

Texten nedan är inledningen, s. 3-4, i Gisèle Sapiro, *Collective biographies and the theory of "literary field"*, Skeptron Occasional Papers, No. 9, 1996

Prosopography. Definition and suggested readings

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This issue presents two papers based on Gisèle Sapiro's talks during three seminars in Stockholm in September 1995. They are written in English by Gisèle Sapiro in September 1995 and checked and copy-edited by Boel Englund and Lena Österlsson.

Gisèle Sapiro, specialist in sociology of literature, is newly appointed CNRS research fellow at Centre de sociologie de l'éducation et de la culture, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris. Her doctoral thesis on the French literary field during and after the German occupation was written under the supervision of Pierre Bourdieu and presented in December 1994.¹ It is an eminent application of the prosopographic method inspired by Bourdieu's works.

A prosopography is a kind of collective biography. I propose the following definition: 1) prosopography is the study of individuals belonging to the same field; 2) it is based on a comprehensive collection of data (maybe hundreds of variables) on these individuals, e.g., their social origin, educational background, trajectories, their positions in the social space and in the field, their standpoints in matters crucial to the field, and their resources in different respects—especially their holdings of symbolic capital specific to the field; 3) the same set of data should as far as possible be collected for each and every individual; 4) the main object of study is not the individuals per se but rather the history and structure of the field itself.

These four basic traits characterise the prosopographic studies undertaken by Bourdieu and his followers. Whether the data are treated by means of sophisticated multivariate quantitative techniques (often correspondence analysis) or in a more qualitative mode is of minor importance, since the choice of techniques is depending on the availability and quality of data. In historical research it is in most cases difficult to establish exhaustive data sets, since you might miss information on educational background for one individual, father's profession for another, etc. In other cases, as in survey research, the questionnaires or information retrieval tools might be standardised in order to allow for multivariate data analysis.

Bourdieu's study on the Parisian academic field² is a famous example of prosopography, as well as his work together with Monique de Saint-Martin on the French top managers.³ In both

¹ Gisèle Sapiro: *Complicités et anathèmes en temps de crise : modes de survie du champ littéraire et de ses institutions, 1940—1953 (Académie française, Académie Goncourt, Comité national des écrivains)*. Tome I-II. Unpubl. diss. Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Déc 1994, 702 p. An article on the same subject is Gisèle Sapiro: "Académie française et Académie Goncourt dans les années '40. Fonction et fonctionnement des institutions de la vie littéraire en période de crise nationale", *Texte. Revue de critique et de théorie littéraire* (Toronto, Canada), no 12, 1992, pp. 151-196.

² Pierre Bourdieu: *Homo academicus*. Paris: Minuit, 1984, 299 p. (German translation: *Homo academicus*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1988, 455 p.; English translation: *Homo academicus* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988, 344 p.)

³ Pierre Bourdieu and Monique de Saint Martin: "Le patronat", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. IV, n° 20-21, mars-avril 1978, pp. 3-82. (Revised reprint pp. 371 ff in P. Bourdieu: *La noblesse d'État. Grandes écoles et esprit de corps*. Paris: Minuit, 1989, 569 p.)

cases correspondence analysis was used. Less well known outside narrow circles of specialists is the sociologist Victor Karady's pioneering work in collecting data on, i.a., late 19th and early 20th century French scholars, especially in social sciences.⁴ Besides using the material in various seminal articles Karady has for many years generously put his filing cabinets to the disposal of many French and foreign researchers interested in French university and intellectual history. Another master in the prosopographic genre is the historian Christophe Charle⁵, who has under-taken extensive analyses of late 19th and early 20th century intellectual, academic and political élites in France. An important contribution to the prosopography of French literature—and a point of comparison for Gisèle Sapiro who studied a later period—was Rémy Ponton's 3^e cycle thesis based on information on more than 600 French authors from the second half of the 19th century.⁶ Neither Karady, Charle or Ponton (or Gisèle Sapiro, so far) have used advanced multi-variate quantitative techniques (with the exception of some unpublished attempts by Ponton).

Gisèle Sapiro's thesis is, thus, a late offspring of this small but vivid French tradition. She collected extensive information on 140 French authors from the 1940s and early 1950s. For each and everyone of them she tried to obtain information on social origin, secondary and higher education, date of first publication, political and aesthetic standpoints, etc., in all 128 variables, though of course not complete for all individuals. It took in all four years to extract these data from a wide array of sources. Prosopographic research based on historical sources is a cumbersome and time-consuming task, which no doubt partly explains that full-fledged studies are relatively rare.

The first accomplished Scandinavian prosopographic study in this tradition was Ingrid Heyman's doctoral thesis on the emerging field of nursing science⁷, which happened to be presented in September 1995 and intensively discussed during the seminar series in which Gisèle Sapiro made her interventions.

Gisèle Sapiro's sojourn in Stockholm was arranged within the framework of a French-Swedish research co-operation program engaging on the one hand two centres at École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Centre de sociologie de l'éducation et de la culture; Centre de recherche historique) and on the other hand two milieus in Stockholm (the research group Sociology of education and culture, Stockholm Institute of education; Department of Economic history, Stockholm University). This long-term program that started in 1995 is

⁴ Victor Karady: *Stratification intellectuelle, rapports sociaux et institutionnalisation : enquête socio-historique sur la naissance de la discipline sociologique en France*. Unpubl., A.T.P. du C.N.R.S. n° 6348. Paris: Centre de sociologie européenne, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, novembre 1974.

⁵ Cf. Christophe Charle: *Les élites de la république*. Paris: Fayard, 1987, 556 p.; *Naissance des "intellectuels" 1880-1900*. Paris: Minuit, 1990, 272 p.; *La république des universitaires 1870-1940*. Paris: Euil, 1994, 520 p. Besides these monographs one should also mention three collections of biographical data on French academics: Charle: *Dictionnaire biographique des universitaires aux XIXe et XXe siècles. Volume 1, La Faculté des lettres de Paris (1809-1908)*. Paris: Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique; Éditions du C.N.R.S., 1985, 179 p.; Christophe Charle: *Les professeurs de la Faculté des lettres de Paris. Dictionnaire biographique 1909-1939. Volume 2*. Paris: Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique; Éditions du C.N.R.S., 1986, 217 p.; Christophe Charle and Eva Telkès: *Les professeurs du Collège de France. Dictionnaire biographique (1901-1939)*. Paris: Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique; Éditions du C.N.R.S., 1988, 248 p.

⁶ Rémy Ponton: *Le Champ littéraire de 1865 à 1906. Recrutement des écrivains, structures des carrières et production des oeuvres*. Unpubl. (Doctorat de 3^e cycle). Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1977.

⁷ Ingrid Heyman: *Gånge hatt till... Omvårdnadsforskningens framväxt i Sverige — sjuksköterskors avhandlingar 1974—1991*. Göteborg: Daidalos, 1995, 346 p. The study is based on a set of data on the first generations of Swedish nurses to take a doctor's degree as well as data on the form and content of their dissertations.

financed by the Swedish governmental special founding of "co-operation with foreign élite universities", as well as by Maison des sciences de l'homme, Paris. The activities comprise exchange of researchers and post-graduate students, co-operation on courses and seminars within the doctorate education, workshops and conferences, publications, etc.⁸

Stockholm, March 1996

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⁸ Cf. D.Broady, U.Jonsson, *Ansökan om medel för forsknings- och forskarutbildningssamverkan med École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*, 19 Oct. 1993.