

Editorial Review of Volume 15

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Our 1973 volume displays an encouraging rise in the vigor of debate over conceptualization of the processes of change through which complex societies 'transform' themselves. Dean C. Tipps's critique of modernization theory (in 15:2) goes further than Reinhard Bendix's (in 9:3) and indeed cuts deeper, methodologically, than any yet published elsewhere. Readers weary of the vogue of hailing every innovation in the older agrarian societies as part of a common evolutionary movement may be inclined to agree with his conclusion that: 'The results of almost two decades of modernization theory do not justify a third.' As he observes, 'it has done remarkably little to stimulate or facilitate the actual comparative study of societies'. Constructive responses to his plea for a fresh start, one that will heed Durkheim's warning against mistaking a concept for a fact, will be welcome.

Joseph Ben-David's review essay in the present issue (15:4) admirably fills our need of a calm survey of other major problems that have lately been turning sociology into a battlefield. Like Tipps, Ben-David relies on logic and on theoretical effort generating testable propositions to discredit the idea that ideological distortion is inevitable. On this point readers might look at Halpern and Hammel's discussion (in 11:1) of the state of the social sciences in Yugoslavia. Unlike Tipps, however, and in opposition to those who want a universal theory grounded in psychology, Ben-David would be content with better generalizing effort within sub-fields, supplying propositions to be tested within the forms of structural-functional analysis that were borrowed from British social anthropology in the 1930s.

Many contributors to *CSSH* have used this method to advantage in wringing new meaning out of historical research. D. E. Brown (in 15:4) adapts it to codifying continuities and change in people's classification of ranked social groupings. His own research has been on the history of an ancient Malay kingdom in Borneo, but he compares his findings with M. G. Smith's on the Zazzau of Africa, and his method might well be applicable to any society under aristocratic domination. Several of these were studied from other points of view in our volumes 2, 5 and 9.

Economic history is so old a home of comparative study and so well served by its own journals that *CSSH* rarely trenches on it save where social and political correlates of stability or change are of obvious importance. The articles by Wolfram Fischer and by J. S. and L. D. MacDonald (in 15:2) and the model of the situation of economically dependent small states offered by A. W. and N. L. Singham (in 15:3) are of this character. Marie Perinbam (in 15:4) tries to fit several centuries of Muslim economy in the western Sudan into the familiar Polanyite model in which trade is seen as governed more by social considerations than by market principles. Confronting the phenomenon of rising prices in time of scarcity she interprets action by brokers in legitimizing the rise, and her lack of evidence about any effect of prices on production, as still proving her thesis. Her effort is an honest one, but an economist would hardly be satisfied with so simple a model. J. J. Spengler's paper on 'The Economic Thought of Islam: Ibn Khaldūn' (in 6:3) and his comment supplementing Irfan Habib's 'Usury in Medieval India' (in 6:4) are relevant here. Ibn Khaldūn wrote very intelligently about supply and demand.

Space does not permit adequate expansion here of the brief editorial prefaces to the first three numbers of this volume, which showed how other articles fit into series with a cumulative comparative and theoretical intent. Suffice it to say that the contributions on family and demography, on roles of women, on new ways of comparing religions, on the social and political structure of cities and on cultural borrowing, will play into continuing series. But special notice is due two more of the review essays in 15:4, those by John Demos on the history of the family and by Robert Nisbet on what he has chosen to call 'The Myth of the Renaissance'. Demos splendidly expresses the spirit in which social historians are reordering their field by going directly to documents of individual experience and by struggling to generalize from these. Nisbet's essay well justifies the editorial policy of setting a fine generalizing mind to review historical work that is rich in detail. Not only are his comments on the popular appeal of the idea of rebirth and his disagreements with some of the conclusions of great historians of Italian humanism provocative, but he has seized on one of the characteristics of the humanists—their fascination with power—as common to numerous groups of intellectuals throughout history. This point is an addition to the sketch drawn by Edward Shils in his lead article in *CSSH*'s first issue, now reprinted in his *The Intellectuals and the Powers and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).