvigorate colonial economies shaken by changes, but at the supreme moment when they were able to act their economy was stricken by catastrophe, much of it self-induced. Wolf accepted the realities of global change but also insisted, as does Andreas Eckert, that changes in modes of production simultaneously reproduced and recreated progress and backwardness but in new forms and ways.

Like Edward Thompson, who always insisted that class was not a thing but a relationship between capitalists and workers, Eric Wolf insisted on emphasizing relationships.²⁷ Thirty years ago, in a chapter entitled "Connections", the first chapter of his book on *Europe and the Peoples without History*, Eric Wolf lambasted state-centered history as fundamentally flawed because it depended upon reified categories not on the relationships between and among cultures, economies and peoples; "By endowing

26. Eric R. Wolf, *Sons of the Shaking Earth* (Chicago, IL, 1959).

27. Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1963). According to Thompson, "the notion of class entails the notion of historical relationship", p. 9.

nations, societies or cultures with the qualities of internally homogeneous and externally distinctive and bounded objects, we create a model of the world as a global pool hall in which the entities spin off each other like so many hard and round balls.”²⁸ Wolf distrusted comparative studies because they often assumed that states were discrete separable units that could in fact be compared as independent units.²⁹ Although Wolf died in 1999 he would have found the current debate among German historians most interesting. Taking up the theme of “the history of exchanges, networks and hybridities” mentioned by Osterhamel, Wolf asserted that, “the world of humankind constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes [...]. Concepts like ‘nation’, ‘society’ and ‘culture’ name bits and threaten to turn names into things.”³⁰ Wolf’s solution was to study a transnational world in which capitalist power vested in states entered and initiated the alteration of existing relationships with a world of kin-based or tribute-paying societies.

Wolf also urged the importance of historical analysis in the social sciences. He argued, in fact, that so important a component of anthropology as peasantry could not be understood without locating it historically. Wolf wrote that “we cannot know much about them (peasants) unless we understand them historically, how they developed in that niche, and that niche developed in turn, in relation, to forces beyond it”.³¹ He was impressed by Edward Thompson’s careful analysis of local level processes that cast light on macro-level problems. According to Wolf, “what history allows you to do is to look at processes unfolding, intertwining, spreading out and dissipating over time. This means rethinking the units of our inquiries – households, localities, regions, national entitled – seeing them not as fixed entities but as problematic: shaped, reshaped and changing over time.”³²

Wolf’s call for a world history based on structures and relationships but still centered on local-level analysis and dynamic processes was answered by Tilly in her 1994 presidential address, entitled “Connections” in tribute to Wolf’s plea for a relational historical analysis.³³ Of course, Tilly was committed to history but she, unlike many social scientists, was also as committed to narrative history as was Eric Wolf. Tilly shared with Wolf an admiration for Edward Thompson’s focus on the empirical richness

28. Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the Peoples without History* (Berkeley, CA, 1982), p. 6.

29. *Idem*, “The Mills of Inequality: A Marxist Approach”, in Edward Berreman (ed.), *Social Inequality: Comparative and Developmental Approaches* (New York, 1981), pp. 41–58, 41–42.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

31. *Idem*, *Pathways of Power: Building an Anthropology of the Modern World* (Berkeley, CA, 2001), p. 255.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 390.

33. Louise Tilly, “Connections”, *American Historical Review*, 99 (1994), pp. 1–20.

of the case study; she attached great significance to the centrality of relationships in world history; and she shared his estimations of the importance of changes in economic structures. She sought to bring Wolf's insights to address many of the questions posed by existing comparative and social history. But Louise Tilly herself contributed important insights. She called for a global social history based on "structures, processes, and human agency".³⁴ Tilly brought an explicit distrust of comparative methodologies, an emphasis on the force of agency at the local level in social history, and a heightened attention to gender.

Tilly was skeptical of the mechanical application of methods of formal comparison, noting that "social historians encounter stubborn empirical details that cannot be compared simply to cases from other settings or time periods".³⁵ She harnessed comparison to larger purposes. She wished "to present a vision of social history that focuses on connections between structure and action, individual and processes, the past and the present, and settings distant in space".³⁶

Tilly's address to the assembled American historians in 1994 paid tribute to Edward Thompson, who had passed away the previous year, but she also lauded Thompsonian approaches to history and for reasons that should interest the historians in these collections. With Kocka and Haupt, she cited as a central problem the need to preserve the rich evidentiary material and concrete detail present in cases studies while locating these cases in a larger world of social structures and broad-scale social networks.

Social historians who follow Edward Thompson in their focus on intensive case studies on a local scale can only benefit by expanding the contest of their work, taking into account the connections of these histories to large structures and world process of change, to far-off peoples in the global economy, and to the past, which is constantly shaping the present.³⁷

To illustrate her case she chose cotton textile industrialization in England, France, and India before 1850 and looked at its effects, close up, on workers, families, and the division of gendered labor. Tilly's analysis of cotton textile workers emphasized the uneven effect of new technologies on workers in different areas connected by world markets. Technological change, reinforced by the power of the colonial state, led to the impoverishment of Indian cotton weavers and a decline in the position of women both inside and outside families. In Britain, on the other hand, these same technologies led to an amelioration of the position of cotton-weaving families and of women, even though the improvements were far

34. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

from thoroughgoing and many cotton weavers remained in crushing poverty.

Tilly's (and Thompson's) focus on the local level was not due to a love of detail or a search for manifestations of larger social forces. Tilly argued that the fundamental processes of social change occurred at the local level and it was these small-scale processes operating over distance and times that provided the foundation for larger structures. Local-level processes were not small-scale examples of the effects of larger structures but constitutive elements of these structures. More often than not, macro-processes were the sum of outcomes of such microprocesses. Without understanding the mechanisms operating at the local level it was impossible to explain the macroprocesses.³⁸

Tilly also brought to world history, and particularly to her brand of case-study-oriented social analysis, a concern with gender. She sought to bring into world history gender conflicts within families as well as the conflicts between families and the economic and social forces surrounding them. As Tilly concluded for the case of cotton industrialization: "the historically sculpted connections between structures and action operated through the power balance and bargaining situation in labor markets (between capitalists and workers) and families (between husbands and wives, parents and children. Together these shaped social relations for cotton workers in India, England and France during the Industrial Revolution."

In some sense her approach is similar to that of Thomas Welskopp's comparison of American and German labor movements. Identifying key processes of social change, she compares labor responses to these changes. At every stage of their development she examines the changing resources available to families and stops to ask, "What were the consequences of these changes for family and gender relations?"³⁹ But she also stressed that the only way to answer this question was to look at local-level relations. With regard to social history, the local-level reaction was critical to understanding change. According to Tilly, "any account of how men and women navigated the large-scale structural changes through which they were living must consider the family household power balance and bargaining between husbands and wives, parents and children, as well as labor market conditions".⁴⁰

38. On mechanisms, see Charles Tilly, "Mechanisms in Political Processes", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4 (2001), pp. 21–42. For an important discussion of the relationship between multi-level explanations, see Arthur L. Stinchcombe, "The Conditions of Fruitfulness of Theorizing about Mechanisms in Social Science", *Social Science*, 21 (1991), pp. 367–388.

39. Tilly "Connections", p. 13.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 20. On family power balances and bargaining, see Jan Kok (ed.), *Rebellious Families: Household Strategies and Collective Action in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (New York, 2002).

As we examine the new critiques of comparative historical approaches, we see that they raise many new issues but they also return to themes current several decades ago at the rebirth of world history in Europe and America, which may be yet relevant. In both the US and Germany, transnational history and comparative history flourish and follow their own course. Still, current controversies may still benefit from a re-examination of the legacies of Eric Wolf and Louise Tilly.