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L'avenir de l'histoire américaine en France passe donc par la continuation du développement de travaux originaux de qualité, qui placent les spécialistes français sur un pied d'égalité à l'égard de leurs collègues américanistes des Etats-Unis et d'ailleurs, ainsi que par une réflexion approfondie sur les implications des postures historiographiques que l'on vient d'évoquer.

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COMPARING FRENCH AND AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY

Michèle LAMONT

The sociology of the social sciences had developed rapidly in the last few decades. Researchers have given special attention to the development and institutionalization of sociology. Despite the availability of a large body of literature on various national sociological fields, comparative studies of the discipline are still few. The existing studies rarely compare these fields systematically along salient dimensions. A more systematic endeavor is needed: such an approach can provide bases for a structural account of the development of sociological knowledge by contrasting various organizational settings and analyzing sociological research in relation to these settings. This study presents some preliminary research guidelines for a systematic comparison of French and American sociology.¹ Although this article is primarily a comparative description of both fields, I present a number of substantial propositions concerning the organization of these fields. First, I argue that American sociology is more structured than French sociology: career paths are more institutionally defined and there is more consensus about the profits attributed to various types of professional investments and about the ranking of departments and journals. Second, I argue that in American sociology, there is a stronger control over the norms of production and of professional behavior, due partly to the existence of a greater amount of research and institutional resources.

American and French sociology are different enough for their comparison to be interesting. These fields present a number of important morphological differences, American sociology being more institutionalized, and larger in number of professionals. Also, French sociology is in many respects the national sociological field, which has

remained most autonomous from American research trends (Drouard, 1982:63). Although it has a lasting quantitative component – in part under the leadership of U.S. trained researchers such as Raymond Boudon, it has been strongly influenced by the European philosophical tradition. In the past, several of its influential members, such as Edgar Morin and Nicos Poulantzas have openly opposed the penetration of American sociology in France.

The comparison of American and French sociology is facilitated by the existence of an important body of literature on these fields. Studies of the French and American research schools are available (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1967; Corcuff, 1995; Clark, 1973; Mullins, 1973; Lemert, 1981), as are studies of the professional organization of these fields (Yoels, 1974; Pollack, 1975; Montlibert, 1982), and of the social sciences in general (Drouard, 1982; Bourdieu, 1984). I will draw on this literature as well as on personal observation based on an intimate familiarity with both American and French sociology.

In the first part of this study, I analyze institutional differences between American and French sociology. I compare the organization of research and publishing activities as well as the organization of departments and the role of the formal Ph.D. training in the professional socialization of students. In the second part, I analyze cultural and intellectual differences between the two national fields. I consider the effect of the national intellectual tradition on the professional culture of French and American sociology. I also discuss the place of quantitative research and of meta-theory in both fields.

INSTITUTIONAL DIFFERENCES

American and French sociology differ in terms of their size, their degree of institutionalization and their geographical concentration of professional intellectual activity. On the one hand, French sociology has less than 1000 sociologists, most of whom work in Paris (Montlibert, 1982). Approximately 50% of this population is affiliated with a university or a state sponsored research laboratory. The first sociology program offering the “license” degree in sociology (equivalent to the American B.A.) was created in 1957. On the other hand, the first American program of sociology was created at the University of Chicago at the end of the nineteenth century (Hinkle and Hinkle, 1954). The American Sociological Association has approximately 13,000 members scattered throughout the country. More than 200 departments offer

graduates degrees in the field. These morphological differences between American and French sociology affect the way the institutions of these fields are structured and organized. Below, I compare their respective organization of research and publication activities. I also compare the structure of teaching institutions, that is, the American “department” and the French “Unités d’enseignement et de recherche” (U.E.R.). I discuss the activity of these institutions, and the distinctive characteristics of the professional training students receive in both countries.

The organization of research and publishing activities

The modes of allocation of research funding and the organization of research teams are the two most striking differences between the organization of French and American research activities. While some of these differences are well known, it is useful to describe them systematically.

In France, academic research activities are primarily conducted in research laboratories financed by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. These laboratories are independent from the university system, and are dissociated from teaching activities. Researchers are recruited by laboratories’ directors and through national competitions. They are normally expected to work on their own and have considerable freedom in the choice of their research topic within the limits of the investigation field of the laboratory they are affiliated with. Researchers without laboratory affiliations can seldom obtain funding for independent research.

In the United States, the organization of research activities is quite different. Research is primarily conducted in graduate departments. Research financing is generally allocated on a project basis. Investigators submit research grant proposals to one of the several funding agencies, and the proposals are reviewed anonymously by experts in the field. The competitive principles of research funding legitimizes the distribution of research money and increases the prestige attributed to the grant receivers. It also encourages researchers to become experts, that is, to think in terms of long-term research programs, to investigate one area in depth, and to build up a reputation in one specific field. Furthermore, this evaluative process reinforces the normative control within the field, as well as a stronger agreement on the professional norms of research activities, independent of the field and of the theoretical orientation of researchers (Whitley, 1984). The diversity of funding agencies and the

greater resources available also support stronger normative control within the profession. In contrast, in France, the scarcity of research funds, and of professional resources in general has probably weakened normative control within the profession (Montlibert, 1982).

In America, full-time researchers are few; in order to be freed from teaching, academics have to obtain research fellowships, normally sponsored by private foundations and non-profit organizations. Otherwise, research and teaching activities have to be conducted simultaneously. This situation favors the constitution of research shops in graduate departments. These shops commonly consist of one or two professors and a few graduate students. Research grants increase the productivity of researchers by financing research clusters, collaborative works, and the hiring of research assistants.

In both American and French sociology, publication records are one of the few main dimensions determining the positioning of researchers within the field. However, the value attributed to the various types of publications varies between the two fields.

In French sociology, publishing in professional journals is less important a status basis than it is in American sociology. First, publishing books provides more visibility than publishing specialized articles. Books can be covered by the cultural media, such as *Le Monde*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, and *France-Culture*. These cultural media diffuse work in the wider intellectual community, which diffusion may influence greatly one's position in the profession (Debray, 1979; Hamon and Rothman, 1981). Second, the prestige attached to publishing in a specialized journal is not as clearly defined as it is the case in the United States where there exists a relatively strong consensus on the ranking of journals – in contrast, French professional journals are not as clearly hierarchalized. There exist approximately 20 sociological journals in France, most of which do not review articles anonymously; this delegitimizes journal publishing as a status basis. Several of these journals are controlled by a research cluster and essentially publish contributions to a specific theoretical orientation.

In the United States, the publication of articles in the main journals is one of the few most important bases of promotion and ranking within the field. Given the size of American sociology, publishing is the main means by which one can reach a specialized audience and build a reputation outside one's own department. The allocation of tenured positions is

largely based on publication records. For this reason, researchers tend to improve their record by collaborating on a number of projects (Patel, 1973). Contrarily to French sociologists, in general they tend to produce more articles and less books.² Nevertheless, a number of original and influential sociologists have made their reputation based on books – it is the case of Daniel Bell, Robert Bellah, Kai Erikson, Joseph Gusfield, Michael Schudson, Theda Skocpol, and Robert Wuthnow, to name only a few. The most stellar members of younger generation tend to combine book publishing with articles in prestigious journals. This is particularly the case among those working in fields that are largely or predominantly qualitative, such as comparative and historical sociology, social movements, cultural sociology, and political sociology. The relative weight attached to books versus articles remains a stake in departmental conflicts.

In the United States, the symbolic profits attached to articles vary greatly with the prestige of the journals where they are published. There exists more than 200 journals, which are grossly hierarchalized along a number of criteria, the most prestigious journals being the most selective and the most widely diffused in the discipline. While the *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review* and *Social Forces* are the most important cross-fields journals, the *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Sociology of Education*, *Sociological Theory*, and *Theory and Society* are benchmarks in their respective sub-fields (Lindsay, 1987 and Zelditch, 1979). Other journals published by regional professional associations, such as *Sociology Forum*, are also valued venues for publication.

Organization of departments and teaching activities

In this section, I compare the formal training of graduate students and the organization of teaching institutions in American and French sociology. The formal training of graduate students differs in terms of its impact on the student's career; the type of dependence the students develop towards their dissertation advisor during their training; the requirements the departments impose on their students; and the departments' role with regard to the students' professional socialization. The teaching institutions differ in terms of their international organizational structure and the basis of their ranking in the field.

In the United States, although there are important differences across departments of sociology, in general, these departments perform a

number of functions essential to the intellectual and institutional regulation of the profession. They often supply material resources to support students during their training, which cover both a sizeable stipend and tuition fees. They socialize them professionally, the research experience accumulated in graduate school providing the students with well-defined cultural codes required for publishing (Crane, 1970). They also provide students with an institutional framework in which to perform. Finally, they continuously select and evaluate students, which evaluations have a strong influence on students' subsequent ability to get a position in a good department. Finally, the status of one's degree-granting department in the field greatly affects one's career (Hargens, 1979).

In France, graduate training is less determinant of one's career. The doctorat is only one of several requirements for becoming a professional sociologist, along with the "agrégation" and the C.A.P.E.S. (Bourdieu, 1984). The students' performance is less strictly controlled, given that the profits associated to the doctorat degree are less clearly defined. Also, because academic jobs are few, students are not expected to gain the control, while in graduate school, of a specialized literature to be used for teaching. Publishing in major journals is not emphasized and students are less pressured to learn implicit publishing codes and to co-author with established researchers. Directed research apprenticeship is not as central a part of the standard doctorate program, partly because of the separation of teaching and research and the paucity of research funds to support graduate students. Research clusters do not develop on a departmental basis, as is the case in the United States. Socialization depends more on the students' independent work and on their informal participation in research laboratories. Their relation with the research directors is determinant of their professional integration, and students are quite dependent upon their mentors (Bourdieu, 1984).

This dependence is also strong for American graduate students, although it tends to be counter-checked by a number of other factors. Students have to fulfill several requirements for which they partially depend on various faculty members. They have to take field exams in two to four areas of specialization in consultation with several field specialists. They have to choose three to five professors as members of their dissertation committee. Through their graduate student career, they often work on several projects as research assistants. They develop a number of institutional links that place them in a position of multiple dependence.

Simultaneously, they have access to a large number of professional resources and they develop a wide range of skills which better their market situation.

The French "doctorat" requirements are structured differently. First, students must obtain a D.E.A. (Diplôme d'études approfondies), which requires attending courses in one's field of specialization for a year, and writing a dissertation proposal – in order to be admitted to the D.E.A. program, students must have completed their masters degree, which includes a short dissertation. Second, they have to write their doctoral dissertation. While working on their dissertation, students normally attend seminars pertaining to their dissertation topic. These seminars are scattered through various schools, and provide students with weak institutional supports. Students are very isolated if they do not succeed in forming support groups with former colleagues or laboratory researchers.

For these students, there is no structural track for professional promotion – academic jobs being few – and the benefits attached to the various types of professional investments are not well defined (Montlibert, 1982). Therefore, their career paths tend to be very diverse. Young researchers take a more generalist orientation than their American counterparts in order to be able to fulfill a wide range of demands. In American sociology, the paths are also diverse, although the graduates from most top departments tend to follow a more clearly defined career path, which includes specializing on a single field, publishing in the major journals, getting research grants, collaborating with established senior researchers, and gaining a tenure-track position as an assistant professor. Students in the most quantitative departments tend to be especially encouraged to submit papers in mainstream journals. It is notably the case at the University of Michigan, the University of North Carolina, Stanford University, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Departments that put more emphasis on qualitative sociology – University of California, Berkeley, Northwestern University, Princeton University – also encourage students to write "big dissertations" as opposed to primarily orient their energies toward publishing in major journals.

The internal organizational structure of French and American departments also differs. On the one hand, American departments normally have a relatively large number of specialists working in a range of areas and whose intellectual networks are located outside their institutions (Yoels, 1974). This intra-departmental division of labor diminishes the occurrence of conflicts among members of a department.

However, intra-departmental conflicts do rise around issues pertaining to general theoretical orientation. On the other hand, French departments of sociology are relatively small normally and often bring together specialists of a single area of research. For instance, the Université-Paris 7 has a sociology of knowledge department and the Université-Paris 1, a political sociology department. Departmental members tend to work under a compatible paradigm and the departments themselves are often organized around one high prestige researcher. Such a departmental structure increases the occurrence of inter-departmental conflicts and weakens the disciplinary consensus about the ranking of departments in the field. This ranking is not itself an issue given that research activities, which determine the academics' position, are mostly conducted outside the university system. However, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, which has a number of well-established researchers, is generally thought of as being the top school for sociologists. In contrast, American departments of sociology are clearly hierarchalized on the prestige of its faculty members. The most prestigious departments hire top specialists in the various sub-fields. Also, these departments are more likely to help students to find jobs in top departments, and to attract the most promising students to their Ph.D. program (Caplow and McGee, 1958; Long and McGinnis, 1981). The various departments race to be at the top of an official ranking published annually, and highly visible to university administrations.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

An analysis of the cultural differences between French and American sociology could include references to the French and American national cultural repertoires (Lamont and Thévenot, 2000), to the process of the institutionalization and professionalization of sociology, and to the role of intellectuals in the French and American political process and in the mass media. I will limit my remarks to the influence of the social position of French and American intellectuals on the self-definition of sociologists in both countries, and to some features of their respective professional culture. Among the numerous intellectual differences between these fields, I will discuss the hegemony of quantitative sociology in the United States, and of meta-theory in French sociology. I will also compare the dominant epistemological orientation in both countries.

As many researchers noted, the French intellectual elite enjoys a high social status (Clark, 1979). The historical role of French philosophers and

social thinkers in the development of Western thought as well as the early institutionalization of the French educational system under Napoleon have contributed to making academics a part of the French national grandeur. Also, the influence of Marxism in some of the main political parties has nourished an image of intellectuals as guides of the popular masses. Traditionally, French intellectuals have been strongly involved in national politics, either as leaders of popular movements, or as supporters of the establishment. The prestige of French intellectuals has influenced the self-definition of sociologists. The role of the intellectual being highly valued in France, sociologists have had a tendency to identify themselves with this role. Many of them, like Alain Touraine, and Pierre Bourdieu, view their work as social intervention.

In contrast, elements of the American culture such as anti-intellectualism, pragmatism, populism and the role of the mass media in producing mass culture has prevented intellectuals from becoming distinctive legitimate creators of social representations (Hofstadern 1963; Mills, 1966; Bowen, 1983; Lamont, 1992). These elements have also affected academics who tend to view themselves as upper-middle class experts inserted in the large professional groupings of American society. Except for a minority, academics in general, and sociologists in particular, do not aspire to any special political or symbolic mission (Janovitz, 1972).

Following the increased professionalization of American society over the last 30 years, American sociologists have developed a professional culture similar to the one of other highly educated professional groups. This professional culture emphasizes good citizenship, efficiency, meritocracy, collegial collaboration and the respect of pluralism in research orientation.³ Cliques are morally condemned, even if they are a constant of the organization of the profession. Direct conflicts tend to be avoided and internal politics are often treated as a closet matter. These cultural norms are necessary for regulating such a large profession. These norms code behavior and reduce the uncertainty involved in interacting in a field where actors, spread out through the country, are interdependent for getting positions and research funding and for publishing articles.

The size of French sociology, and the concentration of research laboratories in Paris, makes the profession resemble a village where everybody knows everybody, if not personally, at least by reputation (Hamon and Rothman, 1981). This concentration has partly prevented French sociologists from developing a strong universalistic professional culture. Their culture overlaps partly with the one of the Parisian

intellectual field, which is diffused by the cultural media. It is also somewhat influenced by the Parisian culture, with its emphasis on sophistication and cultural distinction. This is clearly reflected in the writing style of some French sociologists who, contrarily to their American counterparts, present their research in a literary fashion.

Given the size and the geographical dispersion of American sociologists, the American sociological Association has played an important role in providing an institutional framework for communication within the discipline, and in diffusing a professional culture (see Bowen 1983). In contrast, the Société française de sociologie has always had a lesser impact on the profession, partly because the organization of the field is less problematic, given the size and the concentration of the profession.

Intellectual differences

American sociologists are always half surprised, half scandalized by French sociological theory. Some feel that it presumes a non-empirical approach to social reality that is everything but sociological. The place of theory and empirical work in both fields merits discussion.

Between 1957 and 1970, French sociology grew at an exceptionally rapid rate, due partly to the increase in student enrolment, and to the political and social climate which favored the development of the social sciences. At that time a large number of researchers from various fields came to sociology.⁴ The sociological norms of intellectual production and evaluation were strongly influenced by other disciplines and by philosophy in particular. This change affected research in two respects: it favored the spread of non-empirically based research and the hegemony of theory as research activity. It also weakened the profession's consensus about the definition of legitimate sociological work. Deep, epistemological, methodological, and substantial conflicts have spread to such a degree that in some respect, the discipline can hardly be thought of as one field differentiated from other disciplines.

In contrast, American sociology is unified enough to be thought of as a multi-paradigmatic discipline (Stehr, 1974; Ritzer, 1975). Though the field is very diversified, there seems to be a semi-consensus about what competent sociological research is, and what ought to be considered as a legitimate component of the discipline. Textbooks have helped in building this consensus (Rothman, 1971).

Strongly influenced by the scientific model of the natural sciences, many American sociologists have, from the beginning, adopted a positivist epistemological position which supports a cumulative conception of knowledge and which helps to unify the discipline. This epistemological position was particularly suited to the American context, given that the idea of progress is among the basic ideological foundations of the American national enterprise. Although this position came under the repeated attacks of the postmodernism in the eighties and nineties, it is still the dominant one. In France, such an epistemology could not be popular for a number of reasons. The decline of the French position on the international scene and the weakening of its economic strength since World War II have contributed to preventing the idea of progress from having any concrete social meaning. The context favored the development of a more relativist approach to knowledge sustained by variants of the Marxist theories of knowledge, and by German phenomenology. Also the rationalist French tradition, and the traditional presence of the humanities at the summit of the hierarchy of sciences counterchecked the spread of a more empiricist scientific ethos. This relativist approach opposed the accumulation of the knowledge perspective and maintained a weak epistemological and methodological consensus within the field (Fabre, 1983). The influence of positivism in the United States and of the relativism in France, produced some clear-cut differences between the American and French sociological research.

In the United States, sociology has become almost exclusively empirically grounded (Obershall, 1972).⁵ Theory without empirical support is defined as meta-theory and is often seen as an activity of lesser legitimacy (Turner, 1978). This is clearly reflected in the articles published in the major journals (Zelditch, 1979). Quantitative research, and especially sophisticated statistical techniques, acts as a status boundary within the profession, their presence legitimizing sociology as a science. In France in contrast, interpretative methods and qualitative techniques still predominate and methodologists are few. However, note that in the United States, the impressive growth of primarily qualitative fields such as the sociology of culture, the sociology of emotion, economic sociology, and comparative-historical sociology since the eighties points toward a redefinition of the place given to statistical techniques as a basis for legitimation of sociological knowledge.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the organization of French sociology is less structured than American sociology: the ranking of departments and journals is less clearly established. There is no definite structured career path for younger researchers. The profits attached to the various types of professional investments are less clearly defined. The normative control on research is weaker and as is the regulating power of a professional culture. These differences may be partly explained by the degree of development and institutionalization of the two national fields and by their size.

These preliminary observations should be developed in a more systematic comparison. Further research should deal more systematically with the differences of research orientation in French and American sociology. Data on research funding, on the demographic distribution of researchers and professors and on the publication of books and of research and theory articles would provide a more precise picture of both national fields. Further research should also analyze the influence of the French and American cultural and social context on sociological production. As such, it could contribute to a more sociological understanding of the certitudes and uncertainties of sociological research and of scientific knowledge in general.

NOTES

- [1] This is a revised and updated version of a little-known piece, which I wrote shortly after moving to the United States in 1983 (Lamont, 1984).
- [2] The researchers' propensity to publish articles rather than books varies with their research areas. For instance, sociologists using qualitative data, and those working in "soft" areas, like the sociology of culture, are more inclined to publish books.
- [3] This professional culture seems to be more diffused in quantitatively oriented top departments. Departments emphasizing qualitative research and theoretical training are likely to be more divided on the basis of general theoretical orientations.
- [4] Among the 30 professors holding "directeur d'études" positions in 1974, seven had a "doctorat d'Etat" in sociology, four in philosophy, three in literature, and four were "agrégés" in philosophy. For 19 of them, philosophy was their initial field of specialization (Pollack, 1975).
- [5] For data on the proportion of theory and research articles published in major American journals, see Menzies (1983).

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FRANCE-AMÉRIQUE : REGARDS CROISÉS SUR LE CINÉMA

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Jamais sans doute le cinéma français n'a joué un rôle si important dans la production internationale. De cette indéniable réussite on a pu constater les effets lors du récent festival de Cannes. Près de la moitié des films présentés en sélection officielle étaient financés entièrement, ou pour bonne part, grâce aux subventions du Centre national du cinéma et aux capitaux de maisons de production françaises. L'autre logique est tout aussi cohérente, tant en matière financière, sociologique qu'esthétique, imposée par le cinéma américain qui tente de mettre en ordre ses capitaux, les procédés nés des nouvelles technologies de l'image et de l'écriture numériques, tout comme ses histoires, ses vedettes et ses valeurs. Cette dualité dessine une géographie du cinéma dans le monde, dont le partage d'influence, inégal, est désormais admis : aux studios américains les films du spectaculaire, qu'ils soient bons ou mauvais, et, surtout, la domination mondiale des spectateurs ; aux Français revient le rôle de la seule et unique alternative possible. L'Europe du cinéma, pour peu qu'elle existe, se construit ainsi, essentiellement, avec des idées et des capitaux français.

Le phénomène n'est certes pas nouveau. La plupart des autres pays européens ont renoncé, soit dans l'immédiat après-guerre comme en Angleterre, soit à la fin des années 70 comme en Italie ou en Allemagne, soit à la suite de l'effondrement du monde communiste, à subventionner leur culture cinématographique. L'exception culturelle se tient là, tout d'abord, au cœur d'un système de redistribution des recettes et des avances, organisé par l'Etat, qui fait vivre l'ensemble du cinéma français, et au-delà une part du cinéma international. Car les auteurs du cinéma