

Louise Tilly in Intergenerational Perspective

Author(s): Michael Hanagan and Mary Jo Maynes

Source: *Social Science History*, Vol. 38, No. 1-2 (Spring/Summer 2014), pp. 71-78

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/90017019>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Social Science History*

JSTOR

Louise Tilly in Intergenerational Perspective

Michael Hanagan and Mary Jo Maynes

Louise Tilly is noteworthy as an historian, a mentor, and a distiller of feminist thought. Her work covers a variety of fields. In the field of labor history she produced an important study of political contention in Italy, *Politics and Class in Milan, 1881–1901*, and, along with Charles and Richard Tilly, a widely influential study of collective action, *The Rebellious Century* (Tilly 1994; Tilly et al. 1975). Her most influential work is in the arena of women's and family history, most notably *Women, Work, and Family*, a product of her collaboration with Joan Scott (Tilly and Scott 1978). She was also a member of the Panel on Women's Work and Technology of the National Research Council, which produced a signal study of the evolution of women's white collar work and its prospects, *Computer Chips and Paper Clips: Technology and Women's Employment*, and she possessed a keen interest in the intersection between demographic and family history as shown in her coedited collection on European fertility decline (Gillis et al. 1992; National Research Council 1986). Before illness forced her to cease work, she was moving into global history where her most important contribution was her presidential address to the American Historical Association (AHA) that outlined a distinctive and original approach to world history (Tilly 1994).

Through her ideas and pedagogy, Louise Tilly inspired colleagues and younger scholars who, in turn, drew upon her work and teaching methods as they pursued their own careers. Today, Tilly's intellectual legacy is apparent in the ongoing influence of her scholarship, but also in ongoing conversations across scholarly generations, through her students and her students' students. Encountering more recent theoretical paradigms, her students have discarded some of her ideas while giving new emphasis or interpretation to others. This special section reconsiders Tilly's legacies in an intergenerational framework, where cohorts defined by academic career position—graduate students, assistant professors, professors, and so forth—intersect with age cohorts shaped by a succession of intellectual and political influences.

Louise Tilly: Feminist and Social Scientist

Tilly's feminist scholarship emerged when she was a young faculty member at Michigan State University and then the University of Michigan in the context of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, now known as "second-wave feminism." An earlier "first-wave feminism" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century focused largely on suffrage and legal hindrances to gender equality. In contrast, second-wave feminism increased the scope of feminist concerns to incorporate a wide range of social, class, family, and cultural issues. In a larger historiographical perspective, second-wave feminism coincided with the rise of the new social history, and, somewhat later, a new cultural history.

Within this political and historiographical context Tilly's scholarship was both field-changing and prescient. The publication in 1978 of *Women, Work, and Family*, coauthored with Joan Scott who was then a young professor at the University of North Carolina, took feminist history in new directions; it established a model for thinking about intersections between families and economies in Europe that emphasized the activities and historical agency of peasant and working-class women. In terms of both subject matter and method, Tilly and Scott implicitly criticized and went beyond the search for "great women" that had been all too prevalent among pioneering first-wave forays into women's history. As Scott reminds us in her contribution to this section, the book also challenged what she and Tilly saw as politically limiting misperceptions circulating among many second-wave feminists: "Paid labor and emancipation," Scott recalls, "may have been synonymous for some women in the twentieth century, but not for all—we wanted to write a history to demonstrate that. Feminist activists would benefit, we believed, from a more complex story about women's work" (p. 114).

Women, Work, and Family played an important role in the move of feminist historians toward a new type of analysis of gender, especially in the context of emergent black feminist critiques of mainstream feminism for its inattention to race. The feminist theoretical discussions of the 1970s and 1980s, to which the book offered a vital contribution, took feminism toward a more complex criticism with an emphasis on "intersectionality" among multiple dimensions—initially race, class, and gender—of social relations, subject formation, and forms of power and oppression.

In this book and throughout her career, Tilly stressed approaches to history that emphasized the agency of ordinary people; she defended the sources and methods that made it possible to write such history. In her 1994 presidential address to the AHA, "Connections," Tilly began with a tribute to E. P. Thompson, who had recently died and whose documentation of the cultural history of the English working class and of the political agency of ordinary people noted as one of her earliest inspirations. In her tribute Tilly lauded Thompson's love of the case study with its rich local-level analysis. She recognized the importance of large structures and big processes but often felt that discovering patterned action at the microlevel was key to understanding structure, process, and agency at macrolevels (Tilly 1994). Still, she also insisted on the necessity for the historian to stand outside actors' cultures, as it were, to view historical actors and the sources that document them within larger structured relationships of economy, power, and space.

In the early 1990s, when she was a professor at the New School for Social Research in New York, Tilly anticipated historiographical trends by expanding her spatial frame of analysis toward the global. Tilly's 1994 AHA presidential address also made a strong case for the global interconnectedness of social-historical developments (in terms of work, family, gender, and generational relations and politics) in localities as widely dispersed as India, England, and France. Tilly's turn toward global history did not signify an abandonment of local-level analysis but rather a look at how such analysis could be integrated into a new global history. She sketched out a stunning comparative analysis of how the differing positionalities of Indian and

European textile workers within an evolving imperialist framework constrained in very different ways their labor struggles and the historical evolution of local connections between work and family. Tilly asked her audience to take the analysis further, and she launched this call at a time when pioneering departments of history were just beginning to introduce a world history curriculum.¹ The World History Association had just been founded in 1982; it would be another decade before world historians would begin to incorporate gender analysis into courses (and conference programs).

Tilly's work still offers insights valuable to current discussion in global history. For example, currently one of the most exciting developments in this area is the school of Global Labor History centered at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam and associated with Jan Lucassen and Marcel van der Linden. The school of Global Labor History seeks to broaden our definition of labor to include free and unfree labor—slaves, sex workers, soldiers, and serfs. It looks at labor from a long perspective that can encompass centuries. It does not assume that borders or states are fundamental units of analysis. In a recent article Marcel van der Linden summarized the group's approach in terms very reminiscent of Tilly's AHA address on "Connections." Van der Linden (2012) writes: "In my view, global history is primarily concerned with the description and explanation of the intensifying (or weakening) connections (interactions, influences, transfers) between different world regions, as well as of the economic, political, social, and cultural networks, institutions" (p. 62).

While Tilly, of course, agreed about the centrality of connections to the study of world history, she pursued these connections further; she sought to integrate family and gender firmly into global history. For her, "any account of how men and women navigated the large-scale structural changes through which they were living must consider the family household balance of power and bargaining between husbands and wives, parents and children, as well as labor market conditions" (1994: 17). Her emphasis on family dynamics in world history still constitutes a challenge to world historians. Sadly, Tilly's illness meant the book she envisioned writing along these lines never appeared.² Nevertheless, this aspect of her work also anticipated more recent innovative research initiatives linking family, life course, and labor history with the dynamics of global history. For example, these intersections are at the core of the interdisciplinary project "Re:work: Work and Human Life Cycle in Global

1. One example of the burgeoning interest in the issues Tilly posed in the 1994 address are the papers presented at the "Cotton Research Project: Session 59," of the XIV International Economic History Congress, Helsinki, 21–25 August 2006. These papers, as well as those of other related projects, are archived at the Global Economic History website at the London School of Economics at <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/economicHistory/Research/GEHN/GEHNHelsinkiSessionPapers.aspx> (accessed April 13, 2015).

2. In notes to the 1994 AHA presidential address, Tilly described her planned project as follows: "The following discussion of the early effects on spinners and weavers of the new technologies and increased scale and concentration in larger units that lay at the heart of the Industrial Revolution are part of an ongoing larger project that looks at capitalist and state-promoted industrialization, growth of the state, and family and gender relations in a world historical perspective" (Tilly 1994).

History” directed by Andreas Eckert and affiliated with the Humboldt University in Berlin.³

Tilly’s Work in Intergenerational Conversation

The essays collected here attest to Tilly’s legacy. Her influence can still be seen in the work of her own students and colleagues of the 1970s and 1980s at Michigan State University and the University of Michigan who are presently engaged in historical scholarship. The current project that Miriam Cohen, a student of Tilly at Michigan in the 1970s, is working on with Michael Hanagan (who is also a mentee of Tilly) is intellectually ambitious in ways reminiscent of Tilly’s work. The project—a comparative history of the welfare state in England, France, and the United States—is attentive at one and the same time to the actions and fate of ordinary working people in these three countries even while it explores how varied and changing state policies shaped and also responded to people making history “from below.” As Cohen makes clear in her article in this section, Tilly’s model prepared the way for work such as this through her “ongoing commitment to agency and strategy [that] undergirded her vision for a global history that made connections between large-scale processes across space, between human agency and structure, and between the past and present” (p. 79). Tilly’s interest in demographic history, in migration and labor scarcity, emphasized by Cohen, recall aspects of Tilly’s work largely unexplored, even by her students. Perhaps it offers a path for a third generation?

Tilly’s influence can also be seen in the work of her students’ students who matured as scholars of history in the quite different intellectual atmosphere of the past two decades. Two of the essays in this section are written by students of students of Tilly—Maddalena Marinari and Emily Bruce—who take quite distinctive approaches to writing history but still see and acknowledge a common intellectual heritage. Maddalena Marinari (a student of Donna Gabaccia, who studied with Tilly at the University of Michigan) explores “how Italian[s] and Jew[s] ... in the United States mobilized against restrictive immigration laws” (p. 89). Marinari sees connections between her work and Tilly’s along three analytical axes: collective action, the transnational as a historical arena, and an interest in the political influence in this arena of nonstate actors. Drawing on Tilly’s example Marinari examines a range of organizations that includes ethnic associations and paid lobbyists. While collective action may play a role, success typically requires coalitions of diverse groups and favorable moments as well as transnational negotiation and cooperation. As Marinari has learned from Gabaccia and Tilly, transnational political mobilization is more complicated still because it involves not only more actors and more varied situations

3. According to the mission statement written by Eckert and Jürgen Kocka, the work of the center will “contribute to the history of work and labour . . . [and] to an exploration of the ways in which human beings have structured and perceived their life course . . . [and] to arrive at broad comparisons and study interconnections across borders on a global scale, thus contributing to the advancement of global history.” <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/arbeit/en/mission-and-themes.html> (accessed April 13, 2015).

but because it may involve push-pull effects in which events in one nation interact and influence one another. Like Cohen, Marinari finds inspiration in the ongoing project of which Tilly was a pioneer—exploring “connections between structure and action, individuals and processes, the past and the present, and settings distant in space” (1994: 1-2).

Emily Bruce (currently writing a dissertation under the direction of Mary Jo Maynes, who studied with Louise Tilly at the University of Michigan), operates at the intersection of cultural and social history, “combining cultural histories of reading with social historical approaches to the roles played by girls and women in European social life” (p. 97). Her research on children’s reading in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Germany builds on the traditions of gender and family history pioneered by Tilly; Bruce pushes the question of agency in new directions by exploring the historical agency of children, and of girls in particular. Bruce’s work crosses class milieus; the sources she discusses here, she acknowledges, pertain to “a relatively elite class whose historiographical primacy Tilly’s work helped to decenter” (p. 98). Still, she points out, “My emphasis on girlhood is undeniably influenced by [Tilly’s] attention to the family as a site of history” (p. 98). Bruce’s work sheds new light on the family as a site of history, and on gender and generational relations as definitive in terms of class formation and cultural orientations, albeit in bourgeois rather than working-class milieus, and largely through the lens of German sources.

In the hands of subsequent students Tilly’s heritage becomes less a fixed set of ideas persisting over time than a continuing dialogue between past and present. The results of this dialogue, as Elizabeth Pleck argues, provide critical perspective for students as well as new opportunities for the elaboration and renewal of Tilly’s arguments. Pleck, who was a colleague of Tilly at the University of Michigan, demonstrates how Tilly’s work can still yield valuable insights in an age of “third-wave feminism” that has engaged with the scholarship of the linguistic turn and intersectionality and their challenges to second-wave feminist history. Based on an article by Louise Tilly, Joan Scott, and Miriam Cohen that appeared in 1976, Pleck reminds us that Tilly and her collaborators initiated important discussions in the arena of the history of sexuality (Tilly et al. 1976). This article challenged Edward Shorter’s claim that proletarianization brought sexual liberation and that out-of-wedlock pregnancies could be read as an index of female liberation. Instead, Tilly et al. pointed out, such births stigmatized unwed mothers and made them more vulnerable. Pleck claims that the argument presented in this early article still offers a valuable vantage point for historical inquiry. Pleck takes the ideas presented in that article, for example, to offer a critical perspective on recent work such as that of Clare Lyons who has analyzed sexuality in late eighteenth-century Philadelphia in her book *Sex among the Rabble* (Lyons 2007). Louise Tilly was always keenly interested in the ways in which family membership shaped relations with the outside world. The influential article by Tilly et al., discussed in this paper, raised a key question of whether in the nineteenth-century industrial world families were protectors of vulnerable, single, poor working women or constrainers of working-class women’s sexuality. Pleck’s

historiographical discussion shows that these questions are still a matter of lively interest among historians today.

Louise Tilly as Network Builder

Joan Scott's discussion in this section of Tilly's letters brings out a whole other aspect of her *modus operandi* as a pioneering feminist historian: Tilly's participation in a large feminist network, her talent in making women's history visible, and her active public role in feminist debates. Tilly's evolution as a scholar and teacher was based on her own particular trajectory of development but also of the historical context in which she labored and the intellectual community she helped to build. In many ways the core of Tilly's professional practice emerged during her years of collaboration with Joan Scott when she was teaching at Michigan State and the University of Michigan. Scott's contribution to this collection circles us back to the mid-1970s when she and Tilly were writing *Women, Work, and Family*, an age before electronic communications had rendered handwritten and typed letters obsolete, and also before the theoretical and political shifts of the 1980s transformed historiography and feminism. Scott's focus is on letters exchanged between Tilly and herself. The wonderful quality of letters is apparent here—what Liz Stanley has termed “a flies in amber quality”; letters “do things with and to time” in that “the present tense of the letter recurs—or rather occurs—not only in its first reading but subsequent ones too” (2004: 208).⁴

The letters that Scott shares and reflects upon here recall a particularly important moment in the history of feminism and in the historiography of women and gender—that is, in Scott's words, “the moment of a burgeoning feminist movement in the United States; our students and many colleagues were looking to replace his-story with her-story” (p. 114). The letters provide access to the private, interpersonal communications behind and before the public pronouncements and publications. They offer us privileged access to the moment when new approaches and questions were being formulated. Rereading the letters provokes Scott to recall how thinking about conceptualizations was evolving: “The theme of work's emancipatory effects was a critique of Goode and Shorter, but that also allowed us, indirectly perhaps, to challenge similar feminist arguments (Goode 1970; Shorter 1975). Tied to that was the issue of power: How to measure it? . . . What was the relationship between this kind of family division of labor and political economy's definition of men as breadwinners?” And of course, class was a pervasive concern: “We agreed that the category of ‘women’ was too homogeneous, that class mattered in some way in the patterns of household structure, but how?”

The letters also document the politics of the field of history as women like Scott and Tilly strategized about how to move the emergent area of “women's history” in directions that they favored. For example, in a letter from 1975 or 1976, Tilly discusses a plan to develop the field “along the lines I'd like to see instead of the polemic feminism that is the style of the other folks and use it to involve more scholars working

4. See Stanley 2004. For a discussion of letters as historical sources see Maynes et al. 2008.

on women from the university” (p. 115). At the same time, the letters also addressed the professional question of how to get women historians on conference programs or boards of professional organizations. “Rereading the correspondence,” Scott notes “one gets the sense of a veritable ‘old girls’ network’ being formed with Louise as one of its pivots” (p. 116). Both Scott and Tilly were already actively involved in important organizations like the AHA and the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians. Tilly eventually served as the first woman president of the Social Science History Association (in 1981–82) and was one of the very few women to be elected president of the AHA (in 1993) prior to the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Finally, the letters provide fascinating documentation of these two women at work. They address collaborative writing (then a rarity but now far more common especially among feminist and global historians). The letters from Tilly are filled with allusions to “the personal”—to the everyday life concerns that reflected her own approach to combining work and family: “Another day,” notes Scott, “she continues by hand a letter begun on a typewriter, as she sits in her car, ‘having had to set out on errands and children chauffeuring (and waiting)’” (p. 114).

The letters are very much of their moment, even if they pose questions that will evoke very different answers and critiques in years to come. In this sense, they portend a future that was as yet unimaginable. There is as yet no sign that within a decade the critique of second-wave feminism would explode the category of “woman” in far more radical ways than Tilly and Scott imagined. Nor that the influence of European postmodern theory, to which Scott would provide historians in the United States with the most visible and compelling introduction, would undermine the discipline’s epistemological certainties. Nor that the erosion of the political institutions of the New Left and working-class politics would in its own way serve to dissolve the certainties of the class and gender identities that had been presumed by socialist-feminist analyses of the 1970s.

Louise Tilly and her students developed their own responses to the rapidly changing debates and intellectual reorientations of the 1980s and 1990s, but they did so still embracing ideas that Tilly had developed and training students in ways that they had learned from her.

A key aspect of Tilly’s pedagogy was the close relationship between personal and political as described by Leslie Moch. She traveled with a set of index cards and often passed these out to her students with useful citations for them that she had accumulated over the course of her most recent research. The heavy bags that she carried across Michigan’s quad or New York’s Union Square, later on, when she was based at the New School, might just as well contain newly discovered sources for her students as for herself. Leslie Moch’s essay in this section reminds us that Tilly was committed to history as social science and she frequently passed on to her students articles by economists and sociologists that she expected them to read and debate. Such active mentoring included frequent coauthorships with her graduate students, a practice that many of Tilly’s mentees have continued. Moreover, while Moch’s own scholarly contributions have focused on migration, she reminds us of how her work on migration has always paid attention to its gendered and familial dimensions, the result of her early and close collaborations with Tilly.

Tilly was remarkably successful in recruiting a group of graduate students who thought of themselves as working together in a common endeavor. Many graduate schools foster a competitive attitude among individual graduate students but such sentiments were not encouraged by Tilly nor her husband and frequent collaborator Charles Tilly. Graduate students frequently met at their house to hear papers and meet famous scholars. Tilly students were expected to help one another in the labor of research. She came relatively late in her own life course to academia and, although perfectly familiar with the rules of the game, never fully adopted its formalities and resisted its hierarchies; the nature of the ties she developed with colleagues and students put into practice not just a new politics of the personal, but also a new politics of the professional.

For many historians it has a great privilege to participate in the intellectual community shaped by Louise Tilly. Over the course of almost forty years of Louise Tilly's career, she has influenced three generations of historians who have contributed substantially to the historical profession. Some threads of her intellectual lineage can be traced from her founding writings and professional practices as evidence in the essays published here.

References

- Cotton Research Project: Session 59, XIV International Economic History Congress, Helsinki, August 21–25, 2006, <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/economicHistory/Research/GEHN/GEHNHelsinkiSessionPapers.aspx> (accessed September 4, 2013).
- Eckert, Andreas, and Jürgen Kocka (2015) "Mission and themes: Work and life course as historical problems. Perspectives of the International Research Center 're:work,'" <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/arbeit/en/mission-and-themes.html> (accessed September 4, 2013).
- Gillis, John R., Louise A. Tilly, and David Levine, eds. (1992) *The European Experience of Declining Fertility: A Quiet Revolution 1850–1970*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Goode, William J. (1970) *World Revolution in Family Patterns*. New York: Free Press.
- Lyons, Clare A. (2007) *Sex among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution*. Williamsburg, VA: University of North Carolina Press.
- Maynes, Mary Jo, Jennifer Pierce, and Barbara Laslett (2008) *Telling Stories: The Analysis of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- National Research Council (1986) *Computer Chips and Paper Clips: Technology and Women's Employment*. 2 vols. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Shorter, Edward (1975) *The Making of the Modern Family*. New York: Basic Books.
- Stanley, Liz (2004) "The epistolarium: On theorizing letters and correspondences." *Auto/Biography* 12: 201–35.
- Tilly, Charles, Louise Tilly, and Richard Tilly (1975) *The Rebellious Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tilly, Louise A. (1975) *Politics and Class in Milan, 1881–1901*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (1994) "Connections." *American Historical Review* 99 (1): 1–17.
- Tilly, Louise A., and Joan W. Scott (1978) *Women, Work, and Family*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Tilly, Louise A., Joan W. Scott, and Miriam Cohen (1976) "Women's work and European fertility patterns." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6 (3): 447–76.
- Van der Linden, Marcel (2012) "The promise and challenge of global labor history." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 82 (2): 57–76.