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discussion paper

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**Theoretical Considerations in Cross-
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ABSTRACT

This article critically reviews a range of theoretical approaches to cross-national employment research. It classifies these studies in terms of universal and culturalist perspectives. Universalists tend to ignore the concept of culture, or at best acknowledge it as a marginal phenomenon or additional variable. Culturalists, on the other hand, have sought to integrate the concept of culture into their analysis at a socio-economic and institutional level as well as at the psychological level of the individual. The emphasis on similarities between countries tends to lead to a universalist approach, whilst the emphasis on difference is often supported by a more culturalist perspective. This review highlights that the shortcomings of these approaches in terms of accounting for change and the co-existence of similarity and diversity. Further more, these studies, for the most part, are blind to the affects and effects of gender on industrial organisation and employment practices.

Cross-national studies which have given more weight to gender concerns have tended to be concentrated in debates on the welfare state or patterns of women's employment. One of the problems with many of these studies has been that either gender becomes an optional variable in the cross-national comparison, or where there have been attempts to make it more central, the meaning of cross-national differences becomes blurred and confused. What is clearly required is an approach which shows how gender relations shape observable differences in national regimes of economic production and social reproduction and how these vary between countries. It has been argued here that the employment systems approach coupled with the gender order perspective can provide a useful framework of analysis. This enables us to identify how comparable pressures for change have generated specific interest coalitions; these coalitions resolve conflicts by agreeing on a particular gender compromise.

Zusammenfassung

In dem Beitrag werden theoretische Ansätze für international vergleichende Beschäftigungsstudien kritisch überprüft. Die Studien werden nach universalistischen und kulturalistischen Ansätzen unterschieden.

Universalisten tendieren dazu, die Kategorie „Kultur“ zu ignorieren oder sie bestenfalls als ein marginales Phänomen oder eine zusätzliche Variable zu akzeptieren. Kulturalisten auf der anderen Seite haben versucht, in ihren Analysen das Kultur-Konzept auf einer sozioökonomischen, institutionellen und individualpsychologischen Ebene zu integrieren.

Werden Ähnlichkeiten zwischen verschiedenen Ländern in den Blick genommen, läßt sich eher ein universalistischer Ansatz finden; wird die Aufmerksamkeit auf Unterschiede gelegt, geht dies oft mit einem eher kulturalistischen Ansatz einher. In der vorliegenden Arbeit wird hervorgehoben, daß diese Ansätze nur schwach entwickelt sind in der Erklärung von Veränderung ebenso wie von Unterschieden und Ähnlichkeiten zwischen Ländern. Darüberhinaus erweisen sich diese Studien zum größten Teil als „blind“ gegenüber geschlechtsspezifischen Wahrnehmungen und Auswirkungen von industrieller Organisation und Beschäftigungspraktiken.

International vergleichende Studien, in denen ein größeres Gewicht auf geschlechtsspezifische Auswirkungen gelegt wurde, sind vorwiegend im Kontext der Diskussionen um den Wohlfahrtsstaat oder die Muster von Frauenbeschäftigung zu finden. Dabei erweist es sich häufig als ein Problem dieser Studien, daß entweder die Kategorie „Geschlecht“ keineswegs als eine notwendige Variable im internationalen Vergleich erachtet wird oder daß bei dem Versuch, ihr eine zentralere Rolle zu geben, die Bedeutung nationaler Unterschiede verblaßt. Daraus folgt die Bedeutung eines Ansatzes, durch den gezeigt werden kann, wie Geschlechterbeziehungen offenkundige Unterschiede in den für die ökonomische Produktion und die soziale Reproduktion wirksamen nationalen Regelungssystemen beeinflussen und wie dies zwischen einzelnen Ländern variiert.

In der vorliegenden Arbeit wird die Meinung vertreten, daß der „Beschäftigungssysteme“-Ansatz mit dem Blick auf die Bedeutung der „Geschlechterordnung“ verknüpft werden sollte; dies könnte einen ertragreichen analytischen Rahmen ergeben. Denn dadurch ließe sich erkennen, wie ähnliche Zwänge zu Veränderungen spezifische Interessenkoalitionen hervorgebracht haben; diese Interessenkoalitionen lösen Konflikte durch die Einigung auf einen spezifischen „Geschlechterkompromiß“.

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1. Introduction

Cross-national research on industrial organisation and labour markets over the past twenty five years has tended to take one of two approaches. Either researchers have tried to identify global, universal trends in industrial organisation, or, they have given more emphasis to the differences that exist, and appear to persist, between societies at similar levels of industrial development. These apparently contradictory findings highlight the point made by Lane (1993:275) that one of the shortcomings of much comparative research has been the problem of developing an 'appropriate comparative theory.' This makes it difficult to encompass 'cross-national differences and universal social trends' within a single framework. Sorge (1994) has argued for the development of a new 'dialectical' framework that can help synthesize these different approaches. Such an approach should be able to take account not only of the influences of institutional regulation, but of the attitudes and capacities of actors to bring about change. We can also distinguish cross-national studies in contemporary sociology on two further grounds. First, there are 'gender-blind' studies that concentrate on forms of economic production and industrial organisation. And, second, there are studies, usually concerned with the welfare state or forms of women's paid labour market employment, which, to a greater and lesser extent, try to include a gender perspective. For the most part debates within these two fields have run in parallel, oblivious to the other, despite the fact that in terms of cross-national comparisons they are often concerned with similar problems related to structure and agency, convergence and divergence.

This article sets out to critically review these debates. It attempts to suggest ways of developing a comparative theoretical framework to address employment related issues that can retain a core conceptualisation of gender. This is likely to raise more issues than it can hope to resolve within the present remit. Nevertheless, given the growing importance of comparative research this article aims to act as a catalyst to provoke a more extensive debate on this theme. We start first by looking at the rationale and motivation to embark on comparative research in the first place.

2. Why conduct comparative research?

There are a variety of reasons why researchers embark on comparative projects. These can include simple curiosity, or a sense of affinity with a particular foreign culture; concern for the competitive success, or failure, of their own country in comparison to others; or concerns about inequality and possible social policy solutions. Two major factors which have stimulated an interest in this area have come from "managerial" or policy makers' concerns on the one hand, and theoretical interests on the other.

Managerial motives for conducting cross-national research often seek to identify "best practice". The recent fashion for Japanese working practices like Just-In-Time (JIT) and Total Quality Management (TQM) is an example of this. Subsequent attempts to adopt and adapt these practices in Western organisations, have met with varying degrees of success.¹ In social policy, concerns to identify "best practice" have also encouraged the use of cross-national comparisons. For example, there have been a number of studies examining the effects of welfare benefits or child care provision in Scandinavia, the US, UK, France and other countries.²

From a theoretical perspective empirical cross-national research has highlighted weaknesses in the generalisations applied and exported to "foreign" cultures. Warwick and Osherson (1973) argue that,

"Relationships once assumed to be universal have been shattered on the proving ground of the non-western world. As a result there is now a more cautious and less grandiose attitude in theory construction, and a renewed quest for explanations that will stand the test of varying socio-cultural conditions." (1973:6)

The understandings developed from empirical cross-national comparisons should be able to augment theory formulation. Nowak (1989) argues that an inductive and exploratory approach provided by comparative research can contribute to resolving some the current problems in social theory. One of the major values of such research is that it can challenge implicit assumptions that our own national system of organisation is the best, or only, way to organise. We can also learn how the varied experience of industrialisation has had long-term influences on current social arrangements. These differences can lead us to raise questions about the causes and effects of contemporary social structure and social action. This extends concern beyond the academic community, so that managerial and social science motives need not be exclusive.

¹ See Ouchi 1981; Oliver and Wilkinson 1988; Garrahan and Stewart 1992; Pollert 1991.

² See Moss 1990; Morris 1990; Barrère-Maurisson et al. 1989; Schmid et al. 1992; Reissert 1993; Bradshaw et al. 1993; Dex et al. 1993.

Although both sets of motives can often inform each other, it is also important to recognise that the central focus of interest from each perspective varies. Managerial perspectives tend to seek normative and prescriptive solutions, whilst social science approaches are more interested in analytical methods and theoretical implications. However, each perspective can be mutually informative. Social science can inform managers and policy makers why there are no "quick fix" solutions, whilst managerial and policy concerns can, and are, focusing research agendas on pertinent contemporary issues.

3. Background to the debates

Comparative research was of interest to nineteenth and early twentieth century writers like Marx, Durkheim and Weber, who, according to Warwick and Osherson (1973:4-5), were influenced by classical evolutionist research. The concept of evolutionism when applied to social development suggested that societies pass through a similar series of universal and historical stages, as they become more 'civilised'. Despite coming from different political positions, these universalist theorists shared a similar set of basic underlying assumptions about the trajectory of human development.

However, the unilinear model of social evolution was challenged by anthropological research, such as that of Malinowski whose functional analysis of single societies suggested that these societies were unique coherent entities. The implications of these claims were that a society needed to be understood from a more holistic approach. Such an approach is opposed to reducing particular characteristics of a given society to the status of a few independent variables, and comparing them across societies. Instead greater emphasis is given to showing the relationship and development between different aspects of the same society.

These two basic approaches have continued to underpin contemporary disputes about universal and particular trends in social development. These conflicting traditions run deep and persist. Today debates in cross-national research are divided between those who focus on similarities and convergence, in contrast to those who emphasise differences and divergence. Those who stress universal trends often underplay cultural differences in their search for similar patterns across societies, whilst those who stress divergence tend to take a more holistic approach and give greater emphasis to the impact of culture.

The concept of culture as a significant explanatory variable is a key concern in cross-national comparative research. However, this idea has received quite diverse theoretical treatment. Hill (1973) points out that the problems in comparative research stem from,

“the current status of the comparativist’s major independent variable: cultural or societal heterogeneity. Clearly, the variable is N-dimensional, and comparative sociologists have not as yet agreed on the size of N, let alone on the conceptual nature of the dimensions that define N-space.” (Hill 1973:459)

Over twenty years later this problem still appears to be unresolved. One of the problems in trying to conceptualise, and operationalize culture for empirical research is, as Casassus-Montero (1989) points out: “*Où faut-il chercher pour trouver l’explication des différences?*” Any analysis incorporating the impact of culture would need to include a comparison of the norms and values, as well as the mechanisms or institutions transmitting these values, for example the family, the state, the education and training system, trade unions or even religious organisations.³ The implications this has for comparative, empirical research are potentially overwhelming.⁴

Nevertheless, important contributions to the field of cross-national research have sought to grapple with these problems both at a theoretical and empirical level. The studies discussed in this article are categorised in terms of universal, cultural and intermediary perspectives; the final section examines studies with a stronger gender-orientated focus. In the light of this assessment this paper sets out to indicate potentially useful approaches for conducting cross-national employment research in the future, where gender is a core component of analysis.

4. Universal theories of convergence

Universal theories, although coming from different political perspectives, share a similar underlying theme: they assume a common dynamic. The main contribution of these differing schools of thought to comparative research has been to argue that there are shared, universally identifiable, pressures and trends working across all industrialised societies. Some of these early theories have been modified to accommodate empirical evidence that refuted the predicted universal pattern. Nevertheless, at the core of these theories is the assumption that generalisations can be made on the universal level, applicable

³ Dore 1973; Gallie 1978 & 1983; Maurice et al. 1982; Whitley 1992a and b; MÓsesdÓttir (1995).

⁴ Grimshaw 1973:9; Tayeb 1988:42-3

to all countries. Here we will focus on Marxism and Marxist Feminism, Industrialism and Contingency theory.

4.1 Marxism and Marxist Feminists

Marx's observations of the early stages of industrialisation, in the last century, identified the varying patterns of state and capital consolidation in Britain, Germany and France⁵. For example, while Britain retained parliamentary democracy, France and Germany had authoritarian or unstable liberal democratic governments. In Britain there were signs of a collective class consciousness developing amongst the proletariat, albeit through trade unions, whereas there was a lack or a fragmentation of class consciousness in France and Germany. In his later work Marx used these particular observations to develop a theory that could be applied to capitalist development in general, which he argued would become a universal phenomenon.⁶ Such a perspective is predicated on the argument that although ruling elites may respond to the universal contradictions and pressures of capitalism in differently, essentially the structural demands of the capitalist mode of production to extract surplus value and generate profit will require them to behave in similar ways. The inherent class struggle between the property owning class of capitalists to reduce the wage rates and skill levels of the propertyless proletariat would ultimately be resolved by communism.⁷ Although as the events leading up to 1989 have indicated, this promised more in theory than in practice for 'real-existing' communist states.

Revisions of Marxism try to take account of changes that Marx did not anticipate, as well as engaging with discussions on feminism. For the purposes of this article we are particularly interested in seeing how these debates have contributed a gender dimension to comparative research. Feminism has

⁵ Marx and Engels (1977).

⁶ Marx, K. (1988) *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie - Erster Band* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag) pp.15-16. (first published 1867)

“Eine Nation soll und kann von der anderen lernen. Auch wenn eine Gesellschaft dem Naturgesetz ihrer Bewegung auf die Spur gekommen ist - und es ist der letzte Endzweck dieses Werks, das ökonomische Bewegungsgesetz der modernen Gesellschaft zu enthüllen -, kann sie naturgemäße Entwicklungsphasen weder überspringen noch wegdekretieren. Aber sie kann die Geburtswehen abkürzen und mildern.”

'A nation should and can learn from others. Furthermore, when a society identifies the natural laws of its development - and the ultimate goal of this work is to reveal the economic laws that govern the motion of modern society -, it can neither skip over nor outlaw the objective stages of development. But it can shorten and ameliorate the birth pains.' (author's translation)

⁷ Marx, K and Engels, F. (1872) *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei in Ausgewählte Schriften I* Dietz Verlag Berlin (1977)

sought to challenge Marxism by arguing that exploitation occurs beyond the cash-nexus and outside the factory walls. Various attempts have been made to integrate an analysis of patriarchy in relation to the concept of class. Essentially Marxist Feminism has moved from the domestic labour debates, that attempted to conceptualise how domestic labour contributes to the production of surplus value, to accounting for inequalities generated by capitalism and patriarchy.⁸ One of the key issues in this latter debate is whether patriarchy is essential to capitalism, or whether it represents a separate system that is dependent on capitalism. The key concepts that account for social inequality are class and gender.

A major problem with the dual system approach, as Young (1981) points out, is where does one system end and the other begin, or should we analyse them as part of the one system? This raises questions as to whether or not patriarchy is essential to capitalism, and, secondly, why did earlier forms of patriarchy need to move to a capitalist system? A further problem arises, as Joseph (1981) points out, when this perspective is applied to the issue of inequality amongst non-white ethnic groups. Joseph's main concern is with ethnic diversity in the US, but this critique could also be applied to cross-national differences related to the varying importance and structure of the family in different societies, in particular when we consider the influence of colonialism and post-colonial migration for countries outside of Europe.⁹

One of the major critiques of Marxism, which can also apply to Marxist Feminism, is the over-emphasis on structural determinants. Lane (1989:26-7) argues that Marxist concerns with capitalism as an international system has led them to make "grand sweep" generalisations. This has meant a relative neglect of "meso-level peculiarities",

"This methodological shortcoming of a narrowly Marxist analysis may be attributed to the fact that the actor and his/her perception and manipulation of organisational relations tends to disappear from sight." (Lane 1989:27)

Granovetter (1985) makes the case for a perspective that can take account of actors in relation to the institutions in which they operate:

"Actors do not behave or decide as atoms outside a social context, nor do they adhere slavishly to a script written for them by the particular intersection of social categories that they happen to occupy. Their attempts at purposive action are instead embedded in concrete, on-going systems of social relations." (Granovetter 1985:487)

⁸ See Walby (1986) and Sargent (1981) for a good summary of these debates; Hartmann (1981); Folbre (1994).

⁹ See Folbre (1994) for a comparison of the Northern Europe, the US, Latin American and the Caribbean.

If we are to have a perspective on change we need to be able to locate how institutions, that forms the social system, shape the constraints and capacities of actors (Folbre 1994).

Maurice et al. (1986:205-9) further criticise Marxist approaches for being "reductionist". Whilst developments in contemporary Marxist thought have allowed for a degree of autonomy amongst actors, ultimately productive relations are,

"determined by the forms of capital or its contradictions - that is in our view, by historical or national contingencies affecting the way the capitalist mode of production operates and reproduces itself." (Maurice et al. 1986:208)

Instead, Maurice et al. argue that capital can be influenced by other social and historical factors, not determined by capitalism alone. These factors affect the forms capitalist production takes.

Nevertheless, some of the strengths to draw from a Marxist approach are the emphasis on the concept of conflicting interests. Societies and the social relations within them are dynamic. The most difficult question to answer is where does the dynamic for change come from? The comparative work of Sisson (1987), although not essentially Marxist, is a good example of how a perspective of historical conflicts and compromises between employers' associations and organised labour explain the varied traditions in industrial relations. The importance of acknowledging conflict and contradiction is also made by Sorge and Warner (1986) and Sorge (1994). Sorge argues for the development of a dialectical theory in the comparative study of employment relations and organisations.

"The notion of dialectical theory used to raise the hair of so-called positivist scholars, who considered it a misguided endeavour to tolerate confusion and arbitrariness, things which were thought of as unscientific. ... By trying to do full justice to real-world events, dialectical theory therefore displays an inherent tension between the ambition to reduce contradictions and the recognition that this has clear limits."(Sorge 1994:3)

Thus whilst Marxist approaches have tended to focus on universal generalisations concerning the determinants of capitalist development, recognition of conflicting interests is a useful aspect to borrow from these theories.

4.2 Industrialism and Contingency theory

Industrialism represents a more conservative perspective that seeks to identify universal trends in industrial organisation, although it has less to say about gender. This approach argues that technological innovation and increasing

wealth lead to the universal adoption of similar working practices. The level of technological sophistication was considered a determining factor shaping the characteristics of organisations. It was assumed that technological progress would occur along a single trajectory of development. We can see these assumptions in the early work of Haribson et al. (1955). In their study of the steel industry in the US and W. Germany they identified several differences in the characteristics of the employees and in the organisation of work. They argued that the use of similar technology would minimise these differences. This conclusion was popularised in the later work of Haribson in collaboration with Kerr et al. (1960) .

Kerr (1983) states that one of the aims of this earlier collaborative work was to challenge the ideology that capitalist and communist societies were polar opposites. The theory of industrialism argues that there is an inherent logic to industrialism, regardless of the political context. "Much of what happens to management and labour is the same regardless of auspices." (Kerr 1983:18). Industrialism requires: a skilled and mobile workforce; large-scale production in large cities, together with political consensus for government intervention; a professional elite of managers; workforce participation in the benefits of industrialism and political acceptance of this system. This system is regulated by a web of rules (Kerr et al. 1960:33-46). The key assumption in this work is that as societies progress, the differences, rooted in traditional practices and relationships, would disappear. Productive technology acts as an intrinsic imperative forcing all societies in the direction of industrialism. We hear similar messages today in the debates on globalisation.

Lane (1989:22) argues that this perspective "discounts the powerful impact of history." Like Marxism, industrialism assumes societies will cross a historical "threshold" before entering a new form of industrial order where consensus will reign. But, as we hear frequently in the "post-perestroika" period, attempts of former Eastern Bloc countries to cross this "threshold" is constrained by the historical and political baggage of their former experiences and conflicts persist, albeit, in new forms.

Industrialism is largely a thesis that claims to identify *grosso modo* universal trends about modernisation. However, when we come to look at an important aspect of modernisation, i.e. women's integration into paid employment, we can identify notable differences, even within Europe. A number of studies have shown how some countries have sought to integrate women on a full-time permanent basis, whereas other countries have opted for a part-time work strategy, or alternatively maintaining low levels of female activity alongside an immigration policy to meet labour shortages. These studies clearly highlight that the pattern of modernisation has different affects on the nature of women's economic dependence on men.¹⁰ But this significant

¹⁰ Pfau-Effinger (1993); Tilly and Scott (1987); Einhorn (1993).

aspect of modernisation, which shapes the form of economic production and the social sphere of reproduction,¹¹ as well as rights to political citizenship, is completely ignored by the industrialism approach.

Contingency theory developed to counter some of the weaknesses of industrialism, although not its neglect of gender. However, it too is intellectually rooted in the same implicit assumption of the unilinearity of industrial development. Unlike industrialism, Contingency theory limits its scope to examining the differences in business structures, rather than in whole societies. This approach concentrates on the differences in organisational design and practices in relation to contingent factors like organisational size, the environment, or the type of technology used.¹² The key argument is that under a given set of conditions, or contingencies, it was possible to identify optimal organisational behaviour and structural solutions because external contingencies were potentially malleable. The Aston School took the position that residual factors, not explained by these variables, could be accounted for in terms of culture. Culture was understood in terms of where a specific society was situated on a scale of being socially progressive. Culture was reduced to a single external variable, without being integrated into the analysis of other variables. Lane (1989:24), although critical of this approach, argues that its success was largely due to the consistency of some results derived from standardised surveys in several countries. Contemporary developments in contingency theory, although less academic in style, can be seen in the populist work of Peters and Waterman (1982), and Peters (1992). They attempt to identify and prescribe recipes to achieve excellent companies. Unfortunately, some of the companies they awarded the laurels of excellence were seen floundering shortly after publication and public accolade. Despite much enthusiastic entreaty, American prescriptions may be inappropriate, both at home and abroad because they lack a deep rooted sociological understanding of the cultural context in which organisations work.¹³

Contingency theory has been criticised for being too formalistic, and it over emphasises the significance of organisational structures.¹⁴ Although contemporary versions advocate more flexibly structured organisations, they still do not avoid the essential problems with Contingency theory that is based on the premise that organisational success requires the optimal fit of an organisation's structure to its environment. Tayeb (1988:22-4) argues that this

¹¹ In fact one important trend as societies have become increasingly more wealthy, as measured in GNP, is for there to be a decline in the birth rate (Folbre 1994).

¹² See Lawrence and Lorsch (1967); Woodward (1965) and (1970); Hickson et al. (1979).

¹³ Even Peters recognises this (1992:756). He acknowledges the resistance to his ideas from middle managers in the US who would lose their jobs, as well as those working in government organisations.

¹⁴ Tayeb 1988; Lane 1989.

perspective raises several problems. There are inconsistencies in empirical findings and methodological weaknesses; the theory also suffers from an inherent reductionism and "theoretical ambiguity". For example, how does one isolate the organisational characteristics and structures which account for success? Also, it is not clear that managers are always capable of consciously and strategically adapting the structure of their organisation to achieve efficient and effective performance.¹⁵ This emphasis on formal structures neglects the influence of human action and informal relations (Sorge 1994). What is of interest is not necessarily the formal structures in themselves, but rather the way they are understood and interpreted by the people who occupy these spaces in different countries (Lane 1989:25; Hofstede 1980). Through their behaviour and values these people embody cultural differences.

Contingency theorists see an approach from culture as complementary to their own in as far as they suggest that an explanation from culture might explain the varying magnitude of correlation coefficients i.e. of the mathematical value calculated for the relationship between a contingent factor and a structural property of an organisation (Lane 1989:24). Intellectually this approach is rooted in the paradigm that assumes a unitary logic of action under a given set of circumstances. Contingencies in two or more organisations are examined and compared in isolation, without analysing the relationship between other phenomena (Tayeb 1988:23). Cultural approaches make more effort to analyze the relationship between different phenomena in the same context, in an attempt to identify the affect of culture on organisations. The difference between these two approaches reflects the deep run divisions in social science discussed earlier, between universalists and cultural relativists.

Overall, the contribution of these universal theories of comparative employment research has been to argue that it is possible to identify universal pressures or imperatives. These encourage successful organisations or societies, under similar conditions, to adopt analogous practices. Despite the success of many of these theories, in practice they have been found inadequate. Even if organisations or societies experience comparable pressures it cannot be assumed that they will adopt identical strategies to deal with these because national institutions, coalitions of actors and values mediate the change process. In Marxism, and Industrialism the concept of culture tends to be relegated to the periphery because these grand theories want to be universally applicable. The motors of change are universal: class dynamics, technological imperatives, or markets. The issue of gender rarely gets mentioned despite the fact that modern societies are often marked by an increase in women's participation in the paid economy. Approaches that attempt to give greater weight to the role of culture have challenged these

¹⁵ See O'Reilly 1994, chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion about debates on managerial strategy.

universal theories. We will now turn to review some of these theories and their contribution to comparative, cross-national research and the role for gender.

5. Cultural approaches

Approaches giving greater emphasis to the importance of culture have not, however, been able to agree on how the concept of culture should be integrated in their theoretical and empirical framework.¹⁶ Defining culture, as Hill (1973) points out, is a contentious issue. What is culture, and where do we begin to dissect it? Unless the concept is clearly specified, it can become a 'black box' into which all unexplained differences are allocated, willy nilly. Child and Tayeb (1982-3) argue that culture should be conceived as a substantively distinct field, separate from other social areas. Sorge (1982-3), on the other hand, proposes that culture mediates action at every level: the institutions of society are organised according to specific cultural values.

There is a considerable literature on organisational and national cultures that would be impossible to critically summarise in the context of this paper. Therefore, we will examine how key texts have used the concept of culture according to whether they belong to an ideational or institutional perspective; studies that cross these distinctions are also discussed as intermediary approaches.

5.1 The ideational approach

The ideational approach interprets culture as the practices and beliefs, or values of individuals within a given system. Hofstede's "Culture's Consequences" (1980) is one of the best known examples of this approach. Culture, for him, is about the "collective mental programming" shared by a group, a tribe, a minority, or a nation. Aggregate individual personality traits in a particular country is equivalent to a national culture, or mind set (Hofstede 1980a:475). In his seminal work he attempted to operationalize his concept of culture in the context of a survey of employees from 54 different countries.¹⁷ Differences in attitudes to work were measured along four dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism and masculinity-femininity. The results of these surveys indicated that the United States, for example, had the highest individualist ranking, a relatively low power distance

¹⁶ See Lammers and Hickson 1979; Maurice et al. 1982 and 1992; Maurice 1989 and 1990; d'Iribarne 1991.

¹⁷ Hofstede tried to hold constant the influence of corporate culture by taking respondents from the same multinational, later identified as IBM.

score, a higher acceptance of uncertainty, and a higher masculinity score. Countries like Singapore and Hong Kong had a high score on the power distance variable, compared to countries like Finland or Sweden where this was much lower. On the basis of these scores Hofstede attempts to link them to known research to argue that certain types of leadership or management practice will be accepted in some countries and not in others.¹⁸

However, some of the problems with Hofstede's work arise from his reduction of national cultures to aggregated personality traits based on four dimensions. For example, higher masculine traits are considered to exist if respondents agreed with a series of statements like "Big and fast are beautiful" (Hofstede 1980a:480). It is over simplistic to reduce the cultural identity of a society to an aggregate standardised score based on individual responses. Also, within our own societies we know that conflicting identities exist between different sub-cultures and ethnic groups, which is not accounted for in Hofstede's schema. Further, Hofstede's approach allows little room for an analysis of historical change. He states that national cultures do not change very fast, if at all (Hofstede 1980). Finally, Hofstede's claims that these attitudes make certain forms of management style more acceptable are unsystematically drawn from other research rather than being obtained from his own findings.

One of the problems with an ideational approach is the overemphasis given to the attitudes and values of aggregate numbers of individuals. An ideational approach can only explain behaviour after the event. This approach takes little account of how values change over time. This is particularly problematic when studying countries in a process of transition for example the former Eastern bloc or reunification in Germany. Values on their own are not enough to understand different working and organisational practices; values need to be rooted into the social and economic structure of a given society. An approach that gives more importance to the role of institutions is required (Berger and Luckmann 1971:72). Sorge and Warner (1986:41) argue that institutions represent the "typified and habitualised patterns of reciprocal social action". They also argue that an institutional approach is more fruitful for cross-national comparisons because it captures the dialectic between universal economic rationales and the particularism of institutional constraints. In more recent work Sorge (1994) has argued that a combination of ideational and institutional approaches is required, in order to account for psychological as well as societal or institutional factors. But, before we assess this we will now turn to examine the contribution of institutional approaches to cross-national research.

¹⁸ For example, a more authoritarian style of management (i.e. reflected by a high power distance score) is more common in countries like Singapore or even France, but it would be less acceptable in Scandinavian countries.

5.2 Institutional approaches

An institutionalist approach gives culture a more materialist underpinning: value differences are embedded in the social and economic institutions that support the continuation of traditional values and practices. For example, such an approach would argue that the economic success of West Germany is not attributable to individual West Germans having a strong "work ethic", being "disciplined" and hard working. In fact Germans work comparatively fewer hours than many other industrial countries.¹⁹ Instead, an institutional approach emphasises the role of the comprehensive education and vocational training system which has created a highly skilled workforce; this has been complemented by a consultative industrial relations system, and long term financial support from banking institutions and the local state.²⁰ In Japan comparable institutions like MITI, company unions, and consultative practices through quality circles have been seen as a key to Japanese success.²¹ Again the emphasis is on institutions that support industrial organisation, rather than on the attributes of individuals.

The institutional approach is illustrated in the work of Maurice, Sellier and Silvestre (1986). They have argued that we cannot examine separate aspects of a given system without locating it in its specific societal context. They have argued that there is a strong relationship between organisation of work at the micro level of the firm and national institutions at the macro level. Their work examines the relationship between the educational system, the structure of business, and the sphere of industrial relations. They argue that skill attainment, for example, is affected by the relationship between the educational system and the workplace hierarchy. Each dimension has a degree of autonomy but also forms part of an interdependent structure. They argue that,

“... there are common features shared by firms in a particular country though they use different types of technology. ... the explanation of these similarities lies not in the effects of some sort of invisible hand or teleological principle but rather in the systematic structure of social factors influencing both the formation of the actors and the development of the industrial work system, factors that are at once the result of specific social relations and the cause of those relations.” (Maurice et al. 1986: 78-9)

Commonality is attributed to belonging to a particular country, where social relations and the institutions that govern them have, historically, developed symbiotically. Social behaviour takes place within the context of particular institutions in a given society. The behaviour of social actors (groups or individuals) is influenced by these institutions, but it is also modified by the

¹⁹ Sorge 1994; Financial Times 10/5/94.

²⁰ Prais & Wagner 1983; Steedman & Hawkins 1993; Lane 1989 chp3; Sisson 1987; Zysman 1983; Cox 1986; Quack et al. 1995; Vitols 1995.

²¹ Whitehill 1991.

behaviour of these actors. Their approach is widely known as the "societal effect".

They found that German managers possessed a higher degree of technical skill, and were expected to perform a broader range of tasks compared to equivalent managers in France. French organisations also had more levels of management than German firms. They sought to explain these differences in relation to the structure of 1) the educational and vocational training system 2) the nature of business organisation & 3) the differences in the industrial relations structure. Their work is important in linking the micro, firm level and macro, national institutional levels of industrial organisation within a society.

Although Maurice et al. offer a fresh perspective for conducting comparative research, they have been criticised for the functionalist nature of their explanations, although they would deny this (1982:374). Rose (1985) has argued that their approach allows only a limited role for individual action; it also fails to incorporate an analysis of change. Lane (1989:36) questions the nature of causality in the systems they outline: does the syndrome they set out determine the organisation of work, or is it a case of "mutual adaptation" between business organisations and other institutions in society? Maurice et al. argue that by putting the education system at the centre of their analysis they can focus on the relations between skill attainment and the organisation of workplace hierarchy. However, the gendered construction of skill is ignored in their work.²² In seeking to bring down the bastions of Marxist laws of economics, and the work on convergence and technological determinism, they admit that they have given greater weight to the differences they found, which is inherent in their methodological perspective (Maurice et al 1982:263).

A more recent institutional approach has been developed by Whitley (1992a & b) who advocates a Business Systems perspective. This analysis includes the nature of the firm, the way the market is organised, and the authoritative coordination and control systems. He argues that these characteristics are shaped by background social institutions, i.e. kinship trust, loyalty and authority relations, as well as by proximate social institutions including business relations with the state, financial system, education and training system, unions, and other professional organisations. Whitley uses this approach to account for the differences in firm organisation in Asia and Europe.

However, one of the problems with Whitley's approach is that whilst it draws attention to the way institutions are shaped, and how this is linked to the historical development of the society under observation, his analysis leaves little room for change. This is because of his emphasis on the historical legacy

²² See Maurani & Nicole 1989; Walby 1989; Cockburn 1981 as examples of research which show how skill recognition and the use of technology has been gendered in organisations.

of institutions and social relations. We can clearly see the institutions of a particular society, but we have little sense of the people occupying these. The weight of history also makes it difficult to identify the nature of conflict between major social actors, thus generating a rather static model of industrial organisation.

Overall, the strength of institutional approaches to comparative research has been to give a distinct material basis to the nature of cross-national differences in work organisation. These studies have attempted to give more weight to the values and attitudes of actors within an institutional setting; albeit with scant regard for gender or recognition of heterogeneity within nation state societies.²³

5.3 Intermediary approaches

Intermediary approaches that cross the boundaries of the ideational and institutional schools can be seen in particular in the work of Dore (1973) and Gallie (1978). Dore in "British Factory, Japanese Factory" (1973) compares organisational practices and the values of employees at English Electric in the UK and Hitachi in Japan. Dore opposes the argument that Japanese distinctiveness was a product of industrial "backwardness" (1973:375). Instead, he argues that the Japanese system developed from: a) the creation of new institutions to suit their cultural disposition; b) the selective adoption of foreign models; and c) an unconscious evolution and continuity of existing pre-industrial institutions (Dore 1973:376). However, what is more significant to Dore is not the existence of "institutional inertia", but rather why certain choices were consciously made by Japanese industrialists that, accumulatively, have created the Japanese system (1973:401). Dore argues that the disposition to make certain kinds of choices were influenced by the "modified Confucian world-view" that assumed original virtue rather than original sin (1973:401). This predisposed Japanese industrialists to see benevolence as efficient. The ideological context made them more willing to make certain choices rather than others. Second, it shaped their objectives; for example, leadership in Japan required a moral force as well as a purely material one. And third, ideology affected different objectives: the ideological emphasis on honour and respect led them to give greater weight to these factors than was the case for industrialists in other countries.

Essentially Dore's argument for the difference between British and Japanese firms was based on the impact of i) Confucian ideology and ii) the late development of Japanese industrialisation. The choices made by early British industrialists in the mid-nineteenth century were very different to those

²³ See Duncan (1995) for a discussion of the importance of regional differences.

posed to Japanese industrialists in the early half of the twentieth century. Late development meant that late comers benefit, not only from advances in technology, but also from "social technology", for example, education, personnel management techniques and "ideologies" of increased democratisation. Dore argues that egalitarian democratic ideologies that developed in advanced industrialised societies, "can have independent life and force of their own when diffused to societies just beginning industrialisation." (Dore 1973:12). He argues that the need to handle complex technology and organisations, and the need to meet demands for status equality do not create imperatives requiring identical institutional solutions. Instead, he argues, diversity will persist. This is because of a) the varied pre-industrial history; b) the diversity of other imperatives like war and revolution, the ideology of the elite group, the role of state intervention, as well as the social and racial composition of the country; and c) the experience of industrialisation (Dore 1973:419) These factors account for the persistence of differences between Japanese and British firms. Although Dore emphasises the influence of Confucian ideology on management decision making, he also gives equal weight to how history has shaped the parameters of these decisions. Unlike Hofstede he assesses the significance of values and attitudes from a historical and case-study approach. This has the advantage of linking attitudes to the historical evolution of social institutions. Dore, like Gallie (1978), criticises the simplistic determinism of arguments based on technological imperatives and universal patterns of development.

Gallie (1978) is interested in examining contingency theory and Marxist arguments on the deterministic affect of technology on a) the social integration of workers in the capitalist enterprise, b) on the structure of managerial power, and c) on the nature of trade unionism (1978:36). In his study of oil refineries in Britain and France he asks whether the use of advanced technology leads to the integration or alienation of workers. Gallie argues that a comparative approach to these questions can allow him to include "the influences of societal differences in culture and social structure." (1978:37). He is interested not only in identifying the similarities and differences in the structure of work organisation in each country, but also in how the attitudes and aspirations of workers in these plants compare. In this way his work straddles the ideational and institutional approaches found in cross-national employment research.

In terms of social integration Gallie found that French workers were more discontent with their wages and the salary structure than the British workforce. The conflict that arose over 'manning' levels created greater friction in the French plant than in the British one. Although there were disputes over work organisation in Britain, Gallie argues that the relationships between the British management and workers was more 'co-operative' than in France. The French workforce perceived their relationship with management as being more 'exploitative'. The British workers were more content with the system of negotiating with managers, while French workers felt consultations were

superficial, symbolising their exclusion from participation in decision making within the firm. By drawing on large scale survey research Gallie seeks to generalise these findings to the national level (1978:146-8). French workers were not only more discontent with existing power structures but they also had much higher aspirations of what they wanted to achieve in terms of control of the enterprise. Gallie argues that,

“Although market economies involve similar objective conflicts of interest between employers and employed, these contradictions appear to have different implications for the workers' perception of the firm in different societies..... The effects of institutional structure are not, then, mechanical, but are conditional upon certain cultural contexts.” (1978:206)

Gallie attempts to identify the variables that shape workers' aspirations and experiences within given institutional structures. He argues that where the "value of equality has more salience", but where participation is blocked, this creates greater tension between management and workers: "it is the interaction of cultural values and institutional structures that is crucial." (1978:210)

In his explanations for these differences he focuses on the structure of managerial power and the nature of trade unionism in each country. French management was more paternalistic, compared to the 'semi-constitutional' strategy of British management. French managers were more active in reminding the work force of their discretionary powers whereas British managers played down their potential powers. In France the legitimacy of managerial authority was low. French management retained a tighter degree of control than British managers. The organisation of the unions in each country differed significantly. This affected the way union demands were formulated, and the role they saw for themselves in the firm and society in general. In France, union membership was comparatively low and fragmented. The French unions were highly politicised, so that their demands were linked to a broader long term strategy to bring about societal change and mobilise the workforce to this goal. In Britain union density was much higher. This gave them a greater potential to coerce management. Gallie argues that they had a more representative role: the unions negotiated on a narrower range of issues that emerged from shop floor grievances. Further, Gallie argues that there was little evidence that union structures, both within the plants and at the national level, would converge; instead he argues that their distinctiveness would persist.

In conclusion he argues that technology per se has negligible influence on the integration of workers in a capitalist enterprise. He argues that social interaction at the work place is determined by the patterns of culture and social structure within a given society (1978:295 and 318). These include managerial ideology, the structure of power in social institutions, and the 'ideology and mode of action of the trade union movement'. Gallie draws on comparative

empirical evidence to counter the universalist thesis of technological determinism in workplace organisation. His approach clearly seeks to show the relationship between societal structures and institutions and the attitudes of the people who populate these spaces in relation to their working environment. In a later book he attempts to identify the historical factors that have shaped these institutions in each society (Gallie 1983).

Cross-national studies which take more account of variation in work organisation have given differing weight to the role of individual and social values as well as institutional effects. In many ways this attempts to overcome the overtly structuralist perspective of universal approaches. However, we have seen that a purely ideational approach fails to fully recognise social heterogeneity within a single society. It tends towards a post-hoc account for national differences without accounting for how these differences came about. An institutional approach, on the other hand, is more successful at identifying the material and historical basis for particular societal characteristics. Nevertheless, the tendency to emphasise historical origins can create a rather static conception of social arrangements, with little account given to the role of actors in shaping and interpreting these. The intermediate approaches are more successful in this respect. They manage to identify both the historical constraints and perceptions of contemporary actors in their accounts for societal differences. They also recognise how conflict and change emerge through changing alliances of elites and organised labour. Even so, any consideration of gender is sadly lacking.

6. Gender relations in comparative perspective

Comparative research which has taken more interest in exploring the nature of gender relations in different countries has largely been conducted, usually by female researchers, around issues related to women's employment or studies concerned with the welfare state and the family.²⁴ The various conceptual frameworks generated by these studies raise similar issues, to those discussed earlier, concerning divergent and convergent patterns of development. It will be argued here that a particularly useful theoretical approach has been developed by Connell (1987) and empirically applied and adapted by other researchers. These studies can, potentially, allow us to incorporate an analysis of gender that includes the role of actors within the institutions of the state, the sphere of economic production and social reproduction. Such an approach can identify common developments across societies, but at the same time retains a holistic analysis that sees how these global trends are implemented within nation state

²⁴ Where men's employment is the focus of study, gender is not seen to be relevant, although a notable exception to this is the excellent work of Cockburn (1983).

societies. In this section we will first examine studies related to the welfare state, women and employment before moving on to the gender order approach of Connell.

6.1 Gender and the welfare state

The work of Esping-Anderson (1990) and his critics have generated considerable debate about cross-national classifications of welfare states and their effects. His typology of liberal, conservative, social-democratic, and subsequently rudimentary welfare states was based on the concept of 'de-commodification'.

“De-commodification occurs when a service is rendered as a matter of right, and when a person can maintain a livelihood without reliance on the market.” (Esping-Anderson 1990:21-2)

This means the extent to which the state intervenes in the class system to reduce individual's dependence created by the system of wage labour. He argues that these 'unique configurations' refute both Marxist and Modernisation theses on convergence. They also have a differential effect on the position of women in the labour market, and will in the future potentially create 'new axes of social conflict.'²⁵

His approach has been criticised by Lewis (1992) for being gender blind, in ignoring the importance of unpaid domestic labour, and for focusing purely on the cash-nexus. He also ignores how women's dependence on men can be transferred to dependence on the state. Duncan (1995:267) argues that

“[The] theoretical core is firmly rooted in capital-labour divisions in a capitalist system, based around the relationship of (male, standard) workers to markets as modified by the welfare state.”

Despite revisions to Esping-Anderson's original model, by other writers, a conceptualisation of gender, which means more than talking about women, remains an optional add-on extra. Further, the categorisations have been criticised for becoming purely descriptive and the model is less able 'to deal with variations in gender inequality than might at first appear.' (Duncan 1995)²⁶

²⁵ For example he argues that as a result of pressures for wage moderation in Sweden 'one might easily imagine a war between (largely) male workers in the private sector and (largely) female workers in the welfare state.'(p.227). For Germany he envisages conflicts between insiders (job-holders) and outsiders (the jobless and inactive), and in the US 'class differences will crystallise more sharply within the various minority groups. As some women become yuppies and some Blacks become bourgeois, the women and Blacks left behind will experience much more keenly the phenomenon of relative deprivation.' (p.228-9).

²⁶ The reader is referred to Duncan (1995) where these debates and critiques have been well summarised.

Alternative categorisations have been advocated by Lewis (1992 and 1993) who distinguishes between strong, moderate and weak breadwinner states. The extent to which these categorisations provide a theoretically informed account and explanation for why variously modified forms of breadwinner states exist has been questioned by Duncan (1995:268). He argues that "Gender inequality is more than just simply the result of state policies towards women in families and paid work." Nevertheless, these debates highlight the differential effects of state welfare policies and variations in women's access to the labour market. They are important in showing how the supply of labour, in particular women's labour, is structured by these policies; an aspect which has often been neglected by studies which have concentrated solely on the economic sphere of production.

6.2 Women and Employment

There is an enormous literature on women's employment which has been applied to comparative research. This ranges from concepts of patriarchy to debates in Human Capital and segmented labour market theory. Depending on the perspective adopted, cross-national differences have been explained in one of three ways: in terms of patriarchal structures, or, alternatively the characteristics and preferences of female labour supply, or the incentives and disincentives created by a nationally specific employment system. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

An approach emphasising patriarchal systems of employment can be seen in the work of Walby who has sought to develop her earlier conception of patriarchy and apply it to comparative research (1990 & 1994). She advocates the conceptualisation of patriarchy in terms of six structures: paid work, the household, the state, male violence, sexuality, and culture. She argues that in the last century there has been a move from private to public forms of patriarchy, at least in the UK. In comparative research she further tries to differentiate between the degree and form of public or private patriarchy that can be observed in each of these six structures.

One of the advantages, and in some ways disadvantages, of Walby's approach is that she sets out to address the issue of comparative research with a preconceived theoretical concept about gender inequality, largely developed from earlier studies in the UK. However, what initially appears to be a set of sleek conceptual categories quickly falls into confusion when she attempts to apply it to comparative research issues and cross-national data (Walby 1994). What we find, like the air we breathe, is that patriarchy is all around us - to a greater or lesser degree, in a stronger or weaker form. Her approach could benefit from the use of a dialectical method of analysis as advocated by Sorge (1994). Empirical indicators that could be used to measure these concepts only

highlight that they are open to a plethora of contradictory interpretations once we try to examine these across countries; part-time work is a particularly good case in point (Walby 1994:1346-7).

The reason Walby's approach generates more confusion than clarity is, first, because the aspects she calls structures are not really structures at all: paid employment, the household and the state are sites of action which take different structural forms over time and space; moreover, male violence and sexuality are processes that occur at these particular sites. A further problem is that the relationship between these 'structures' is not systematically specified: sometimes they coincide with each other, to a greater or lesser extent, and sometimes they are not relevant at all, but we have no consistent explanation for why this variation occurs, other than that they are a product of patriarchal relations. Finally, culture becomes little more than an add-on extra because the relationship between culture and other institutions, values and practices is not fully and systematically specified. This conceptualisation when applied to cross-national research suffers from many of the same problems that were observed in critiques of contingency theory.

Second, it is claimed that these 'structures' are held together by the concepts of public and private patriarchy. However, it is not clear if the public-private dimension represents polar opposites or a continuum. If they are polar opposites then we are faced with the problem of deciding where the public ends and where the private starts.²⁷ If it is a continuum model we are then left asking what is the nature of the categories between the two poles. A further problem with her approach is a neglect of individuals and institutions. She argues that patriarchy refers:

“to a system of social relations rather than individuals, since it is presumed that it is at the level of a social system that gender relations may be explained, not that of individual men, nor that of discrete social institutions” Walby (1986: 51)

This systemic approach ignores individuals. Both men and women on a daily basis interact and create around them the very institutions that shape the particular system that Walby is interested in studying. Duncan (1995) points out that her approach underestimates women's capacity to act. Although in later work she argues that women's political activity is essential, there is little systematic analysis of women's behaviour and attitudes that does not include

²⁷ The case of single parents on income support in the UK is a particularly good example of the problems such categorisation creates. The state directly intervenes in the private sphere, through the Child Support Agency, to take resources from men (the fathers), directly out of their wages, and redistribute these to women (the mothers of their children), with the aim of moving these women off the publicly funded income support system. Although Walby claims that in the last century the UK has moved from a system of private to public patriarchy, this case suggests that the British state is trying to reverse this trend. It also illustrates that the distinction between the public and the private is empirically less easy to sustain.

strikes or open political action. A further problem with her approach is a neglect of individuals and institutions. She argues that patriarchy refers:

"to a system of social relations rather than individuals, since it is presumed that it is at the level of a social system that gender relations may be explained, not that of individual men, nor that of discrete social institutions." (1986: p. 51)

This systemic approach ignores individuals. Both men and women on a daily basis interact and create around them the very institutions that shape the particular system that Walby is interested in studying (Granovetter, 1985). Duncan (1995) points out that her approach underestimates women's capacity to act. Although in later work she argues that women's political activity is essential, there is little systematic analysis of women's behaviour and attitudes that does not include strikes or open political action. Finally, an underlying assumption of this approach is based on a universal perspective of development, as discussed in earlier comparative studies in this article.

From a contrasting perspective neo-classical economists in the form of Human Capital theory have also sought to provide a universal model to account for differences in women's labour market participation and the domestic division of labour. Unlike the patriarchal emphasis on structures they give greater importance to individual supply side decisions. They argue that when women receive lower rates of pay compared to men, and where women are less likely to have equivalent investments in human capital (understood in terms of qualifications, training and continuous patterns of labour market participation) then they are more likely than men to take greater responsibility for unpaid domestic labour. This theory has been well criticised both in terms of its overemphasis on a model of 'rational economic man' as well as its claims that such a division of labour is 'efficient'²⁸.

Hakim (1991), also emphasising supply side factors, has claimed that differences in female work patterns can be explained in terms of an individual's commitment to work.

²⁸ See Folbre (1994), Rubery et al. (1996) and Humphries and Rubery (1995) for more detailed critiques of this approach.

"The degree and pattern of job segregation in any country are historically determined, but the persistence of job segregation *from now on* should be regarded as a reflection of women's own preferences and choices" (Hakim 1991:114-5)(my italics)²⁹

She suggests differentiating between women with a full-time career orientation and those who prefer a homemaker role. She argues that up until now social scientists have tended to treat women as 'grateful slaves' subject to structural constraints, whereas she says that they should be seen as 'self-made women', in the sense that they choose freely between the career or homemaker track. For her, part-time work can be seen as 'a proxy indicator to differentiate the two groups' (Hakim 1991:114).

In fact, the issue of part-time work particularly highlights how this form of employment means different things in a given employment system.³⁰ Rubery and Fagan (1995:226) have criticised the supply orientated approach of Hakim. They argue that the effects of the societal employment system provide a better explanation for the cross-national differences in women's take up of part-time work and in forms of occupational segregation. They advocate a more holistic approach when analysing employment systems. Such an analysis would need to include the impact of: industrial organisation, labour market conditions, consumption patterns, social attitudes, training systems and career paths, working-time arrangements and systems of pay determination. Rubery (1988:253) has argued that applying a societal perspective to women's employment

'means that we need to understand the way in which the system of industrial, labour market and family organisation interrelate and the role of the society's political and social values in maintaining these relationships before we could expect to make sense of the differences between countries in the position of women.'

Rubery (1993) has forcefully argued how the characteristics of a national production regime are influenced by the form and structure of the sphere of social reproduction.³¹ It is this broader definition of an employment system which can provide a particularly useful bridge with the studies discussed in the earlier parts of this article, but one which maintains a consistent focus on the significance of gender in employment relations in their broadest sense. In the final section we will now look at the theoretical perspective provided by the gender order approach which complements that of the employment systems perspective discussed here.

²⁹ To suggest that from 1991 onwards women have suddenly being able to exercise more choice than the past hundred years seems a little fallacious.

³⁰ Büchtemann and Quack 1990; Daune-Richard 1995; O'Reilly 1995; Fagan et al. 1995; O'Reilly and Fagan forthcoming.

³¹ See also Humphries and Rubery (1984) on the relative autonomy of the social reproduction.

6.3 The gender order

The gender order approach to comparative research integrates both a core recognition of gender relations in different social spheres and can be used to address the importance of varying cultural and cross-national dimensions. In this section we will concentrate on the work of Connell and empirical application and adaptation of his ideas.³²

Connell (1987) in his book 'Gender and Power' attempts to develop a framework which avoids structural categoricism found in early accounts of gender relations, where 'all women' are swept into a distinct category from 'all men'. His perspective attempts to develop a dynamic approach to understanding gender relations both across societies and over time. He seeks to show how actors are both affected by the structural relations in which they live, whilst at the same time they have a capacity in which to shape and change these relations.

He argues that normative gender relations are produced through the inter-relationship of the 'gender order' and different 'gender regimes'. By 'gender order' Connell refers to the way power relations, and the definitions of femininity and masculinity, have been historically developed in society in general. The concept of a gender order refers to the relationship between i) the division of labour, ii) power expressed in the context of authority associated with masculinity, and iii) cathexis, which refers to emotionally charged, sexual relations. Each of these constituent structures can have independent effects and may even conflict with each other. However, they provide a form of unity in which gender relations are realised. By 'gender regimes' he refers to the way these power relations and identities are shaped in specific institutions for example through forms of state regulation, through workplace practices, as well as within the family and on the street, i.e. through peer group encounters. These concepts attempt to account for the relationship in the sphere of state social policy and labour demands, as well as in the emotional relationships experienced by individuals. By pointing out that there is not necessarily a functionalist fit between these spheres, he can identify the arena through which change comes about. It can also allow us to compare the gender order in different societies.

An empirical cross-national application of these ideas can be seen in the work of Lane (1993) who compares gender regimes at the state level for Britain, Germany and France, and she argues that

“..a focus on the construction of gender categories at the highest level (i.e. the state) often yields fruitful insights about cross-national variation, particularly if it is combined

³² Duncan (1995:270-271) has shown that similar debates have been developing in Scandinavia, but unfortunately much of this work remains in Swedish.

with an historically informed study of political actors and institutions. Such an approach thus links an institutionalist perspective, emphasising national diversity, with a universalist focus on a division of labour in which masculinity is associated with power.”(Lane 1993:276)

Further applications and adaptations of his work have been conducted by Pfau-Effinger (1993 and 1994) for Finland and West Germany,³³ by O'Reilly (1994) for Britain and France, by O'Reilly (1995) for East and West Germany,³⁴ by Daune-Richard (1995) for France, Sweden and the UK and by Einhorn (1993) for the former communist bloc. Other empirical historical work which can be used to support the framework outlined by Connell can be found in the comparison of industrialisation and women's employment in Britain and France by Tilly and Scott (1987). What these studies clearly show is that the process of industrialisation and the integration and regulation of women's entry into the economy of paid work took different paths. These early arrangements have had a long-term influence on the contemporary position of women in these societies in relation to the availability of full and part-time employment, the basis of entitlement to social welfare and childcare provision. The arrangements which have specified gender relations in these societies could be seen as a form of 'gender compromise' in the sense that they have regulated coalitions of interests supporting, or opposing, a more equal treatment of men and women in society at particular historical periods. This argument is supported by the work of Jenson (1991) comparing Sweden and France, according to Daune-Richard (1995: 60) who says:

“.. it was the strong commitment of women to political life (parties and trade unions) that enabled the Swedish women to widen the scope of thinking on equality to women on the one hand and to the private world of the family on the other (Jenson 1991); this is the reason for the equal entitlement of both sexes to parental leave, and for the development of task sharing within the family and of child care facilities. Jenson (1991) sees in this a difference from France where, in the absence of any real link between the feminist movement and political power (and even the trade unions), demand for equality between the sexes have remained confined to the world of production, where labor legislation has traditionally been relatively neutral and little influenced by the great political debates.”

Women's interests have been mobilised and expressed in the public arena through various channels. For example, Norway is the only country where women have their own party. In Britain the extent of radicalism found in the first wave of feminism amongst the suffragettes was exceptional, compared to the rest of European and North America. In continental Europe women's demands have tended to be funnelled, and peripheralised, through radical parties demands for the universal 'Rights of Man'. The type of gender compromises

³³ Pfau-Effinger prefers to refer to these differences in terms of a gender contract and gender arrangements.

³⁴ In this work I have suggested that such a framework could be called a gendered societal approach.

arrived at can be related to the nature of coalitions built between male and female interest groups. Folbre (1994:81) argues that,

“Rather than thinking in terms of a transition from the 'traditional' to the 'modern', or some evolution of distinct modes of production, such as capitalism and patriarchy, we need to focus on the ways in which structures of constraint stabilize and destabilize each other. ... we need to ask how given groups interact in processes of political change and economic growth. Sets of assets, rules, norms, and preferences that enforce membership in given groups define the context for both market exchange and state planning. They set the stage for contest among competing distributional coalitions.”

It is the nature of these coalitions which distribute resources allowing for a greater or lesser degree of equality between men and women that shape the characteristics of the gender compromise. The interesting question for the future, after the extinguished heat of the second wave of feminism, is what shape and impact these new coalitions will have.

7. Conclusions

This article has sought to critically outline a range of theoretical approaches to cross-national employment research. We have seen how universal and culturalist studies vary significantly in their treatment of differences and similarities between contemporary societies. Universalists tend to ignore the concept of culture, or at best acknowledge it as a marginal phenomenon or additional variable. Culturalists, on the other hand, have sought to integrate the concept of culture into their analysis at a socio-economic and institutional level as well as at the psychological level of the individual. The emphasis on similarities between countries tends to lead to a universalist approach, whilst the emphasis on difference is often supported by a more culturalist perspective. However, as we have seen from this review, whilst each perspective can shed light on a particular feature of economic organisation, they also have their shortcomings, both in terms of accounting for change and the co-existence of similarity and diversity. Further more, these approaches, for the most part, are blind to the affects and effects of gender on industrial organisation and employment practices.

Cross-national studies which have given more weight to gender concerns have tended to be concentrated in debates on the welfare state or patterns of women's employment. One of the problems with many of these studies has been that either gender becomes an optional variable in the cross-national comparison, or where there have been attempts to make it more central, the meaning of cross-national differences becomes blurred and confused. What is

clearly required is an approach which shows how gender relations shape observable differences in national regimes of economic production and social reproduction and how these vary between countries. It has been argued here that the employment systems approach coupled with the gender order perspective can provide a useful framework of analysis. This enables us to identify how comparable pressures for change have generated specific interest coalitions; these coalitions resolve conflicts by agreeing on a particular gender compromise.

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