The Comparative Method and Poststructural Structuralism—New Perspectives for Migration Studies

NANCY L. GREEN

"I WAS CONSTANTLY referring my new world to the old for comparison, and the old to the new for elucidation. I became a student and philosopher by force of circumstances."[1] Mary Antin, a young Russian Jewish girl who arrived in Boston at the turn of the century and became a successful writer, was acutely conscious of the comparative nature of the migration experience. The immigrant represents the Other in the nation-state, but the new land is the referential Other for the newly arrived. The migrant embodies an implicit comparison between past and present, between one world and another, between two languages, and two sets of cultural norms. The immigrant's observations fall somewhere between the tourist's hasty generalizations and the social scientist's constructed comparisons.

Yet for migrants and social scientists alike, the comparative nature of observation is more often implicit than explicit. Historians, for example, usually ignore the temporal comparison implicit in most research. This essay examines the possibilities for explicit comparative research projects and their impact on migration studies.

First, this study argues for the importance of comparison as a way of going beyond national categories. Comparisons necessarily imply a more general level of analysis in interpreting migration patterns. Yet while insisting on the importance of the comparative method, I will also emphasize the ways in which comparisons are constructed. Two examples will be studied. The first involves the use of national comparisons by looking at how French and American historiographies of migration have compared themselves to each other. The second concerns national group comparisons, and the different ways of comparing immigrant groups to each other. These examples illustrate the importance of recognizing the intellectual underpinnings of the "comparative imperative."[2] The essay then concludes with some considerations on the usefulness of a "poststructural structuralism." Comparisons can help us understand both the structural constraints and individual cultural choices framing the migration experience.

The Comparative Method

Historians, by our nature or by the nature of our archival research, have been more reticent than other social scientists to move from the particular to the general. The minutiae of archival research, the barriers of geographically (most often nationally) defined fields, the multitude of languages necessary, and the reign of the monograph are perhaps some of the material causes for this reticence.

Three factors may have inhibited more comparative migration studies in particular: the focus on assimilation, community studies, and a fundamental search for difference rather than similarity. To study assimilation or acculturation is in fact to study a hidden comparison, that of immigrant groups to the nation-state. Community studies, while questioning an assimilationist model, have importantly told the immigrants' story "from below" and have provided a necessary corrective to the homogenizing tendency of the nation-state.[3] Nevertheless, they too have perhaps inherently prevented certain types of comparative questions. Ultimately, as necessary and important as they have been, community studies (by which most of us began work in the field) implicitly if not explicitly emphasize the specific over the general by both the subject (an immigrant group) and the level of analysis (monograph). As Rudolph Vecoli has stated:

> [s]ingle group studies have the merit of permitting the analysis of the migrant experience in depth, but they are open to the criticism that they neglect the common aspects of that experience which transcend ethnic differences.[4]

By underlining the importance of the values, customs and skills imported by the immigrants, we have emphasized culture over structure. But in this poststructural world, must all notions of structure be eliminated?

There have been several specific if sporadic calls to use the comparative method in general in French, English, and American historiography since the turn of the century. These appeals to comparison have argued for its use on several grounds: to make history more of a social science, to rise above nationalism, to seek causes and origins of historical phenomena, and to clarify the specificity or similarity of historical processes.

In 1903, François Simiand issued one of the first calls for a comparative method in order to render the historical method more "scientific." In his desire to combat the orthodox, so-called objectivist historians of

the nineteenth century who claimed to reproduce a simple representation of the past, Simiand argued that comparisons allow that classification which is the stuff of which social science is made. As Henri Sée later explained it, more "scientific" methods were necessary to move history from a descriptive practice to an explanatory one. William Sewell continued this line of argument in 1967: "The comparative method is an adaptation of experimental logic to inquiries where a true experiment is impossible."[5]

In addition to rendering the historical profession more "scientific," early calls for comparison stressed its importance in order to avoid the nationalism inherent in nation-based historical practices. Both World Wars concretely reinforced this line of reasoning. At the first International Historical Conference after World War I, in 1923, Henri Pirenne gave an impassioned plea for a comparative, scientific method. This was necessary, he argued, in order to rid historians, and hopefully the world system, of the pitfalls of national prejudice inherited from nineteenth-century romanticism. Following World War II, Geoffrey Barraclouch issued a similar call for comparison. After the dust had settled in the battlefields, he wrote, historians had been able to measure the lacunae in their nation-bound knowledge. He pleaded fervently for a less ethnocentric history in which comparisons, among other methods, would play an important role. When the journal *Comparative Studies in Society and History* was founded in 1958, a telling phrase by Lord Acton served as epigraph and justification for the new approach: "The process of Civilization depends on transcending Nationality."[6]

However, there are two other purposes for comparison, as Marc Bloch argues in his oft-cited article of 1928. Less defensive and more programmatic with regard to the use of comparison, Bloch points out that comparisons can help us understand the causes and origins of specific phenomena. (In his case, he found, somewhat to his surprise, the Germanic origins of certain French feudal practices). And, more importantly for our purposes, he argues that comparisons permit an analysis of what is specific and what is general in all phenomena.[7]

This last issue can be of particular interest to migration historians. What is specific and what is general in the migration phenomenon? In what ways have Jews and Italians had similar or different experiences in the United States? How does the experience of Poles in Pennsylvania compare with that of Poles in the north of France? This essay argues that we cannot understand that which is individual and specific without understanding that which is structural and vice-versa. As one sociologist

put it, "the comparative approach yields contradictory processes of unification and diversification."[8] Through a comparative method (or, as we will see, comparative methods), we can explore the universalism inherent in certain processes while understanding the diversity of both their representations and realities.

Yet to compare is not enough. While two cases are better than one, we also need to be aware of how comparisons are constructed. As Simiand himself wrote, "In any science, there is no statement which is not already a choice, there is no observation which does not presuppose some idea."[9] There is also no comparison which is completely neutral. By the level of generalization chosen, the variables chosen, the method of agreement or difference used, the accent is placed on diversity or unity. The way in which the question is asked implies part of the response.

Take "French Jews" for example. The simple category or subject may seem neutral, but much depends on the comparison. French Jews may be studied implicitly or explicitly in comparison with: French Catholics or Protestants; Italians or Poles in France; or with American Jews. In each case, the comparative perspective implies a different query, regarding religion, ethnicity, or nationality. The subject is almost but a pretext for very different questions: the place of religion in the nation-state; the importance of ethnicity for acculturation; the impact of the Diaspora on the Jews. In the first two cases, French Jews are compared to their compatriots in France; their "Frenchness" is essentially being scrutinized. However, in the third case, the Diasporic perspective highlights the differences among Jews around the world; the French Jews' Frenchness becomes a given.

The comparative project thus implies a triple choice: that of subject, that of unit, and that of the pertinent level of analysis. While the choice of subject is often explained, the unit and level rarely are. Yet the level of analysis is both subjective and crucial. As Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune have written, "Social phenomena do not have a property of 'being comparable' or 'not comparable.' 'Comparability' depends upon the level of generality of the language that is applied to express observations."[10] For Lévi-Strauss, the "significant distance" ("l'écart significatif") between units is constructed in "function of the type of research envisaged."[11] The logic of the comparison is thus constructed with the level of analysis chosen. Levels of comparability depend upon the perspective of the observer.[12]

Furthermore, the choice of unit is closely tied to the level of analysis. Since the advent of the nation-state, the most common unit of compari-

son has been that of a country. Although Marc Bloch, the medievalist, argued for more imaginative regional comparisons, and William Sewell, in his important gloss on Bloch, suggested that units do not even have to be geographic, the nation-state has remained the most visible unit of comparison for the last century.[13]

From the micro to the macro level, nation-states have also been the building blocks of migration studies. Political scientists, sociologists and economists (more than historians) have compared national policies on immigration and integration. Immigrant groups have also, for the most part, been defined by their national origin, be they Lithuanian or Galician Jews, Venetians or Neopolitans. Community studies of the last twenty years have helped consecrate the terms and identities of "Jews," "Italians," "Poles," etc. Their epistemological presuppositions, however, have perhaps rendered comparison more difficult by stressing each group's specificity.

Yet comparisons can better help us test our conclusions based on single case studies. They take us beyond the bounds of the sometimes tautological community study; they can help us evaluate the part of the individual, the group, and structure in the causal phenomena of migration; and comparisons can help us understand that which is specific and that which is general in the migration experience.

In the rest of this essay, two types of comparisons for migration studies are suggested, each of which go beyond the nation-state framework in a different way. First, this study will compare two national historiographies of immigration and more particularly the ways in which comparisons have been used by them. By comparing the French and American historiographies' use of each other, we can understand some of the problems of the ways in which comparisons are constructed. Secondly, the essay will show how comparing different immigrants within the nation-state can provide a middle-level comparison of groups that may be more fruitful than nation-state comparisons. By comparing immigrant groups to each other in their cities of settlement, for example, we can "deconstruct" the notion of the nation-state for migration studies and focus on a more pertinent, intermediary—"mezzo"—level of analysis.[14]

In each case, comparison is salutary. It takes the perspective to a more general level of analysis and provides what social science is supposed to provide: wider categories of analysis for the understanding of human society. However, as will also become clear, the choice of the comparison implies certain presuppositions. Migration studies can in turn illustrate the possibilities and limits of the comparative method.

Comparative Historiography: The Migration Story in France and the United States

We can use the nation-state itself to transcend its meaning via comparison. By comparing nation-states with regard to migration patterns and policies, we can (and political scientists and sociologists have) construct larger generalizations about migration processes.[15] But at the same time we must recognize two elements that necessarily structure such comparisons. The first may be tautological. Nation-state comparisons often only tell us what we already know: that the difference lies in the difference between the nation-states themselves. Second, we can ask how each nation compares itself to another. Thus, while arguing for the merits of comparison, I would also like to examine some of the limits of that comparison, by comparing French and American attitudes toward each others' historiography on the migration question.

Why a Franco-American comparison? The answer lies not only in my own intellectual itinerary (an American currently living in Paris and teaching in a French university) nor in intellectual fashions (in France, at least, comparisons with the United States about everything from jeans to missiles are legion) but in a historical fact. Both countries have been major countries of immigration over the last century. That they have dealt with that fact, that history, and that memory in very different ways is at the crux of the comparative problem.

If we look at an overview of French and American immigration history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we can situate that history within a global history of industrialization. Both countries were major immigration countries that relied on immigrants for labor recruitment and population increase. Yet at the same time, both countries had to deal with contradictory rhetoric that distinguished between "good" and "bad" immigrants and which led to a notion of triage.

The major historical differences in the immigration histories of France and the United States are two: (1) timing, and (2) the immigrant groups who came to their "shores." While the United States cut off immigration in the early 1920s, using nationality criteria as a logical outcome of growing sentiment for triage, France maintained an open-door policy until the Depression, when growing xenophobia even led to expulsions.[16]

Yet while we can look at this history comparatively (and much more work needs to be done in this respect), the historiographic differences are perhaps even more interesting. Why is it that if both countries have been major countries of immigration, they have represented their immi-

gration history so differently? Ironically, the United States, which cut off immigration earlier, has maintained a strong open door image, while France, more generous into the inter-war period, has subsequently largely ignored that portion of its history.

Furthermore, the way in which immigration history is perceived in both countries has had an implicit if not explicit comparative component to it. In comparing how they have compared themselves to each other, two facts stand out. American historiography has ignored French migration history while French historiography has often referred to the American model in order to understand its own immigration history.

The American reticence towards comparison is not the province of migration studies alone. One historian characterized the isolationist nature in the writing of American history as the "Monroe Doctrine of American historiography."[17] Comparisons have been rejected all the more to underline the exceptional character of the American destiny. Indeed, the history of immigration has been used to reinforce if not found the notion of American exceptionalism (itself a comparative concept). Only occasionally have other models—Canadian, Argentine—been examined.[18] But by and large the history and memory of immigration has served to define and construct American identity. The refusal of comparison reinforces its specificity.

In France, on the other hand, the "discovery" of immigrants (via the "immigrant problem" coming to the fore in the 1970s) has taken place within an at times explicit reference to the American model.[19] One of the first articles in this regard was by Dominique Schnapper, comparing Italians in France and the United States.[20] Her title sets up the Tocquevillian dichotomy: "*Centralisme et fédéralisme culturels*" or American cultural pluralism versus French cultural jacobinism. In other words, the true melting pot occurred in France.

Yet French writings on the subject have gone through two periods, corresponding to shifts in the more general politics of immigration. A first period emphasized the multiethnic nature of French society. Pro-immigrant and second generation groups, sociologists and historians firmly defended the "*droit à la différence*." The American example of cultural pluralism was often cited as a model for minority interaction with the nation-state. More recently, however, there has been a retrenchment with regard to the "right to be different" argument. And this has led to a reevaluation of American cultural pluralism in a new, and menacing, light.[21]

French historians in the last ten years have sought to reclaim the

history of immigration to France. Gérard Noiriel made a deserved splash with his *Le Creuset français*, followed closely by Yves Lequin et al. *Le Mosaïque France*.[22] These works sought not only to re-equilibrate the history of France but to implicitly if not explicitly combat the exclusionism of the far right with an appeal to a revised memory about immigration. However, especially for Noiriel and others working on immigration, the implicit and often explicit historiographic reference was that of American history.

But which American model? From the Chicago School of the 1920s to the fileo-pietistic histories of immigrant groups to Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted* (1951) and John Higham's *Strangers in the Land* (1955) to the new social history of the 1970s, the immigration story itself has evolved. As we know, after the years of consensus in the 1950s and the years of contestation in the 1960s, ethnic studies took off in the 1970s.[23] At the same time the research was reoriented. From the difficulties and xenophobia of the immigrant experience studied by Handlin and Higham, a new emphasis evolved stressing the immigrants' own agency, especially via their community and kinship structures. Pessimism gave way to (sometimes unbridled) optimism.

What is interesting is the choice of the socio-historical products imported by French historians and sociologists. The American model referred to in France has been, logically, the new social history, but with a twist. Having become interested in American immigration history during our own "roots revival," many French academics took this model as a symbol of all American immigration history and memory. Thus American periods of anglo-conformity and assimilation have been absent in the French representation of American immigration history.

Furthermore, this use of an American model coincided with a growing French interest in the Chicago School of sociology. The Chicago School has become the obligatory reference for French sociologists and historians (to most Americans' surprise).[24] Louis Wirth has replaced Al Capone as the French academic's symbol of the Windy City, and a direct line of continuity from the 1920s to the 1970s has been drawn with regard to American historiography and memory of migration. The years of consensus, when immigrants were invisible, or the years of pessimism, when the portrayal of the American model was far from rosy, have been ignored along with the fact that immigration historians in the United States have been far from sanguine about the state of their specialty within American history as a whole.[25] Yet by taking American cultural pluralism for granted, there has been little understanding, as

Olivier Zunz has pointed out, of how Horace Kallen's formulation of the term in the interwar period only became popular when it was rediscovered in the 1970s.[26]

During a second period, however, as calls for multiculturalism have receded in France (in part due to specific political factors such as the debate over a reform in the nationality law), the French view of American cultural pluralism has changed as well. French use of the term melting pot illustrates this shift.

Admittedly, the notion of the melting pot has had a complex history in the United States itself. As Philip Gleason has stressed, it contained a theoretical ambiguity from the beginning.[27] I would suggest that there have been at least five different meanings to the term. (1) In its most basic, popular usage, the term is often simply used as a substitute for the history of immigration to the United States: a definition of a country of immigration. This, curiously enough, emphasizes diversity rather than the homogeneity that the etymological root of the term actually implies. (2) Second, the term symbolizes a process of homogenization. But there are both positive and negative assessments of that process. (3) In the initial, Zangwillian vision, the transformation of immigrants into Americans is seen as positive, both for the country and for the immigrants. (4) But the Kallenian critique (re-emphasized since the 1970s) challenges the value of melting on behalf of the immigrants;[28] whereas (5) the conservative critique (from Henry Ford to Henry Fairchild's *The Melting Pot Mistake*[29]) disputes the melting pot's virtue for the country.

But again what is interesting is to see which references are imported to France in the search for a new (comparative) history of immigration. At first, the most popular meaning of the term—that of a country of immigrants—was used. Gérard Noiriel told me when his book was published that he had chosen the title "creuset" as an obvious reference to the American notion of melting pot (but avoiding the Anglicism). Yves Lequin said that he also would have liked to use the term, but it was already taken.

The "melting pot" has in fact become such a frequent reference in French that it has lost its quotation marks (but added a hyphen, "le melting-pot"). Yet the use of the term has ultimately become as variable in French as its multiple meanings in English. During the (short) period of French interest in multiculturalism, it became the simple symbol of an immigrant society or a shorthand for cultural pluralism.[30]

However, lately, the American reference has been redefined again. As the "right to be different" has given way to strong integrationist senti-

ment (on the part of immigrants and their defenders), the American melting pot has been described as a "juxtaposition of communities" and ethnic groups which are "cultural ghettos" barricaded against each other in a "soft form of apartheid."[31] The terms ethnicity and community have similarly come under attack as reifications, like lobbies, which are foreign to the French nation's notion of individual rights.[32] American immigration history has thus been used first to prove that France is a country of immigration, and then to represent a frightening image of tribal ghettos in battle with each other. In its ultimate formulation, however, the etymological meaning of melting has been reclaimed as the truly French model of immigration.[33]

The migration of concepts merits a study of its own.[34] Concepts and words are imported, criticized, and rejected from one country to another depending on the period. Popular terms and academic references can be introduced to one country totally out of synchronization with their use in their country of origin. I would suggest two explanations for the transfer of ideas. First, the travelling across national boundaries of terms is usually accompanied by a selective use of the complex and changing definitions imbedded in the original concepts. Second, the partial reading that occurs is clearly a function of the needs of the country of arrival.

To compare itself to the American case has had several functions in French historiography. First, it served to insist on a (similar) tradition and history of immigration in France. Second, the comparison became a reproach in order to spur French historians on to narrow their historiographic lag with Americans in this field. But there has more recently been a significant distancing from the American model in order to emphasize a more specifically French immigration model. That the latter is celebrated as the true melting pot, in the assimilatory sense, is but a final ironic twist in the study of comparative historiographies.

Looking across the Atlantic thus becomes not simply a way of measuring one country's history against another, but of constructing national identity itself. In France, this dialogue (monologue) with the American model has taken place within a context of return to analyses of the nation itself.[35] For the United States, the discovery of French immigration could lead to a re-evaluation of American exceptionalism. If immigration is considered to be a fundamental differentiating factor from other countries, what happens when the same phenomenon is found elsewhere? Specificity must be reexamined.[36]

National Group Comparisons

Perhaps more satisfying may be a more "mezzo" level of comparison. For migration studies, this can mean the comparison of nationality groups within one country. Since the rise of the nation-state, immigrants have invariably been defined by their nationality, and cultural attributes have been implied accordingly. Here, too, the comparative method can take us beyond culturally embedded explanations. Indeed, the comparative method frontally asks the question of structure versus culture. What has been more important in shaping immigration patterns: the social, economic, and political factors in which the migration decision is made, or the individual, cultural traditions inherent in the decision? Three basic types of inter/national comparisons are possible, which I call linear, divergent, and convergent. But each comparative project implies different perspectives on the culture/structure issue that also need to be examined.

Linear Model

To follow an immigrant from Vilna to New York or from Venice to Paris, from one point to another, is to compare past to present, a before to an after, and ultimately the experience in the country of arrival with that in the country of departure. The Neopolitan in Chicago is thus the subject through which life in Italy and life in the United States are compared. This linear form of comparison is in fact often used but rarely made explicit. Yet the debates over continuity or change have fundamentally been of this sort of comparison.

John Briggs, in a rare example of an explicit analysis of what I call the linear comparison, has criticized the general terms that are often used to compare fertility in Italy with fertility in the United States. More generally, he insists that

> researchers must choose a baseline from which to judge change, and they must locate evidence from different times, places, and groups that is similar in level and intensity of observation. . . . The question of change from Italian norms requires a comparison of similar forms of evidence from sources before and after migration.[37]

What is interesting in Briggs' comment is not only his general stress on the importance of a nuanced understanding of the culture of origin, but the suggestion that even a linear comparison is not neutral. It must be carefully constructed in order to evaluate properly continuity or change.

Convergent Model

The convergent model is perhaps that mode of comparison that has been most frequently undertaken in American migration studies (although still absent in France). To compare Jews, Italians, and Poles in Chicago, or the Irish and Italians in Boston generally means comparing relative success or failure, or, in more discreet social science terminology, "social mobility." By taking a place, the city, as the constant, the comparison implies from the outset that difference will be found at the level of the immigrant groups themselves. Cultural origins thus explain the varying modes of adaptation to the city. Blacks and immigrants,[38] Jews and Italians[39] have been the groups most often compared. But at the same time, some more global convergent studies have compared multiple groups within one area: Olivier Zunz on Detroit, John Bodnar on Pittsburgh, Ronald Bayor on New York.[40] These works have helped make the convergent model more complex, including factors such as timing and economic opportunity at the time of arrival to explain varying "success stories."

However, if most convergent studies draw on national origins as the explanation of differentiation, the same type of study, at a more general level of analysis, can yield different results. Elizabeth Ewen's study of Italian and Jewish women in New York, for example, which is not presented as an explicitly comparative study, in fact compares two groups as immigrant women rather than as Italians or Jews.[41] The pertinent categories of analysis for Ewen are "immigrant," "women," or "family" rather than Italians or Jews. The evidence she presents from both groups, and the way in which it is presented—the structure of her chapters, the close use of Jewish and Italian examples from one paragraph to another and within one paragraph—emphasize above all the similarities in the immigrant women's experience on the Lower East Side. At this level of analysis, the differences between the two groups are almost invisible.

The comparative project as well as the level of analysis chosen thus to a great extent structure the conclusions. There is no right or wrong way to construct a comparison, but it is necessary to be aware of the ways in which certain choices at the inception reflect options concerning the similarities or singularities of the immigrant experience. In one case difference may exclude resemblance. In another, semblance may hide uniqueness from sight.

Divergent Model

If most convergent studies take differentiated origins as their starting point, what I would call divergent studies locate the explanation of difference at the point of arrival, not at the point of departure. Following Poles throughout Polonia, Jews throughout the modern Diaspora, or Italians across the continents is another way of examining the questions of tradition and culture, continuity and change. Divergent studies are, however, rare.[42] Perhaps, as has been suggested for the Jews, it is because the premise of such comparison implies a differentiation that works against the notion of unity of the group.[43] The study of single national groups across space is however particularly interesting in order to evaluate the relative importance of cultural baggage or social-economic factors with regard to emigration and adaptation.

Two articles, admittedly by non-historians (anthropologists), illustrate particularly well how a divergent comparative approach can nuance linear or convergent comparisons in explaining immigrant behavior. Nancy Foner, in trying to understand the relative "success" of West Indians in New York, has questioned explanations based on the functioning of the ethnic network.[44] If a cultural explanation were sufficient, the same success should be found in other settings. However, West Indians in London are not nearly as successful as those who have emigrated to New York. Other explanatory factors must therefore be addressed: the immigrant cohort in each city, the nature of the neighborhoods in which they settle (the African-American clientele in New York). What is of interest here is how different comparative perspectives lead to different conclusions. Studying West Indians in New York (and implicitly comparing them to African Americans) yields one result; comparing West Indians in New York to West Indians in London leads to another explanation.

Caroline Brettell has used a comparative approach to revise her initial work on Portuguese immigrants in Toronto.[45] After subsequently studying Portuguese immigrants in Paris, she concluded that (linear) studies based on a single community are very often tautological: "One chooses a community to find or prove 'community.' The assumptions become the conclusion."[46] In Paris, unlike Toronto, Brettell found no "little Portugal" and few Portuguese voluntary associations, leading her to question her previous conclusions about the immigrants' behavior. The explanatory factor now became the difference between France and Canada and particularly the fact that France's proximity to Portugal sustains an active

vision of return. (I would add that the "French model" of more diffuse ethnic bonds that Brettell thus posits may be pertinent for the comparison of Portuguese in France and Canada, but it does not necessarily hold for other immigrant groups in France.) Thus Brettell's article shows how different comparisons can create a chain reaction of questions, each relativizing previous conclusions, but therefore deepening our knowledge of the complexities of the migration process.

Different comparative studies thus provide different perspectives on migration. In asking who are more alike, an Italo-American and an Italo-Frenchman or an Italo-American and an American Jew, the answer already varies in function of the way in which the question is posed. The constant implied—country of origin or country of settlement—in many ways structures the comparative project from the outset.

Divergent and convergent histories can lead to different questions and different conclusions about immigrant itineraries. One way in which this can be done is by choosing neither a group (or two) nor a place, but a cross-study. By focusing on an economic sector as the "constant," for example, we can circumscribe the socioeconomic context and then seek ways of more closely defining the variables pertinent to understanding immigrant work and lives. The garment industry is a particularly obvious example.[47] Jews, Italians, and Chinese, among others, have converged on the sewing machines in New York, while Polish Jews, Armenians, North African Jews, Turks, and other immigrants have moved into the garment district in Paris over the last century. Do they bring their skills with them in a linear trajectory? How do their (convergent) histories compare? And if we compare Polish Jews (or Chinese) in Paris and New York, what do their divergent stories tell us about immigrant adaptation?

Immigration essentially raises the question of the relationship of the particular to the general. As a result, not only have Mary Antin and others become comparativists by force of circumstance, but immigrants as groups have raised the question of difference within the nation-state and with regard to each other. Comparisons can help us understand both the structural constraints surrounding individual experience and understand the specificity of responses to that global experience.

Towards a Post-Structural Structuralism?

We have thus seen how comparisons have been used (or not) in nation-state historiographies and how comparisons may be used to go

beyond the study of single nationality groups. The comparison makes us question generalizations based on single case studies while also questioning the conceptualizations behind the nation-state and nationality terms. In both cases comparison can offer a way around either the glorification of exceptionalism (American or French) or a structuralism that reifies "immigration." If comparisons generally take us to a higher level of generality (yes, apples and oranges can be compared), they also necessarily show variety within the structure and differentiated responses to it.

From heroic adventurers to downtrodden pawns, the image of migrants changed radically over the past half century. In the last two decades, community studies and micro-historical approaches have in turn rightfully restored the voices of the immigrants themselves and have been the crucial foundation stones of the field. However, perhaps the community paradigm has reached its limit, bound by national boundaries. Is it possible to re-integrate a structural approach that looks at individual decisions, cultural choices, *and* structural constraint? By examining individual and group choices within comparative, historical frameworks, we can perhaps move toward a "post-structural structuralism." For migration studies, this means examining and reinterpreting the structures surrounding the migration process in light of individual choice and vice versa. In this respect, comparisons bring us back to the question of generality and difference. But while regulating the macro- or microscope to stress one or the other, we cannot truly understand the one without the other. Similarity and specificity, structures and their variants can only be understood in relation to one another.

NOTES

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1. Mary Antin, *Promised Land*, 2d ed. (Princeton, 1969), p.xxii.

2. I elaborated some of these ideas in an earlier form in two articles that have appeared in French: "L'histoire comparative et le champ des études migratoires," *Annales, E.S.C.*, no.6 (November-December 1990): 1335–1350; "L'immigration en France et aux Etats-Unis, Historiographie comparée," *Vingtième Siècle*, no.29 (January-March 1991): 67–82.

3. The seminal article in this respect was Herbert Gutman's "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815–1919," in his book by the same name (New York, 1976), pp.3–78.

4. Rudolph J. Vecoli, "European Americans: From Immigrants to Ethnics," *International Migration Review*, 6 (Winter 1972): 418; Thomas Archdeacon, "Problems and Possibilities in the Study of American Immigration and Ethnic History," *International Migration Review*, 19 (1985): 112–134.

5. François Simiand, "Méthode historique et science sociale" (1903), in *Méthode historique et sciences sociales*, ed. Marina Cedronio (Paris, 1987), pp.113–169; Henri Sée, "Remarques sur l'application de la méthode comparative à l'histoire économique et sociale," *Revue de synthèse historique*, 36 (1923): 37–46; William H. Sewell, Jr., "Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History," *History and Theory*, 6 (1967): 208–218. See also Raymond Grew, "The Case for Comparing Histories, *American Historical Review*, 85 (October 1980): 763–778; "Editorial," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22 (April 1980): 143–144; and more generally the October 1980, December 1980 and February 1982 issues of the *American Historical Review* and the March-April 1988 issue of the *Annales E.S.C.*.

6. Henri Pirenne, "De la méthode comparative en histoire," in *Ve Congrès international des sciences historiques*, ed. G. Des Marez and F.-L. Ganshof (Brussels, 1923), pp.19–23; Geoffrey Barraclough, *History in a Changing World* (Oxford, 1955); Sylvia Thrupp, "Editorial," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1 (October 1958): 1.

7. Marc Bloch, "Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes" (1928), in Bloch, *Mélanges historiques*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1983), 1:16–40. See also Sewell, "Marc Bloch"; Alette Olin Hill and Boyd H. Hill, Jr., "AHR Forum—Marc Bloch and Comparative History," *American Historical Review*, 85 (October 1980): 828–857; and *Marc Bloch aujourd'hui: Histoire comparée et sciences sociales* (Paris, 1990).

8. Pierre Bouvier, "Différences et analogies," in *France-U.S.A.*, ed. Pierre Bouvier and Olivier Kourchid (Paris, 1988), p.14.

9. Simiand, "Méthode historique," p.159.

10. Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune, *Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (New York, 1970), p.10. The debate over the comparative method has been particularly engaged by those working at the boundary between history and sociology. See Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22 (April 1980): 174–197; Theda Skocpol, ed., *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* (Cambridge, 1984). See also John Stuart Mill, "Two Methods of Comparison" (excerpt from *A System of Logic*, 1888), in *Comparative Perspectives: Theories and Methods*, ed. Amitai Etzioni and Frederick L. Du Bow (Boston, 1970), pp.205–13.

11. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris, 1974), pp.312–313.

12. Ira Katznelson, *Black Men, White Cities: Race, Politics and Migration in the United States, 1900–1930, and Britain, 1948–1968* (London, 1973), pp.29–30.

13. Bloch, "Pour une histoire comparée," p.37; Sewell, "Marc Bloch"; Ira Katznelson, *Black Men* has also suggested that we can compare "social time"—different periods in two different countries in which similar phenomena occurred. This is commonly the case in comparative studies of ancient and modern slavery. See also my study of the stock market crashes of 1929 and 1987, seen from American and French perspectives, "Leçons d'octobre—1929, 1987, La presse française et américaine face aux deux crises boursières," *Esprit* (October 1988): 91–110.

14. The term was suggested by Hervé Le Bras. On "middle level," "middle range" or "meso" comparisons, see Grew, "Case for Comparing Histories," p.773; George M. Fredrickson, "Comparative History," in *The Past Before Us: Contempo-*

rary Historical Writing in the United States, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca, N.Y., 1980), pp.457–473; Jan Lucassen, *Migrant Labour in Europe 1600–1900*, (London, 1987), pp.21–22, 52, 92–94, 211.

15. For two particularly interesting wide-ranging approaches, see Aristide R. Zolberg, "International Migration Policies in a Changing World System," in *Human Migration*, ed. William H. McNeill and Ruth S. Adams (Bloomington, Ind., 1978), pp.241–286; and Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York, 1985). For two other particularly interesting comparisons, see Michael Burawoy, "The Functions and Reproduction of Migrant Labor: Comparative Material from South Africa and the United States," *American Journal of Sociology*, 81 (March 1976): 1050–1087; and Gary P. Freeman, *Immigrant Labor and Racial Conflict in Industrial Societies: The French and British Experience, 1945–1975* (Princeton, 1979).

16. General histories of immigration to the United States are by now numerous. Three recent overviews are: Thomas Archdeacon, *Becoming American: An Ethnic History* (New York, 1983); John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, Ind., 1987); and Roger Daniels, *Coming to America* (New York, 1990). For France, see Gérard Noiriel, *Le Creuset français: Histoire de L'immigration, XIXe-XXe siècles* (Paris, 1988); Yves Lequin, ed., *La mosaïque france: Histoire des étrangers et de l'immigration en France* (Paris, 1988); and André Kaspi and Antoine Marès, eds., *Le Paris des étrangers* (Paris, 1989).

17. Cited in Louis Hartz, "Comment," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5 (April 1963): 281.

18. One of the rare attempts was the anthology edited by C. Vann Woodward at the behest of the Voice of America: *The Comparative Approach to American History* (New York, 1968). See especially John Higham's article, "Immigration," ibid., pp.91–105 (reprinted in Higham's *Send These to Me* (New York, 1975), where he shows how proportionately many more immigrants went to Canada and Argentina than to the United States. He suggests that the true specificity of the U.S. was the diversity rather than the quantity of immigrants who arrived. See also Fredrickson, "Comparative History."

19. Diane Pinto, "Immigration: L'ambiguïté de la référence américaine," *Pouvoirs*, no.47 (1988): 93–101. On the more general issue of the French love-hate relationship with the United States, see Denis Lacorne, et al., *The Rise and Fall of Anti-Americanism: A Century of French Perception* (New York, 1990); and Jacques Portes, *Une fascination réticente: Les Etats-Unis dans l'opinion française* (Nancy, 1990).

20. Dominique Schnapper, "Centralisme et fédéralisme culturels: Les émigrés italiens en France et aux Etats-Unis," *Annales, E.S.C.* 29 (September–October 1974): 1141–1159.

21. Judith E. Vichniac, "French Socialists and *Droit à la Différence*: A Changing Dynamic," *French Politics and Society*, 9 (Winter 1991): 40–56.

22. An early article on the subject by an Australian historian deserves note: Don Dignan, "Europe's Melting Pot: A Century of Large-scale Immigration Into France," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 4 (April 1981): 137–152.

23. The publication history of Higham's book is revealing: First published in 1955, it "took off" along with ethnic studies. From 1963 to 1978, the book was reprinted twenty times. John Higham, "The Strange Career of *Strangers in the Land*," *American Jewish History*, 76 (December 1986): 214–226. Higham adds that the "paperback revolution" also undoubtedly helps explain the book's success.

24. Yves Grafmeyer and Isaac Joseph, eds., *L'Ecole de Chicago: Naissance de l'écologie urbaine* (Paris, 1984), republished in 1990. On the impact of the Chicago School in Europe, see Michel Oriol, *Bilan des études sur les aspects culturels et humains des migrations internationales en Europe occidentale, 1918–1979* (Strasbourg, 1981), pp.28–32.

25. Marcus Lee Hansen's seminal article of 1927 remained but an isolated call for immigration studies at the time it was written: "The History of American Immigration as a Field of Research," *American Historical Review*, 32 (April 1927): 500–518; Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration, 1607–1860* , (1940; reprint ed., New York, 1961). Nor did Frank Thistlewaithe's now often-cited article have much impact at the time: "Migrations from Europe Overseas in the 19th and 20th Centuries," *XIe Congrès International des Sciences Historiques, Rapports*, vol. 5, *Histoire Contemporaine* (Göteborg, 1960), pp.32–60. On the current state of the field, see Vecoli, "European Americans," pp.403–434; Vecoli, "Return to the Melting Pot: Ethnicity in the United States in the 1980s," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 5 (Fall 1985): 7–20; and Archdeacon's thoughtful "Problems and Possibilities," pp. 112–134, in which he calls for more comparative work in the field.

26. Horace Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States* (New York, 1924); Olivier Zunz, "Genèse du pluralisme américain," *Annales E.S.C.*, 42 (March–April 1987): 429–444. See also John Higham, *Send These to Me*, ch. 10.

27. Philip Gleason, "The Melting Pot: Symbol of Fusion or Confusion?" *American Quarterly*, 16 (Spring 1964): 20–46; Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York, 1986), pp.88–99.

28. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge, Mass. 1963).

29. Henry Fairchild, *The Melting Pot Mistake* (Boston, 1926).

30. It also designated a peaceful merging of peoples and was occasionally also decried as a homogenizing blend. See, for example, Etienne Balibar's article in *Le Monde*, 1 December 1984.

31. Robert Solé, "Un modèle français d'intégration," commenting on a talk by Michel Rocard, *Le Monde*, 7 December 1989.

32. Donald L. Horowitz, "Europe and America: A Comparative Analysis of 'Ethnicity,'" *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, 5 (2e trimestre 1989): 47–61.

33. Dominique Schnapper, "A Host Country of Immigrants that does not know Itself," *Diaspora*, 1 (Winter 1991): 353–363 (originally published in *Le Genre humain* in 1989); Gérard Noiriel, "Français et étrangers," in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, vol. III/1, *Les France—Conflits et Partages*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris, 1992), pp.274–319. With regard to Noiriel's use of the "modèle américain," see also Eric Fassin, "La France des immigrés," *French Politics and Society*, 7 (Spring 1989): 50–62.

34. Or, as the *New York Times Magazine* commented with regard to transatlantic cultural migrations: "'There is a constant war between the United States and France,' one screenwriter says. 'We sent them Jerry Lewis, so they retaliated by sending us deconstruction.'" Fall 1990.

35. Most notably with Pierre Nora's major editorial project: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1984–1993).

36. Higham, "Immigration."

37. John W. Briggs, "Fertility and Cultural Change among Families in Italy and America," *American Historical Review*, 91 (December 1986): 1131. See also Briggs, *An Italian Passage: Immigrants to Three American Cities, 1890–1930* (New Haven,

1978); Donna Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* (Albany, 1984); and Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880–1930* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977).

38. E.g., John J. Appell, "American Negro and Immigrant Experience: Similarities and Differences," *American Quarterly*, 18 (1966): 95–103; John Bodnar, Roger Simon and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900–1960* (Urbana, Ill., 1982); Herb Gutman and Ira Berlin, "Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum American South," *American Historical Review*, 88 (December 1983): 1175–1200; Stanley Lieberson, *A Piece of the Pie: Blacks and White Immigrants since 1880* (Berkeley, Calif., 1980); Ivan Light, *Ethnic Enterprise in America: Business and Welfare among Chinese, Japanese and Blacks* (Berkeley, Calif., 1972); Joel Perlmann, *Ethnic Differences: Schooling and Social Structure among the Irish, Italians, Jews, and Blacks in an American City, 1880–1935* (New York, 1988); Stephan Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973).

39. Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York City, 1880–1915* (New York, 1977); Dominique Schnapper, "Quelques réflexions sur l'assimilation comparée des travailleurs émigrés italiens et des Juifs en France," *Bulletin de la Société Française de Sociologie*, 3 (July 1976): 11–18; Judith Smith, *Family Connections: A History of Italian and Jewish Immigrant Lives in Providence, Rhode Island, 1900–1940* (Albany, N.Y., 1985). For other convergent studies, see, e.g., Josef Barton, *Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians and Slovaks in an American City, 1890–1950* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975); Donald B. Cole, *Immigrant City: Lawrence, Mass., 1845–1921* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1963); and Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City* (Urbana, Ill., 1987).

40. Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880–1920* (Chicago, 1982); John Bodnar, *Immigration and Industrialization: Ethnicity in an American Mill Town, 1870–1940* (Pittsburgh, 1977); Ronald Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict: The Irish, Germans, Jews, and Italians of New York City, 1929–1941* (Baltimore, 1978). See also the debate between Zunz and Bodnar in Olivier Zunz, John Bodnar, "Forum: American History and the Changing Meaning of Assimilation," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 4 (Spring 1985): 53–76; and Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth* (Boston, 1981).

41. Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars* (New York, 1985).

42. See, however, Samuel Baily's thoughtful analysis, "Cross-Cultural Comparison and the Writing of Migration History: Some Thoughts on How to Study Italians in the New World," in *Immigration Reconsidered*, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (New York, 1990), pp.241–253; along with: Baily, "The Italians and the Development of Organized Labor in Argentina, Brazil and the United States, 1880–1914," *Journal of Social History*, 3 (Winter 1969): 123–134; Baily, "The Adjustment of Italian Immigrants in Buenos Aires and New York, 1870–1914," *American Historical Review*, 88 (April 1983): 281–305; Briggs, *An Italian Passage*; Donna Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants: Rural Sicilians become American Workers* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1988); Herbert S. Klein, "The Integration of Italian Immigrants in the United States and Argentina: A Comparative Analysis," *American Historical Review*, 88 (April 1983): 306–346; Andrew S. Reutlinger, "Reflections on the Anglo-American Jewish Experience: Immigrants, Workers, and Entrepreneurs in New York and London, 1870–1914," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 66 (June 1977): 473–484.

43. Dominique Schnapper, "Jewish Minorities and the State in the United States, France, and Argentina," in *Center: Ideas and Institutions*, ed. Liah Greenfeld and Michael Mertin (Chicago, 1988), pp.186–209; Nancy L. Green, "Diversité et unité dans les études immigrées: Les juifs étrangers à Paris," in Kaspi and Marès, *Le Paris des Étrangers*, pp.106–118.

44. Nancy Foner, "West Indians in New York City and London: A Comparative Analysis," *International Migration Review*, 13 (Summer 1979): 284–297.

45. Caroline B. Brettell, "Is the Ethnic Community Inevitable? A Comparison of the Settlement Patterns of Portuguese Immigrants in Toronto and Paris," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 9 (Fall 1981): 1–17.

46. Ibid., p.1.

47. John Higham made a general appeal for more comparative studies in John Higham, "Current Trends in the Study of Ethnicity in the United States," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 2 (Fall 1982): 5–15. For a mixed, convergent and divergent, approach, see Roger Daniels, "On the Comparative Study of Immigrant and Ethnic Groups in the New World: A Note," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 25 (April 1983): 401–404; Daniels, "Chinese and Japanese in North America: The Canadian and American Experiences Compared," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 17 (Summer 1986): 173–187; and Nancy Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work: The Garment Industry and Immigrant Workers in Paris and New York, 1880–1980* (Paris, forthcoming). The industry of course is not an absolute constant either; Green, "Immigrant Labor in the Garment Industries of New York and Paris: Variations on a Structure," *Comparative Social Research*, 9 (1986): 231–243. See also Roger Waldinger and Robin Ward, eds., "Cities in Transition: A Comparison of Ethnic Minorities in London and New York," *New Community*, 14 (Spring 1988).