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Cherry Schrecker

► **To cite this version:**

Cherry Schrecker. Textbooks and Sociology: a Franco-British comparison. *Current Sociology*, 2008. hal-01568764

**HAL Id: hal-01568764**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01568764>**

Submitted on 28 Aug 2017

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# **Textbooks and Sociology: a Franco-British comparison**

By Cherry Schrecker

**Abstract:** This comparison of British and French textbooks published between 1950 and 2003 sets out to identify differences and similarities in form and content which may be indicative of the ways in which sociology is conceived of and practised in the two countries. Various aspects of the texts are examined such as their definitions of sociology, their construction of the sociological tradition and their use of examples and illustrations. Both common features and differences are found suggesting the existence of distinct national traditions which refer to more universal characteristics inherent in sociology as a discipline.

**Keywords:** textbooks, French sociology, British sociology, sociological traditions, textual presentation.

**Biographical note :** Cherry Schrecker is senior lecturer in sociology at the University of Nancy 2 and assistant director of the research laboratory LASTES. Her principal areas of research include the history of British and American sociology and the sociology of knowledge. She has recently published *La communauté, histoire critique d'un concept sociologique* (Harmattan, 2006), a reflection on the concept of community and on community studies intended for a French public.

**Contact:** Cherry Schrecker, 34, rue de Médreville, 54 000, Nancy, France.

**Tel:** 00 33 3 83 44 16 72.

**Email:** [cherry.schrecker@wanadoo.fr](mailto:cherry.schrecker@wanadoo.fr)

# **Textbooks and Sociology: a Franco-British comparison**

By Cherry Schrecker

An attentive reader of sociological texts in Great Britain and in France is bound to notice differences in content and style. A major difficulty is to pin down and offer an empirically based description of this diversity. Sometimes, rather than highlighting differences closer study reveals unexpected similarities. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that exchanges between these two countries and others, very often via America, should have resulted in the development of a common disciplinary ‘culture’ which justifies the shared epithet of sociology.

## ***The comparison***

I have compared British and French sociology textbooks published over a period extending from 1950 – 2003 in an attempt to identify their differences and common features thus contributing to the reflection on the relationship between national and universal factors in sociological discourse and practice by testing for what several authors have called a sociological ‘core’. According to Lynch and Bogen (1996: 481), this is a social and commercial construct involving a common ancestry, a unified field of investigation and a general scientific methodology. I have looked out for factors which might be said to constitute such a core, on both intra- and inter-national levels.

The choice of textbooks as a basis for a study of this type may, or may not be a judicious one as there is considerable disagreement as to the extent to which textbooks are representative of sociological practise in general. Nevertheless, the study brings to the

fore several interesting characteristics of British and French sociology which are useful for an understanding of the respective approaches and which could serve as leads for further investigation.

### *The sample*

All of the textbooks selected claim to present a systematic introduction to the discipline. To ensure greater comparability, the main sample conform to a common model, that is to say they contain at least one chapter on theory and method and several dedicated to specific disciplinary fields. Other types of division such as that by theoretical perspective, though they are used elsewhere, have not been an object of comparison. I have thus given priority to books with chapters figuring titles such as “the family” or “education” over those using other types of heading for example “society as a system of institutions” (Sprott 1957/1966: 140). Ideally, the sample would have contained textbooks published at regular and equivalent periods in France and England during the second half of the twentieth century, in practise, this has not been possible, mainly due to the relatively restricted number of French textbooks. Another reservation about the choice of textbooks relates to the fact, already mentioned, that the use and publication of manuals is far more prevalent in Great-Britain where they are considered as important enough to undergo extensive revisions, whereas in France<sup>1</sup> some “new” editions differ from their predecessors only in that some of the references have been updated and their cover design (often very slightly) altered.

It has been impossible to find textbooks all aspects of which are comparable. The sample contains some books written by single or multiple authors, others contain chapters written by specialists in the subject area but who are not the principal authors. Thus, to a

greater or lesser extent, each publication reflects the aims, theoretical preferences and even the personality of the authors. All this complicates the search for common characteristics on a national or general level. Nevertheless, as we will see, several aspects of the content and presentation show enough regularity for certain factors to be considered as significant.

Eight manuals formed the basis of my original comparison:

**TABLE 1 about here**

They have been chosen as best-sellers representative of the manuals generally available, and have been consulted in several editions. Several other texts have been referred to in order to check whether observations pertaining to the main sample apply more generally. Neither inequalities in the academic standard of the texts nor the apparent political convictions of their authors – such as those indicated by Besnard (1991) in his review of several French manuals - have been a criterion of inclusion or exclusion, as long as the books offered a comprehensive and factually based discussion of the areas they set out to cover. Of course, both political factors and intellectual quality are likely to affect the form and content of the texts.

After a general comparison of structure and content, several points have been considered. Firstly, the authors aims and intentions and the public for whom the book is destined; secondly, their definitions of sociology and descriptions of sociological practise (including the way in which they envisage the relationship between sociology and society, sociology and common sense or sociology and other disciplines), thirdly, the “story” they tell to introduce sociology, fourthly, the type of examples used in their explanations, lastly, stylistic and aesthetic factors linked to the presentation.

## *General structure and content<sup>2</sup>*

The size of the books in the sample is extremely variable, ranging from 192 pages (Ferréol et Noreck all editions) to 1116 pages (Haralambos 2002) this is linked to a variation in the number of chapters (eight and fifteen respectively). Even though page sizes and layout vary considerably, these general proportions are confirmed by a word count.

Many authors, particularly the British ones, begin with a general introductory chapter where the aims of the manual and, very often, the authors' conception of sociology are described. This chapter may well also include a fairly brief overview of theory and method which the later British editions only develop fully in the last chapters of the book. Whereas in British editions the history of sociology tends to figure fairly briefly as part of the introductory chapter, most of the French editions - and only one of the British (Bottomore) - contain at least one chapter, and very often two or three, on this aspect of the sociological tradition<sup>3</sup>. The fact that these chapters tend to be situated at the very beginning of the book, seems indicative of the importance accorded to them. The importance of history in the teaching of sociology in France is confirmed by the fact that many universities include at least one course on the history (and usually on the pre-history) of sociology in their first year programme. What is more, electronic searches for French textbooks revealed the existence of a large number of publications on the history of sociology or social theory, this type of introductory text seems to have priority over the general introductions more often found in Great-Britain.

All the French manuals contain at least one chapter on theory, as do most, but not all, British ones. Inversely, chapters on method figure in most British manuals and in very

few French ones. The importance accorded to theoretical considerations and to the discussion of sociology as a discipline in French manuals is confirmed by a closer examination of their content.

Although there are changes in the disciplinary areas studied over time and differences between countries, a certain number of phenomena are subject to almost universal interest. All the textbooks include a chapter on the family (included in sex and gender for Worsley 1987) and all except Berthelot (2000, 2003) at least one chapter on social structure and/or stratification. Other frequently found chapters are those on work and organisations (absent in the earliest textbooks), education (present in all British textbooks); present less often, but fairly equally represented are culture and the media, political sociology, tradition and change.

French books are more likely than British to include chapters such as “social groups” or the “individual and society”. As from the beginning of the 1970’s, all the British textbooks include chapters on crime and deviance and sex and gender and, for most, on race and ethnicity. The former figures as a main heading in only one textbook in France (Durand and Weil, both editions). The two others are absent, though a discussion of gender relations in capitalist society is included in Durand and Weil’s chapter on the family. This might seem rather surprising to sociologists of the British tradition where the sociology of crime and deviance has been central to the discipline for well on thirty years, the question of race and ethnicity has inspired continued reflection over the same period and questions related to gender as a social phenomenon or in relation to epistemological concerns have become an essential aspect of the sociological debate. In Britain, the discussion of gender in Britain also appears in other chapters such as those on social structure in Haralambos (2000), Giddens (all editions) and Worsley (1977).

We can see that though some subject areas figure in most textbooks others are only considered relevant at a given period or in the context of one or other of the national traditions.

### *Aims and intentions*

Not all authors give precise indications as to the public aimed at. The back covers of all the textbooks consulted say they are intended for university students and, for the majority, the general reader. At least two British manuals (Haralambos and Bilton) also mention “A” level students. With the exception of *La sociologie française contemporaine* which states that the student may be either a beginner or have greater experience of sociology, the manuals are presented as introductory texts.

Certain aspects of the authors’ intentions are similar whatever the country and the period covered, thus Cuvillier hopes to provide students with a comprehensive guide or a tool for their work in which they will be able to learn the bases of sociology. Ferréol and Noreck “attempt to update the objects, methods and principal subdivisions of sociology” (1989: 4), whilst Berthelot hopes his book will constitute a rich and stimulating presentation of contemporary French sociology. (2000: 17). In a similar vein, British authors such as Haralambos and Giddens wish to provide a systematic introduction to sociology, Bottomore to propose a general introduction, Worsley to present the different perspectives, Giddens to reframe some of the main perspectives and concerns of the subject. (1993: 1) The British authors differ from their French counterparts in that they establish links between sociology as a subject and real life, especially that of the reader. Two examples chosen from a plethora of possibilities are those of Worsley (1987) who



sets out to “discuss major issues that anyone living in a decade when the year 2001 already looms on the horizon has to confront intellectually since these issues affect *the everyday lives of all of us.*” (p. 10 my italics), and Giddens (1993: 5): “Learning sociology is in part a process of self-exploration.” It could be assumed that differences in presentation reflect the desire to make the textbooks more accessible to “A” level students. This is not borne out by the consultation of a French manual intended for Lycée (“A” level) students (Coiffier 1990).

As these examples show, the needs of the sociology student and thus the role of the textbook, are conceived of in very different ways. Whereas French authors set out to offer a systematic presentation of sociology as a discipline, British ones deem it necessary to link this description to everyday life and, even more directly, to the personal experience of the student. It is not apparent whether the ultimate aim of all this as expressed by Haralambos, is shared by all the British authors, that is to say that the understanding of society which sociology can help to attain, should enable people “to change and improve their lives.” (p. 21) This does not mean that the sociologist should not be scientific and rigorous, but rather, it is an injunction to use his or her findings in a constructive manner. Of course, this type of ambition is neither new nor specifically British, numerous sociologists such as Durkheim (1895) or Thomas and Znaniecki (1918-20) have hoped that sociology practised as a science will ultimately contribute to social improvement.

Apparently linked to the differences in intention outlined above, is a dilemma to which Clark (1976) draws our attention: do the manuals wish to teach about society or about sociology? It is clear that the French textbooks share the latter ambition, whilst the position of the British manuals is often far more ambiguous.

### *What is sociology?*

It is hardly surprising that the authors' ambitions concerning the presentation and teaching of sociology should be reflected in their definitions of the discipline. Thus for Cuvillier it is "a positive science of social facts" (p. 99), Mendras echoes this point of view. In Britain at the same period Cotgrove (1967) names his textbook *The Science of Society*, and affirms in the preface that "sociology is a science" adding later that "Science, like other intellectual activities, can be exciting." (p. 7) Again, this type of comment is typical of the British approach, insisting on the possibility of personal involvement and on a creative attitude which almost all qualify as the "sociological imagination" with direct reference to C. Wright Mills' book of the same title.

Defining sociology may involve differentiating it from other disciplines which also study society, such as psychology, philosophy, anthropology, history or economics. Only the two earliest textbooks in my main sample, one from each country, adopt this solution. Two later British manuals (Hurd, 1973: 1 Bilton *et alii*, 1981: 1) in passages that have much more in common than pure coincidence would lead us to expect, make a similar distinction in a different manner, the authors affirming that sociology is a distinct *way of looking* at the individual and society, the important thing being not *what* is studied, but *how* it is studied.

Though there is no universal agreement as to whether sociologists should be more interested, for example, in social structure (Bottomore, 1962), the social system (Cotgrove, 1967), social movements (Ignasse et Génissel, 1999) or more generally, social life, groups and societies (Giddens, all editions), all the manuals insist in some way or another that sociology should be characterised by a scientific approach which involves an objective or impartial analysis of social life. Even if sociologists, like ordinary people,

make theories about society (Worsely, 1987) a certain number of features distinguish sociological thought from “common sense”, indeed, peoples’ ideas can be contradicted by sociology. Thinking oneself away from everyday life, as Giddens (1989: 18) puts it, more or less unanimously involves using empirical data to evolve and test theories - the layman tries to prove his theories whereas the sociologist is constantly questioning his hypotheses (Hurd, 1973: 6) – thus establishing regularities in social life. Objectivity also involves setting aside one’s own values in order to avoid making judgements about the facts observed. Several of the British authors establish a difference between objectivity and neutrality, that is to say social responsibility, and many of the British manuals mention the possibility of the application of the theories studied. The attitude of the French texts tends far more towards abstraction, Mendras (1967: 22), for example, argues that the role of the sociologist is to understand and not to invent rules for action, in this he or she behaves like an astronomer rather than an astrologer (he refers to Claude Levi-Strauss who first expressed this point of view).

### *Shared traditions*

Two types of story tend to be told as descriptions of the sociological tradition, I will call them historical and theoretical. As already indicated, the French texts tend to accord great importance to the history of the sociological tradition and to the ideas out of which it has evolved. Very often this tradition finds its roots in Greek philosophy, Plato and Aristotle being the philosophers most often mentioned. More recently, Alexis de Tocqueville and Montesquieu are regularly cited as “*précurseurs*” of sociology, followed by the “*pionniers*” (Marx and Comte) and the “*fondateurs*” (Durkheim and Weber) (see Pierre-

Jean Simon, 1991). This history is shown as relevant to contemporary practice: the essential characteristics of sociology as a discipline which distinguish it from the other social sciences, lies in a balance between theory and practice (the use of empirical material) and between explanation and comprehension, each of these aspects having been developed and perfected overtime via the contributions of various ancestors.

British texts tend to go less far back, though Bottomore does mention Greek thinkers. In common with the French texts they give considerable importance to three “founding fathers” Marx, Durkheim and Weber. Authors in the British tradition such as Hobhouse may also be referred to, especially in earlier texts, Worsely and others also mention Darwin in connection with evolutionary theories. In all editions of the eight manuals in my sample these three figures far outstrip all the others in frequency of appearance. Indeed, all except the very recent British authors are more frequently cited in France than in Great Britain. This would seem to reflect the importance accorded to both of historical and of textual references in the French sample.

The other way of telling the story is via the theoretical evolution of sociological thought and analysis. Almost all the textbooks include accounts of competing perspectives, in particular those based alternatively on structure or action. Though versions change with time and the development of the theoretical approaches, there is less variation than might have been expected between countries (due possibly to the reception of American theoretical tradition in both countries during a period ranging from 1945 – 1960). One exception to this is that the later British textbooks refer to feminist theories as a theoretical perspective, which is never the case in France. This seems to be common practise in Great Britain and several introductions to sociological theory such as Philip Jones (1993) also include a section on feminist theories.

The way in which theories are presented and justified may show considerable variation between countries and over time. Three types of strategy exist: firstly, the theories may be presented as independent entities, each theory being explained with reference to its own internal characteristics (Berthelot, Durand et Weil, all editions); secondly, the theories are presented as leading on to one another each in some way offering a remedy for the failings of its predecessors (Bilton et al. 1987); thirdly, the succession is presented as a sort of struggle, a conflict between different points of view, this strategy is common in Britain and very rarely found in France. The last approach is particularly well illustrated by the following extracts from Worsley (1987) “At this point, howls of frustration arose from those they criticized. Social behaviour, it was objected, *does* exhibit regularities ...”(p.26). “Radical critics had no objection to the notion that selection and equality were inevitable in modern society. But the rest of the argument, they said, was simply a defence of privilege.”(p.27) “Marxists have been equally critical of deviance theory.” (p.28)

### *Justification and evidence*

Another aspect of sociological and national culture is the type of examples the authors use to support their discussion and to give it authority. Several differences can be observed over time and between countries, as can a certain number of common features. The first of these, an aspect of sociological culture we all recognise, is the reference to and citation of the works of other sociologists. All the textbooks use this strategy which is of course indispensable, as they wish to offer a synthetic vision the discipline as it exists either in their country or on an international basis. That being said, having checked the index

entries of 16 editions drawn from my sample for a selection of 16 authors it soon became apparent that the French manuals cite disciplinary references, be they contemporary or historical, much more frequently than the British ones. This factor confirms the impression obtained on reading the texts and seems to be linked to the fact, mentioned above, that the French manuals tend to present sociology rather than society.

As well as disciplinary references, textbooks of both national traditions illustrate their theoretical statements by means of generalised situations. Mendras, for example, describes problems which the sociologist might be called upon to resolve: “The priest is scandalised that his sheep should be so lax in their beliefs and their practise. The jurist is surprised that his laws, which are good and just, are not respected. ....” (1967: 18). Another example, that of marriage, so often seen as a “natural” phenomenon whilst it is really a social construct, is cited by almost all the British manuals, whenever they were published. Among others, we find it in Cotgrove (1967: 15-16), in Bilton et *alii*, where the authors inform us that “the odds against HRH Prince Edward falling in love with Elsie from the TESCO supermarket are very high indeed.”(1987: 6), as well as in Giddens (1993: 8) and Haralambos (2000: 15). A further, and rather different example of a general situation, that of drinking a cup of coffee, is to be found in Giddens. A sociological view of this apparently banal action could emphasise the symbolic value of the act as part of everyday social life, the fact that coffee is a drug, the social economic relationships involved, their past development or international and political factors which affect lifestyle choices (Giddens, 2001: 3-4).

A different type of reference is that of literary or artistic examples, Worsley for example refers to the film, *The Godfather* as an example of the development of codes of honour based on the family. Some of Cuvillier’s illustrations are drawn from artistic

sources (especially as he has a section on the sociology of art and literature), but in general this type of example is more often found in British manuals.

A type of textual example, found almost exclusively in the British texts, is that of the real-world situation. It may be conveyed with reference to the press; the murder of Katherine Genovese, which Lynch and Bogen (1997: 485) affirm is often cited in American textbooks as an example of apathy in big cities, is also cited by Giddens 2nd edition (1993: 571) though it has disappeared from the fourth edition.

The authors may also point out ways in which behaviour varies between cultures and in different historical periods. But the ultimate real-life situation involves the reference to the students' own life. Take, for example, this passage from Giddens (2000: 5):  
“Consider, for instance, why you are turning the pages of this book at all – why you have decided to study sociology. [...] Whatever your motivations, you are likely to have a good deal in common, without necessarily knowing it, with others studying sociology. Your private decision reflects your position in the wider society.”

Very often authors invent situations intended to combine the abstract and the specific, the imaginary and the real. One of these, drawn from Haralambos (2000: 14), is the fictional “scene” of a man and woman lighting a candle. It forms part of an explanation of the interactionist perspective and deals with the attribution of meanings to a situation. Do the couple require light, is it a ceremony of religious significance, do they wish to create an atmosphere conducive to lovemaking or are they celebrating a birthday or an anniversary? What is important for the sociologist analysing a situation from this perspective, he says, is to discover the actors' intentions.

We have seen that the type of reference used to back up the discussion ranges from citations of scientific literature, via generalised examples, to situations drawn from real-life. The former are shared by manuals from both countries, though they are given much

more importance in France, the latter in their purest form are the preserve of the British textbooks. The first type of reference then, if it were confirmed by further national comparisons, could be considered as a “core” feature of the sociological tradition. The other features and/or the frequency of the inclusion of any types of example could be considered as characteristics of national practice which together could be said to form its specific identity: the French tradition relies more heavily on the citation of sociological texts, let us say scientific or intra-disciplinary material, whereas the British manuals accord far greater importance to references drawn from, or relating to, everyday life.

### *Presentation*

Choices concerning the presentation of the manuals, where patterns are apparent, may also be considered as aspects of sociological or national culture, and tend to confirm the traits already observed. The number of illustrations 16 editions drawn from the sample have been counted and divided into the following types: graphic representations; numerical tables; algorithmic tables, schemas and diagrams; maps and plans; artistic illustrations; photos and caricatures.

### **TABLE 2 about here**

As shown in the comparative chart of illustrations, there is a general tendency for the number of illustrations to increase over time, though both editions of Durand et Weil form an exception to this trend. This being said, there is considerable variation between textbooks as to the type of illustration preferred. Though some common features are



observed between countries and over time it is difficult to pick out decisive patterns. Manuals from both countries use statistical representations and tables which are traditional scientific methods for visualising large amounts of information. As well as serving as a visual aide to the presentation and comprehension of information concerning social trends, this style of presentation emphasises the scientific nature of the information contained in the chapters. It could also be considered as a pedagogical device designed to familiarise students with the reading of tabulated information. The later British manuals, particularly Haralambos (2002) make ample use of this type of presentation. Remarks similar to those which precede could be made about the presentation of facts by means of tables, schemas and diagrams, the former are to be found in all text-books tending to increase over time, the latter are predominantly used in French manuals. Very few of the manuals include pictures as illustrations, these figure marginally in the later British books and Cuvillier includes several. Many of them illustrate the sections on art and anthropology but some of the tables are also embellished with artistic motifs.

Only the British manuals make use of photographs, none are to be found in the French textbooks. Of course the specificity of photos is that they offer realistic representations of people and real-life situations their use is thus coherent with the previously mentioned attitude of the British manuals. The number of photos and the way in which they are used varies. A photo figures on the front covers of Spratt (1966 impression) and Worsely (1977) though none are included in the body of the text. Whereas the original version of Haralambos contains almost no illustrations and no photos, the 2000 edition has several, including 18 photos (for 1115 pages). For the most part these figure alongside the chapter headings. None are included in the first edition of Giddens (1993) whilst the 2001 edition contains 115 (for 750 pages). In the older manuals the photographs are generalised representations of people or groups of people, Spratt

shows a crowd amongst which four individuals are highlighted, Worsely, a family and a colour mixed couple, which are part of a larger social group figuring on the back cover. These emphasise, presumably, that human beings and social groups are the subject matter of sociological research. Photos in the later textbooks represent people in more specific situations such as that of exclusion or as members of a family or picnicking on a beach. For the most part, these situations are of a fairly ideal-typical nature and seem to be intended to convey the idea that the situations they portray are real, involving people who are linked via particular relationships or due to common cultural characteristics. The accent placed on human life and society in Great Britain being reinforced by the choice of the realistic portrayal of situations. It should be emphasised that where the accent is placed on social situations this is not at the expense of a more formal analysis: the Giddens textbook which contains the highest number of photos also has the highest number of graphs containing statistical information. The graphic charts could be conceived of as a device confirming the scientific nature of the presentation, as such, they counterbalance the more realistic representations and anticipate accusations which might question the sociological nature of the contents. The French reliance on schemas and diagrams coupled with the quasi-absence of illustrations is coherent with the more abstract orientation of the textbooks and the accent placed on the theoretical aspects of the discipline.

A last type of illustration, humorous drawings, figure in some British textbooks usually serving to emphasise an aspect of the phenomena under discussion which, though unintended or surprising, may well have received the attention of sociologists. The use of humorous drawings could also be conceived of as a strategy designed to involve the reader and to confirm the idea, put forward by some of the textbooks, that sociology can be fun. Only one of the French textbooks I have consulted (Ignasse et Génissel, 1999) contains this type of illustration which figures on the front cover.

The inclusion of an ever greater number of tables and illustrations is part of a more general evolution in format which has taken place over the period studied. This is particularly marked in Great Britain, but let us begin with the French books. In contrast with the trend for British textbooks indicated by Jennifer Platt in this volume, a tendency to increase in size cannot be observed in France, indeed the most voluminous book as far as the number of pages goes (1099 pages in three volumes) is the earliest, the shortest, being the Ferréol and Noreck (189 pages). That being said, it is true that, in keeping with the British tendency, *Sociologie Contemporaine* shows an increase in size in relation to its predecessors as well as an increase in the number of subject areas presented. Among the British textbooks studied, the most spectacular growth can be observed in Haralambos whose 1985 edition contains 594 pages for 1115 in 2000. Although chapters do not necessarily increase in number over time, those dedicated to sub-disciplinary areas certainly do at the expense of those on theory and method.

The layout of the French textbooks tends to be fairly dense and many highlight parts of the text by the use of bold type. The inclusion of tables, increases in space between sections and often larger print, tends to make the later editions look more airy, though this is not the case for all editions, Berthelot, for example contains no tables and illustrations and is written in small, compact print. The covers are plain, though variable in colour showing essential information such as title author name and publisher. Some later editions figure and abstract picture, this is common practice for French sociology books aimed at a larger public. The British texts are fairly similar in presentation, and not so different from the French texts, with the exception of the Giddens and Haralambos volumes. The original editions of both of these use larger lettering and interline spacing than all other texts. But the most radical change occurs as from the 2000 volume of Haralambos and the 2001 of Giddens. These and their subsequent editions are in larger format with bright

colours on the cover. Inside, they are printed in two columns per page, headings, subheadings and other important features figure in blue, they also make liberal use of tables and illustrations. As such, they resemble, to a certain extent, secondary-school textbooks as they are to be found in both countries. Indeed, the only French edition using the two-column layout, along with a large number of tables and illustrations, is *Sociologie basique*, written for sixth formers. As previously indicated, despite this format, the general approach to the presentation of sociology in this textbook resembles that of the other French publications.

### *A chapter: the family*

It is useful to extend the overall comparison by means of a closer look at a specific chapter. Ideally, this would have been either the introductory chapter or a chapter on general theory, unfortunately neither of these is to be found in all of the textbooks in the sample. In view of this I have selected the chapter on the family as the only one contained in all of the textbooks consulted (and not only those in the sample). The points covered in the preceding sections concerning the approach and presentation of the different textbooks as well the conclusions concerning national sociological practice are borne out in these chapters, it is therefore unnecessary to go back over these aspects. Instead, I have chosen to examine three points of interest: firstly, the theories or types of theories applied and the way in which these are integrated into the discussion; secondly, the themes figuring in the chapters – this factor is, of course, to a certain extent linked to theoretical perspective -; and thirdly, certain textual strategies which are distinctive enough to merit attention. The comparison has involved a manual classification of the divers elements and the use of the computer programme Alceste

which provides a quantitative analysis of thematic content. As well as revealing patterns of diversity, reciprocity and continuity in and between countries and over time, this part of the research has also brought to the fore the idiosyncratic nature of the textbooks: despite significant regularities in content and procedure, it becomes quite clear that the final choices are made by the persons producing the book (the respective weight of author and publisher being outside the scope of the present stage of the research).

### *Theory and its integration*

The theories referred to, and the ways in which they are introduced into the discussion vary between textbooks. Despite this, regularities can be observed on national lines, whilst similarities at any given period in time are less easy to pinpoint. One pattern of change found in British textbooks is that the presentation of theories tends to be cumulative: as new theoretical perspectives emerge these are added to the perspectives which already feature. Change in French textbooks is much less systematic and tends to offer analysis of new trends affecting the family – also found in British textbooks - rather than of theoretical development as a cumulative process. This is due, at least in part, to the fact that the French texts tend to structure their presentation around a central concept or theoretical approach.

In general the British books set out to offer a fairly exhaustive coverage of the explanations of the family and of family life organised thematically rather than around more general theoretical perspectives such as Marxism or functionalism, though these latter do find their place in all chapters, very often in a separate section dedicated to theoretical perspectives. Thus Bottomore, after discussing kinship systems mentions anthropological studies using evolutionary and functionalist perspectives. The functionalist perspective is also

examined by Worsley in a section contrasting it with Marxist analysis, other theories critical of the functionalist approach are also mentioned, notably feminist theories. Interactionist approaches do not figure here, though they play an important role in other chapters. Haralambos also discusses functionalism and Marxism as well as critical views of the family, such as those of Cooper and Laing which owe much to both systems theories and interactionist theories. The 2000 edition contains several sections devoted to feminist perspectives. As for Giddens, whilst no theoretical section is to be found in the earlier editions, a short section devoted to “theoretical perspectives”, comprising a discussion of “functionalism”, “feminist approaches” and “new perspectives” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim), is introduced in 2001.

Of the French textbooks only *Manuel de sociologie* and *Sociologie Contemporaine* contain a theory section as such. Both Cuvillier and Mendras use an anthropological approach and include extensive sections on kinship in primitive cultures and diverse types of family form. The texts are illustrated by figures typical of structural anthropology such as the following showing family structures.

**TABLE 3 about here**

The theories contained in Cuvillier’s section “les théories de la famille” would not be recognised as sociological today; we find here “la théorie traditionnelle” which stipulates that the monogamic paternal family is the original social structure, “les théories de la promiscuité” which argues that primitive families were characterised by promiscuity, “les théories économiques” linking family forms and economic conditions and “les théories idéalistes”, in which the family is based on a principle rather than on blood ties (totem).

Ferréol and Noreck adopt a more sociological approach examining the relationship between family and society and discuss change in modern society. They organise their chapter

around various topics, for example “the augmentation of illegitimate fecundity” rather than around the presentation of theoretical perspective as such. As for Marie-Blanche Tahon and Geneviève de Pesloüan, the authors of the chapter on the family in *Sociologie Contemporaine*, in their section “the constitution of the field” they present and discuss the development of feminist and Marxist approaches to the sociology of the family.

Although in the way in which theory is used varies between countries, the differences are not as marked as might have been expected. All the same, we can observe patterns which, to a certain extent, remain within national boundaries and which are in keeping with the features observed more generally. The general tendency in Britain is to consider the family as an institution and to offer explanations for various aspects of the family and family life. In the two earlier books this is revealed in the opening statement, Bottomore affirming that: “The individual nuclear family is a universal social phenomenon.”(p.162) And Worsley: “The family, with its strengths and weaknesses and its possibilities for the future, is today at the centre of a lively and concerned debate.” (p. 165) In their earlier editions Haralambos and Giddens point out the importance that sociologists have accorded to the study of the family, later (2000 and 2001 respectively) their approach has changed, thus Haralambos’ first sentence “Many sociologists have regarded the family as the cornerstone of society.” (p. 325) becomes “The family has often been regarded as the cornerstone of society.” (p. 503) A similar change of emphasis, away from the questions sociologists ask towards the description of a more general attitude toward a social phenomenon takes place in Giddens. All the authors subsequently concentrate on the way in which sociologists have answered these questions and even Giddens, whose structure is the least bound by sociological theory, immediately offers a definition of the terms used (kinship, marriage, the family) followed by a section dedicated to theoretical perspectives.

Three out of four of the French textbooks begin by situating their discussion with relation to sociology as a discipline. Whilst Cuvillier evokes the problems encountered by sociologists in the study of the family which, he says, arise from the complexity and diversity of the institution itself, Ferréol and Noreck and Tahon and Pesloüan (in Durand and Weil) give priority to the ambiguities in the relationship between this field of study and sociology in general. For the former the study of the family is necessarily interdisciplinary, for the latter the interest of sociologists being relatively recent in France, it still needs to gain its autonomy as a field of research. In the later edition of *Sociologie contemporaine* the authors begin by explaining a change in approach which has resulted in the modification of the title of the chapter from “Sociologie de la famille et des rapports sociaux de sexe” to “Sociologie de la famille”. Among other reasons, the change can be justified by the necessity of separating these two fields of study which can be considered as autonomous. It is noteworthy that a chapter on gender is not added elsewhere in the textbook.

Mendras differs from the other French authors in his emphasis on the institution itself, his opening: “On dit fréquemment que...” translated into English would very much resemble the Haralambos (2000) opening cited above. He goes on to affirm that whereas kinship is said to be the framework of primitive society, the family could be considered as the basic cell of modern ones, an idea very similar to that put forward by Haralambos. With the exception of Mendras then, the French texts emphasise theories of the family whilst the British ones organise their discussion around observable social facts.

### *The themes*

Despite the disparity of certain aspects of thematic content, some patterns can be observed both within national traditions and over time. Some of the similarities and variations apparent



on a first reading were confirmed by subsequent computer analysis using the programme ALCESTE which also indicated factors which had previously been less visible. In both countries, with the exception of *Introduction à la sociologie*, the number of themes increases over time.

A first theme present to a greater or lesser extent in all the British textbooks and absent from the French sample is formulated as an answer to the question: “Is the family universal?”. In all except Giddens, where the question occupies only a few lines, this discussion takes up several pages during which family forms in different cultures are reviewed as are, in some of the textbooks, nuclear and non-nuclear forms of family in western societies. Common also to the British texts is a discussion of the relationship of the family to industrial society, with the exception of Worsley they adopt a historical perspective, establishing a link between different types of society and family structure. All British authors discuss the functions of the family and as from 1970 this is followed by a discussion of its dysfunctional aspects. Lastly, most of the British texts mention family breakdown (divorce) the later ones also giving space to remarriage and “new” types of family.

As has already been pointed out, the French texts are much more likely to structure their discussion around a single theme, as a result they contain fewer common features than the British sample. Both Cuvillier and Mendras accord considerable importance to a discussion of kinship systems they also include sections on marriage its role in various types of family group, they go on to present the family in modern society. Cuvillier explains also that kinship cannot be considered to be a natural phenomenon and must be viewed as a social construction. Ferréol and Noreck base their discussion around the relationship between family and society (socialisation, social change, relationship family/society) and the chapter in Durand et Weil takes a stance which owes much to Marxist and Marxist-feminist theory,

discussing social relations – class and gender - affecting family organisation and with regard to work as a more general phenomenon.

Some features are common to both countries at a given period and may disappear or appear. The first of these is the discussion of kinship forms in different cultures at different historical periods. We have observed the importance accorded to this aspect of the family by Cuvillier and Mendras, it also finds an important place in Bottomore and thus can be said to be characteristic of the earlier textbooks. Where primitive family forms are cited by other authors this tends to be as an illustration of another point - such as the diversity of family forms or social change – rather than in view of its own intrinsic interest. The subject of rupture divorce and violence within the family appears in the later books (particularly Giddens, 2000) and is given much more space in the British editions. In the case of divorce this would seem to be coherent with social trends, whilst violence within families has aroused increasing common interest over the last decade.

In keeping with the general trends already observed, the French books aim to present sociological or, often, anthropological explanations and analyses of the family and family forms, whilst in Britain social trends are more likely to provide a basis for the discussion. Whilst the two later French texts tend to present the questions raised in the form of general problems encountered in industrial societies (illustrated in *Introduction à la sociologie* with reference to statistical information obtained in France), the most recent British texts make much of the diversity of family forms encountered in these societies with particular emphasis on contemporary Great-Britain as a multi-cultural society.

### *Some explanations and conclusions*

A number of explanations can be offered for resemblance and variation between manuals. The first of these can be formulated with reference to the similarities and differences in academic tradition in the two countries. As far as the similarities are concerned, scientificity, which can be considered as a common criterion aimed at by European sociologists (Boudon, 1993), is an important preoccupation of all authors. It concerns, among other features, the objectivity of the sociologist (in their capacity as sociologists they avoid judging the reality studied), the empirical testing of hypotheses, and the use of disciplinary references. Similarities could also be explained by the fact that sociological traditions in both countries have been sensitive to American ideas, particularly in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when American sociology, according to several authors in both countries, was an important factor in the renewal of flagging French and British traditions. Of course exchanges have also occurred within Europe, thus it is hardly surprising to find common features.

As far as differences are concerned, even the simplest French textbooks such as *Sociologie Basique* (Coiffier et alii. 1990) and *Introduction à la sociologie* (Ignasse et Génissel 1999) do not link their theoretical explanation to everyday life in the manner of the British books. The differing student populations and the commercial interests of the publishers, already mentioned, form only part of the explanation. In Britain, sociology is usually considered to have emerged from the empirical tradition of social surveys, until the 1960's government policy was to encourage the applicability of results and theorising was often been considered somewhat suspect (Albrow, 1993: 85-86). This tradition is reflected by the textbooks in their insistence on real life situations and on the practical application of sociological ideas.

The origins of French sociology are quite different from the empirical tradition which has been prevalent in Great Britain. According to Michael Pollak, French

sociology has been dominated by philosophy and history with a resulting predilection for a literary style of expression, the investigation of major theoretical questions, and the rarity of empirical research (Pollak, 1976: 106). The first of these affirmations is borne out by Charles Lemert (1981), in whose opinion the stress on good reading and writing, involving among other things an extensive knowledge of literary references, has influenced the style of the sociological text. More recently, according to Drouard (1989: 71), two tendencies co-exist in French sociology: that of social philosophy linked to durkheimian thought which fostered a preoccupation with conceptualisation and theory, the second tendency is more sensitive to empirical thought brought in from America in particular by Gurvitch (as from around 1945). Nevertheless, the philosophical tradition continues to exert considerable influence on French sociology; in the 1970's when the first stage of the institutionalisation of sociology in France was completed (Chapoulie, 1991) a large majority of sociologists had a background in philosophy and though some came from other walks of life, many were trained at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* or other *Hautes Ecoles*. What is more, although many French sociologists spent some time in American universities, a certain ambivalence towards American sociology remained. The empirical and pragmatic import from the United States was assimilated by the French academic and intellectual tradition and adapted to the French social and academic context.

Whilst, the textbooks examined reflect the diverse national contexts whose sociology they aim to present, they also contain features of a more universal sociological tradition and, it would seem, particularly in Great-Britain, of textbooks as a particular form of presentation of sociological knowledge. As far as national traditions are concerned, convergence in both style of presentation and content can be observed, though this may vary over time. It is difficult to ascertain on the basis of such a limited study, the extent to which these similarities should be attributed to the textbook tradition in itself. The books

certainly contain common features and a certain amount emulation between authors can be observed. Amongst the characteristics which seem to cross national boundaries, are the reference to common “founding fathers” and to other important figures of international standing, the sharing of a certain number of analytical frameworks and disciplinary areas, and a consensus as to a certain number of criteria of admissibility deemed necessary if sociology is to be considered as scientific, such as objectivity, systematisation of results, articulation of the general and the specific, of theoretical and empirical data. Further research would be necessary in order to verify the applicability of these conclusions to sociological practice in general.

## *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> The French selection includes only manuals published in France and excludes French language publications from other countries such as Belgium and Canada which tend to differ stylistically from the French national texts.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank Emmanuel Henry for his help in counting various aspects of content.

<sup>3</sup> It has been suggested that Bottomore having spent and maintaining strong connections with French sociologists may well have been influenced by French practice as far as and presentation content are concerned.

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**TABLE 1**

British textbooks	French textbooks
T. B. Bottomore (1962) <i>Sociology: a guide to problems and literature</i> (330 p.)	Armand Cuvillier (1950/62/63/70) <i>Manuel de sociologie</i> (1099 p.)
Peter Worsley (1970/77/87) <i>(The New) Introducing sociology</i> (605 p.)	Henri Mendras (1967/89/2002) <i>Eléments de sociologie</i> (252 p.)
Michael Haralambos et alii (1980/85, 2002) <i>Sociology, themes and perspectives</i> (594 p.)	Gilles Ferréol et Jean-Pierre Noreck (1989 - 2003) <i>Introduction à la sociologie</i> (192 p.)
Anthony Giddens (1989/93, 2001) <i>Sociology</i> (819 pgs.)	Jean-Pierre Durand et Robert Weil (1993/97) <i>Sociologie contemporaine</i> (625 pgs.)

**TABLE 2**

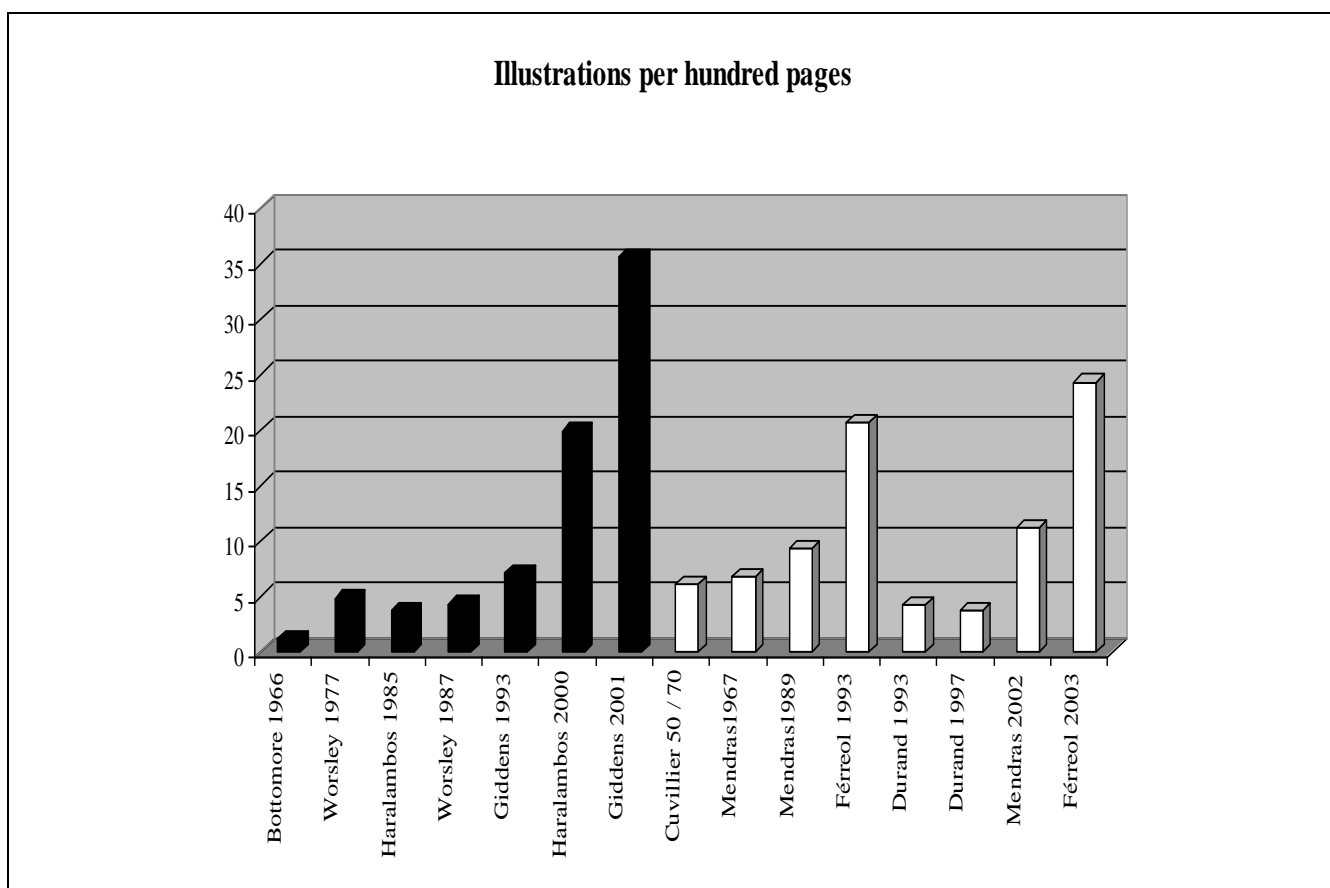


TABLE 3

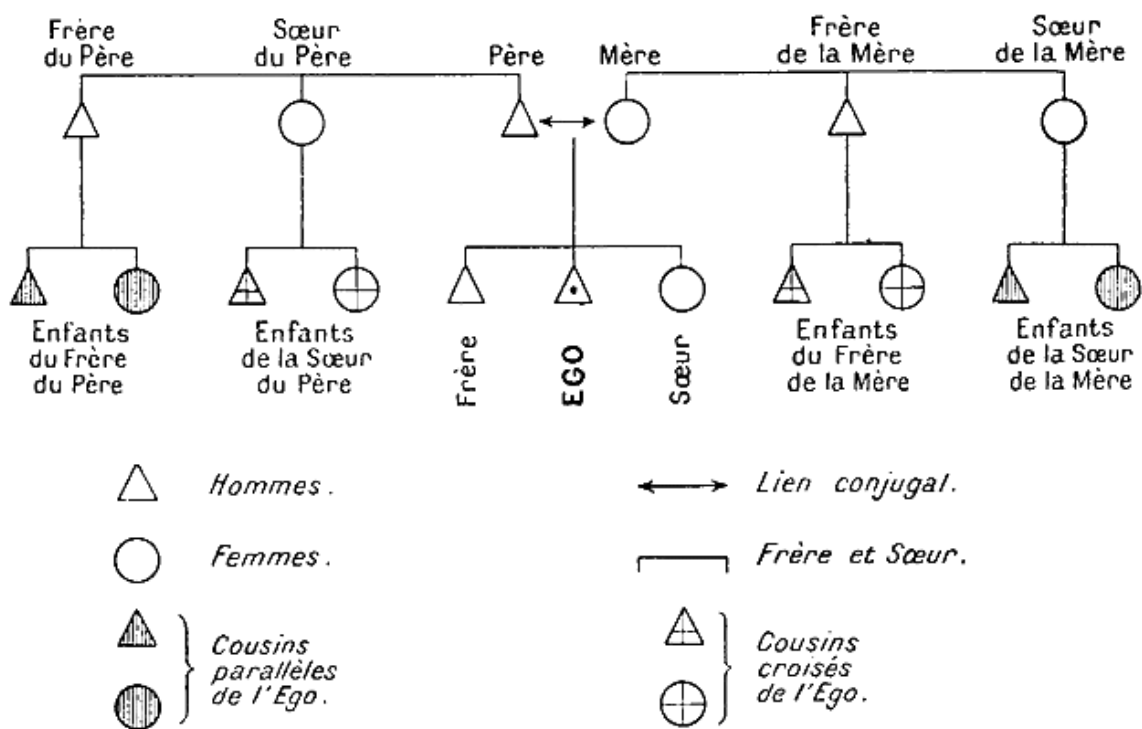


FIG. 26  
 COUSINS PARALLÈLES ET COUSINS CROISÉS

Parallel and crossed cousins: Cuvillier (1968: 554)