Trends and Causes of Cultural Modernization

An Empirical Study of First Names

Jürgen Gerhards and Rolf Hackenbroch

University of Leipzig

abstract: The empirical basis of our research forms a systematic content analysis of the birth register of a state registry office from 1894 to 1994. We interpret the development of first names as an indicator which measures trends of cultural change: we analyse (1) whether there are secularization processes (measurement: the amount of first names of Christian origin); (2) whether the importance of family relationship is decreasing (measurement: number of children who are named after their parents); (3) whether social class is losing its importance (measurement: homogeneity of names in social classes); (4) whether there are processes of individualization (measurement: heterogeneity of names); and (5) whether there are processes of globalization of culture (measurement: number of names from other cultures). In addition, we formulate possible explanations of these trends and test them empirically.

keywords: culture ✦ first names ✦ Germany ✦ modernization ✦ social change

Introduction

Classical sociological theory offers a variety of different descriptions of cultural modernization. Durkheim and Simmel depicted the rise of the individual as one of the essential elements of modern culture. According to Durkheim, the process of individualization is intimately related to the dissolution of family ties. Weber, among others, emphasized instead the

process of secularization, through which beliefs in a transcendent reality lose their meaning. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the unmistakable mark of cultural modernization is the development of a global, supra-national culture. Finally, a number of authors, notably Clark et al. (1993) and Beck (1983), argue that cultural modernization erodes the effectiveness of class structures in the constitution of distinct social groups. While all of these descriptions are well known, little attempt has been made to integrate them into a coherent concept of cultural modernization, much less to support their claims with empirical evidence. Some studies have addressed specific notions of cultural modernization individually by examining trends from the past 20 years (Ester et al., 1993; Inglehart, 1989), but we know very little about long-term developments.

In view of these deficiencies, we have attempted to describe how the names chosen for newborn children reflect processes of cultural change extending over a period of 100 years. Further, we have sought to explain these processes in the light of accompanying structural changes. First names provide an indicator that allows us to measure cultural moderniz- ation. In this study, we draw on the concept of cultural indicators devel- oped by Gerbner and Rosengren (Gerbner, 1969, 1973; Rosengren, 1981, 1986, 1989; Melischek et al., 1984; Namenwirth and Weber, 1987).[1] For practical reasons, cultural research cannot rely on survey data. No such data are available for studies that cover long periods of time, and they cannot be gathered after the fact. Processes of cultural change can only be rendered visible using indicators drawn from historical documents.

Sociologists and historians have sometimes used first names as a cul- tural indicator.[2] Some works (Miller, 1927; Rossi, 1965; Taylor, 1974; Lieberson, 1984; Alford, 1988; Lieberson and Bell, 1992; London and Morgan, 1994; Lieberson and Mikelson, 1995) do attempt to reconstruct class, gender and ethnic differences in the selection and innovation of names. Streiff-Fenart (1990) has analysed names of children of mixed French-Maghrebian couples as an indicator of successful cultural repro- duction. Watkins and London (1994) compare the patterns of personal names of Italian and Jewish immigrants and native-born whites to describe the transformation of social identity and the process of assimi- lation. The most interesting examinations of the diffusion of names through the class structure are the works of Taylor (1974) and of Lieber- son and Bell (1992). Few studies can be found which have analysed first names as an indicator of cultural change. Most of the studies done by his- torians deal with earlier time periods (Main, 1996; Smith, 1985). Weitman (1987) has analysed first names given to children in Israel between 1882 and 1980 as an indicator for national and ethnic orientation. There is a rich French literature on the change of personal names during the last 200 years (Besnard, 1995). Dupaquier et al. (1987) have analysed first names

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during the 19th century; Besnard and Desplanques (1986) have analysed first names in France from 1890 to 1985 and Besnard and Grange (1993) focus on first names and the polarization of social taste. As Besnard (1995) points out, the main focus of these different French studies is to analyse the existence of class differences in taste and the influence of the vertical diffusion of tastes. This also is one of our topics, but unlike these studies our research is more theory driven and tries to analyse cultural moderniz-ation in a broader way.

We are going to examine empirical evidence on five facets of cultural modernization:

1. the change of family traditions;
2. secularization, that is the process through which interpretations of life experiences begin to rely less and less on images of a transcendent reality;
3. the breakdown of the class structure, insofar as class is understood not merely as a group defined by a set of objective criteria, but rather as a social entity which provides a framework for interpreting personal experience;
4. individualization, that is the process through which particular human beings begin to share distinctive qualities with others less and less fre-quently; and
5. the globalization of culture, namely the process through which previ-ously foreign cultures begin to take precedence over one's own.

In the course of the article, we specify each of these five facets. In the second part of the article, we discuss the methods used to gather our data. In the third and most important part, we examine the pertinent literature on the five aspects of cultural modernization, discuss how they can be measured and present our findings. Beyond describing these five aspects, we formulate possible explanations of these trends and test them empiri-cally. The focus of our research, however, lies on the description of differ-ent processes of cultural modernization. The explanations, we offer, are only a first attempt, hypothetical in character and from a methodological point of view problematic. In the fourth and final section, we summarize the results of our study and consider to what extent we can legitimately generalize from them.

Data and Methods

We analysed the register of births from 1894 through 1994 in Gerolstein, a small city about 100 km from Cologne in a region called the Eifel.[3] In Gerolstein 82 percent of the inhabitants are Catholic, while 10 percent are

Protestant. The remaining 8 percent either belong to another religious group or have no religious affiliation.[4] Until the turn of the century, Gerol-stein remained a relatively isolated and underdeveloped community: with no major roads, no rivers and no railway, little fertile land for farming, a poor climate for growing crops and few natural resources, Gerolstein had little means of attracting the attention of the distant urban centres (Doering-Manteuffel, 1995). This situation began to change when the Cologne–Trier railway went through at the end of the 19th century. The railway provided jobs and made the industrial centres of the Rhine and Ruhr regions more accessible. Further, it helped draw in the metal indus-try and provided the impetus for a successful mineral water bottling company, Gerolsteiner Mineralbrunnen. Step by step, Gerolstein changed its social structure: agriculture got less important, jobs in industry, trade and services increased.[5]

We generated a sample from the register of births in Gerolstein con-sisting of the first 100 birth records from every fourth year from 1894 to 1950 and every second year from 1950 to 1994, including the first year of each time span. On average there are 245 births per year.[6] We assume that the 100 birth records we selected per year are a representative sample of all births in Gerolstein since 1894. Whether we can generalize our results from the sample we have drawn for the entire country, is discussed at the end of the article.[7]

Values for the following variables were collected from each birth record:[8] date of birth, first name[9] and gender of the child, and the mother's and father's first names, religious confessions and professions. A civil servant at the Register of Deeds collected the data – only civil servants have legal access to this information. In addition to the information from the Register of Deeds, we classified each name according to its cultural origins. This we accomplished with the aid of two handbooks about names (Drosdowski, 1974; Gerr, 1985). In addition to describing the cul-tural origins of each name, the handbooks traced which names had been adopted from other cultures. Katharina, for instance, comes from the Greek woman's name Aikateriné and grew popular in the Christian world after the canonization of St Katharina of Alexandria. Martin comes from the Latin, derived from Mars, the god of war, and became popular among Christians who wanted to pay homage to St Martin, Bishop of Tours, during the Middle Ages. In cases in which a name had passed through more than one culture, we assigned the name to the most recent one. We presume that the most recent cultural meaning will have been the most relevant for the parents who selected the name. For example, parents who named their child Katharina or Martin were more likely to have been familiar with St Katharina or St Martin than the Greek or Latin origins of the name. In order to classify the parents' professions, we employed a

system of categories which blends that developed by Bohrhardt and Voges (1995) with that from Blossfeld (1985).

Cultural Modernization: Hypotheses and Results

In this section, we present five different hypotheses about the course and causes of cultural modernization. We then test each against empirical evidence, in each case first explaining how we operationalized our hypothesis and then presenting the data we gathered.

The Dissolution of Family Ties

The notion that the family loses its traditional function and meaning in the course of the modernization process has been around nearly as long as sociology itself. Neidhardt (1975: 67) cites Spencer and Ogburn as the founding fathers of this idea. Despite its popularity, however, controversy abounds over the empirical evidence which has been gathered to support it. Mitterauer (1989) argues in his overview of the historical literature that the development of the family varies with its historical context. At least until the beginning of the 20th century, few general trends are discernible.

Some studies show that the importance of the family has actually increased since the beginning of the 20th century. Bertram (1995) cites studies which show that parents support their children longer than was previously the case. Wagner (1989) demonstrated that fewer children are moving far away from their parents. After reviewing the literature on the development of the family, we have the impression that contradictory findings frequently proceed from very different assumptions about what research on the family is actually supposed to examine (Huinink et al., 1989). One has to specify, (1) which relationships (parent–child; grandparent–grandchild; nuclear–extended family) and (2) which aspects of these relationships (the choice of a spouse, support in times of ill health, amount of contact, among others) have changed in which ways.

In passing on one of their own names, parents seem to express a desire to establish a connection between themselves and their children and to maintain family traditions. We suspect that parents have passed on their names less and less frequently over the course of time – that is, the names parents have chosen reflect a change of family traditions. This is not to say that the importance of parent–child relationships has changed in other respects, nor that the frequency or intensity of contact between parents and children has decreased.[10] Wagner (1989) and Bertram (1995) have shown that this is not the case. Nevertheless, we suspect that choosing particular names has become less and less important as a way of creating bonds between parents and children and maintaining family traditions.

We have measured the persistence of family traditions by examining

the names that parents have chosen for their children. When a son is named after his father or a daughter named after her mother, independently of whether this is the first, the second or the third name, we interpret this as an attempt to establish a link between parent and child and to maintain a family tradition. When this does not happen, we take it as a sign that the importance of family ties and traditions is declining, at least in this one aspect.

Previous research on names has shown that passing on the names of grandparents and godparents plays just as important a role in maintaining family traditions as does passing on the names of parents (Rossi, 1965; Simon, 1989). Unfortunately, data which would have allowed us to consider this aspect were not available in the birth records. As such, our measurements are fairly conservative.[11] The limited data reduce the amount of names we were able to consider, but do not prevent us from examining the course of a cultural development over a relatively long period of time. Since we are primarily interested in the changing importance of names from a sociohistorical perspective, the data are adequate for our purposes.[12]

Figure 1 shows how the importance of names has changed over the past 100 years. For the stated reasons, we found relatively few cases where the names chosen reflected a concern with maintaining family traditions (11.7 percent on average). The change over the course of 100 years, however, clearly confirms our hypothesis. Choosing particular names does, in fact, lose its importance as a way of maintaining family traditions.[13]

How is one to explain this loss of importance? We attribute the declining importance attached to the choice of particular names for maintaining family traditions to the increasing economic independence of children from their parents. The two most important elements of this change are (1) the change in social structure resulting from the decreasing proportion of workers employed in agriculture and (2) the rise of social welfare programmes. As a result of the decreasing importance of agriculture relative to other sectors of the economy, the family lost a great deal of its significance as an economic unit. No more was the economic success of the individual dependent on the family. Gradually, individual income began to replace family income. Consequently, family lineage has become less and less important, and much of the significance of passing traditions from parents to children has been lost (Mitterauer, 1989: 185).

We used data collected by Hohls and Kaeble (1989) to calculate the portion of workers employed in agriculture. They have reconstructed the occupational structure of various regions of Germany at various points in time. From these data, we calculated the portion of those employed in agriculture in the region surrounding Gerolstein. From 1895 to 1970, this

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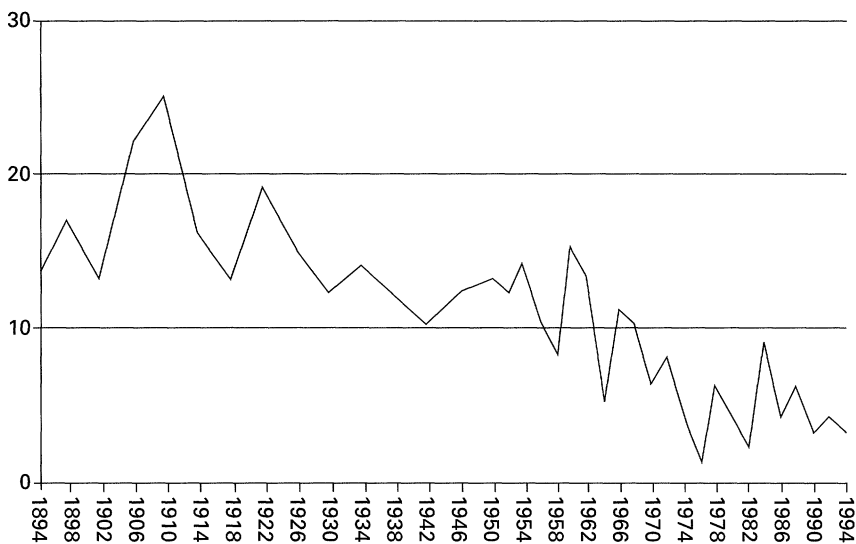
Figure 1 *Percentage of Parents Passing on their Name to their Children*

portion declined from 62.7 percent to 22.3 percent.[14] This change corre-lates strongly with the decreasing importance of choosing particular names to maintain family traditions; the Pearson's correlation equals 0.84.[15] The empirical evidence suggests that the decreasing importance of names for maintaining family traditions is intimately connected to the shrinking portion of the workforce employed in agriculture.[16]

Second, children become more and more independent of their parents as social welfare programmes provide an alternative to the economic security offered by the family. The introduction and expansion of social welfare programmes have released the family from the burden of caring for the old and the sick and supporting the unemployed (Mayer and Müller, 1987). As a result, family ties have lost some of their significance, a loss which is reflected, among other things, by parents' choice of names for their children. We considered three types of social programmes: social security, unemployment insurance and health insurance. We calculated the portion of the total population covered by each type of insurance in Germany from 1894 to 1970 (Flora and Alber, 1982). Unfortunately, it was not possible to determine what proportion were insured specifically in Gerolstein. For each type of insurance, we noted a steady increase in the portion covered.[17]

Our analysis reveals negative correlations between the portion covered

by each type of social insurance and the importance of choosing particu-
lar names for maintaining family traditions: –0.7 for social security, –0.51
for unemployment insurance and –0.62 for health insurance. These cor-
relations point to an intimate connection between the degree of economic
security provided by social programmes and the declining importance of
family ties.[18]

At this point, we must address a methodological problem. The attentive
reader will have already noticed that the correlations we have discussed
are ecological correlations. This means that our data analysis describes
relationships between aggregate data, without necessarily proving that
they adequately explain the circumstances that apply to individual cases.
Robinson (1950) was the first to consider this problem, which he dubbed
the ecological fallacy. Unfortunately, we do not have any sources which
would allow us to test our hypotheses on the individual level. The only
possibility we have is to make theoretically plausible why the correlations
on the aggregate level may also exist on the individual level.

When the relationships between aggregate data remain constant over
long periods of time, one can explain these relationships in three steps
(Coleman, 1990; Esser, 1996): first, as the impact of a given social context
on individual actions (independent variable: society, dependent variable:
individual); second, as the result of individual actions that determine
other actions (independent and dependent variable: individual); and
third, as the consequence of aggregation (independent variable: indi-
vidual, dependent variable: society). Statistical relationships between
aggregate data can be taken as proof that corresponding relationships
exist at the individual level, but only insofar as they can be explained by
these three steps. This means that in the case of the relationship between
differing sources of socioeconomic security and the changing significance
of the family, we must be able to proceed from the societal level to the
individual and from the individual back to society. We can do so as
follows:

1. the introduction of social programmes which provide economic and
   social security independent of the family frees the individual from tra-
   ditional obligations based on kinship (society to individual);
2. for those individuals who can depend on the security offered by social
   programmes, maintaining family traditions by, among other things,
   choosing particular names for their children is not as important as for
   those who were not able to rely on state-sponsored welfare (individual
   to individual);
3. individuals who do not pass their names onto their children produce
   a change on the societal level in the direction of dissolution of family
   ties (individual to society).

These three premises provide the *theoretical* basis for the statistical corre-lations and help us to explain why family traditions decrease over the past 100 years. While we have no empirical evidence which illustrates how different forms of economic security and the changing significance of the family are related on the individual level, we are able to develop a plausible line of argument based on these premises. In the following sections of this article, we continue to rely on this pattern of explanation without explicitly formulating our specific assumptions about the relationship of individual and aggregate data in each case.[19]

Secularization

The term 'cultural secularization' refers to a transformation of the central value systems and interpretive frameworks that have dominated Euro-pean thought since the Enlightenment (Gerhards and Melzer, 1996). From Marx to Dilthey, from Troeltsch and Weber onto Berger and Tenbruck, sociological theorists and researchers alike have regarded cultural secu-larization as one of the defining elements of modern culture. Despite the notion's popularity, however, the actual empirical content of the term remains unclear (Luckmann, 1980). One can only achieve a precise, empirically oriented definition of cultural secularization by clarifying what the secularization process actually changes, that is by specifying what one means by religion. In this article, we use the term 'religion' to describe a particular way that human beings have developed of making sense of their own mortality, namely, by interpreting life experiences (immanent reality) in terms of beliefs about a transcendent reality (Eliade, 1957). Given this understanding of religion, cultural secularization denotes the process which causes human beings to rely less and less on such beliefs in their attempts to understand their everyday experiences.

The choice of a particular name is sometimes influenced by a strongly held religious belief; for instance, a father seeking to express his religious devotion may name his child after a Christian saint. In this respect, the names of martyrs, those who reputedly sacrificed their own lives in Christ's name, are the most important to consider (Bieritz, 1991). Each martyr had a corresponding holy day, which was supposed to coincide with the day of her or his death. The celebrants assembled at the martyr's grave, read the account of her or his passion and rejoiced in her or his triumph through Christ over the power of death. As such, the holy day served not as a solemn remembrance of the saint's passing so much as a birthday celebration. The martyr's significance was twofold: first, she or he was supposed to offer an example (*imitatio*) of how to live out one's faith and, second, to act as an intercessor who would plead her or his namesake's case (*invocatio*) before God. Choosing the name of a saint for one's child also had a double meaning: first, the saint was supposed to

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provide a moral example for the child; second, and ultimately more importantly, she or he was supposed to serve as the child's spiritual guardian and advocate. This link was established through baptism and renewed yearly by celebrating the saint's holy day.

With this in mind, we argue that a change in the frequency with which children are named after saints indicates that cultural secularization is underway.[20]

Figure 2 shows the percentage of Christian names as a function of the total number of names taken from the register of births. Overall, the percentage of Christian names declines from 69 percent in 1984 to only 28 percent in 1994, a dramatic shift which provides strong evidence to support our hypothesis and the popular theory of cultural secularization.[21] The frequency of names taken from saints steadily decreases, reflecting the declining importance of beliefs in the spiritual function of the patron saint. From 1934 to 1942, however, we detect a disturbance in the otherwise steady decrease in the number of names chosen to establish a link to patron saints. Suddenly, but only temporarily, the rate of decrease speeds up. This development is particularly striking when one notices that, at the same time that the number of Christian names is rapidly decreasing, the number of German names rapidly increases. We argue that this sudden shift can be attributed to the influence of the National Socialist political regime (Gerhards and Melzer, 1996). The religious orientation of a given regime, whether anti-clerical, secular or theocratic, determines the cost – and may provide incentives – for those who would publicly align themselves with a particular faith. Politics, in short, influences the secularization process. Regimes which limit religious freedom and offer alternative ideologies in the form of political ideologies will tend to hasten secularization (Berger, 1973: 106). Liberal regimes will have little effect one way or the other, and those that actively foster a particular religion will tend to slow the pace of secularization. The National Socialist regime was anti-clerical (at least with respect to Catholicism) and promoted German nationalism as an alternative ideology. The regime's success in fashioning an ideological surrogate for religion out of German history and tradition is evident, it seems to us, in the explosive growth in the number of German names parents chose for their children.[22] This interpretation becomes even more plausible when one notes that the parents chose German names with greater frequency primarily for male children. Girls' names were 'Germanized' to a much lesser extent. Given the ideological importance of manhood in the National Socialist creed, this facet of the trend makes a great deal of sense.

This finding provides additional support for claims made by political sociologists under the rubric of 'Bringing the State Back In' (Skocpol, 1979; Evans et al., 1985). This body of work expresses a great deal of scepticism

Figure 2   *Percentage of Christian Names and German Names*

towards the notion of generalized societal trends, emphasizing instead the specific influence of particular nation-states on societal and cultural developments.

The ideological orientation of the National Socialist regime provides, as we have discussed, an explanation for the sudden increase in the rate of secularization. It cannot, however, explain the steady decline in frequency of Christian names over the last 100 years. We suspect that this decline has been intimately connected to the fading commitment of individual members of society to the church and its rituals. The less the members of society are actively involved in the church, the less influence this institution and the associated belief system exert over individual actions.[23]

Unfortunately, the limited data we have available offer little opportunity to test this hypothesis. Drawing from church records in Gerolstein and the surrounding area, we were able, at least, to gain an impression of how many parishioners participated in Easter Sunday services. Easter, the celebration of Christ's resurrection, is the most important holy day in the Catholic faith. The level of participation in Easter services remained

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relatively constant up until the 1950s, when interest began to decline. The correlation between participation in Easter services and the frequency of Christian names equals 0.23. Contrary to our expectations, there seems to be only a weak connection between the two. We suspect this has more to do with the inadequacy of our indicator than the accuracy of our hypothesis – the relatively steady level of participation in Easter services may be an example of ritualism, in the sense that Robert K. Merton (1968) gave to the term.[24] Unfortunately, we are in no position to test this speculation, nor can we offer a better indicator.

First Names and the Breakdown of Class Structure

Many authors have suggested that cultural modernization proceeds in two distinct phases (Beck, 1983, 1995; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). In the first phase, so the theory goes, feudal society, with its religious ideology, breaks down, clearing the way for a modern industrial society to emerge. The process of secularization we have described thus far, including the declining importance of family traditions, can be thought of as an aspect of this first phase. Society compensates for the breakdown of traditional social bonds by developing new, class-specific ones. Not only does every member of society belong to a social class, understood primarily in economic terms, she or he also belongs to a cultural milieu specifically associated with this class. These milieux determine, in turn, how the members of each class actually lead their lives. Participation in such a milieu may mean being a member of particular clubs, voting for certain parties or candidates, engaging in particular hobbies or other recreational activities, and even taking on particular roles within the family. During the second phase of modernization, these class-specific milieux lose their significance, ultimately eliminating the cultural dimension of the class structure (Beck, 1983). The economic basis of the class structure, meanwhile, remains firmly intact. Numerous studies have shown that, at least in Germany, the unequal distribution of resources, income, education, power and status has not been ameliorated by the modernization process (Mayer, 1989; Geißler, 1996). The theory of class breakdown merely suggests that, despite the relatively constancy of an unequal distribution of resources, the link between class formation and particular lifestyles has weakened.

The choice of a particular first name is an element of a person's lifestyle – by choosing names for their children, parents express their personal tastes and preferences. Simmel was perhaps the first to point out how matters of personal taste can be used to establish and maintain class distinctions, an observation which has been brilliantly elaborated in the work of Bourdieu (1982). The choice of a particular first name reflects, no doubt, the personal taste of the parent(s) and serves, at the same time, as an indication of the social status the parent(s) want for their child.

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Figure 3   *Percentage of Names Shared by More Than One Class*

Accordingly, one would expect that the choice of particular names will vary from class to class, particularly with respect to various levels of educational achievement.

A breakdown of class structure would mean, then, among other things, that associations between particular names and particular classes gradually disappear. This presumes that the choice of particular names is part of distinct lifestyles and determined to a considerable extent by access to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1982). Accordingly, we divided the parents' occupations into three groups: unqualified, qualified and highly qualified.[25] If the choice of particular names were class specific, this would mean that these three groups drew their children's names from distinct groups of names. The breakdown of the class structure would bring with it an increase in the number of names used by more than one of the three groups, until ultimately they could not be distinguished on the basis of the names chosen for their children alone.

Two things stand out.[26] (1) A breakdown of the name structure does not seem to occur. The amount of names shared by at least two classes remains relatively constant throughout the period under consideration. (2) The portion of names shared by more than one class is, on the average, less than 30 percent. Parents choose names which are class specific in approximately two-thirds of the cases studied. As far as the choice of names is concerned, the educational level of the parents does, in fact, correspond with a particular lifestyle. Class differences are apparent, then,

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not only in the sort of resources available to different groups, but also in the names members of these groups chose to distinguish themselves and their children from the others.

Excursus: First Names as Cultural Capital – The Diffusion of Names through the Class Structure

Our data allow us to analyse the diffusion of names between classes, as well (Lieberson and Bell, 1992). Class theory presumes that the elite classes strive to defend and extend existing disparities in the availability of resources. One approach attempts to limit access to resources by creating a shortage. With names, however, it is not possible to prevent others from choosing them. Presuming that the lower classes will adopt names associated with the upper classes in order to gain status, particular names can only serve to reinforce class distinctions temporarily. Maintaining such distinctions requires, then, that the upper classes continually innovate by choosing new names which have not yet filtered down to the lower classes. Accordingly, we expect a process to occur through which old names diffuse and new ones emerge. Again, we employ the threefold classification we used earlier, measuring the diffusion of names through these three strata during the period stretching from 1966–72 to 1990–4. Our operationalization owes much to the work of Lieberson and Bell (1992). Those names which were most popular from 1990 to 1994, but had not been popular from 1966 to 1972, are those which 'made it', which managed to diffuse through the masses. We determined the percentage of these names which each of three classes chose in each four-year period from 1966–72 through 1990–4. The results are summarized in Figure 4.

The 'highly qualified' did, in fact, introduce the new names. They are the ones who introduce new distinctions. The 'qualified' are the first to follow suit, eventually taking over and becoming the chief protagonists of the new names. This trend undercuts the usefulness of the new names for the 'highly qualified', so that the most elite, relative to the 'qualified', use them less. Finally, the 'unqualified' begin to adopt the new names, though only after the trend has long since been underway. In general, our findings support the theory of a class-specific process of name diffusion. In addition, we analysed the period from 1942–6 through to 1966–72. We found essentially the same pattern in this period, which encourages us to suggest that we have described a general mechanism which drives the origination and diffusion of names.[27]

Individualization

In light of the variety of often vague and ambiguous meanings associated with the term 'individualization', a glance at its etymological background
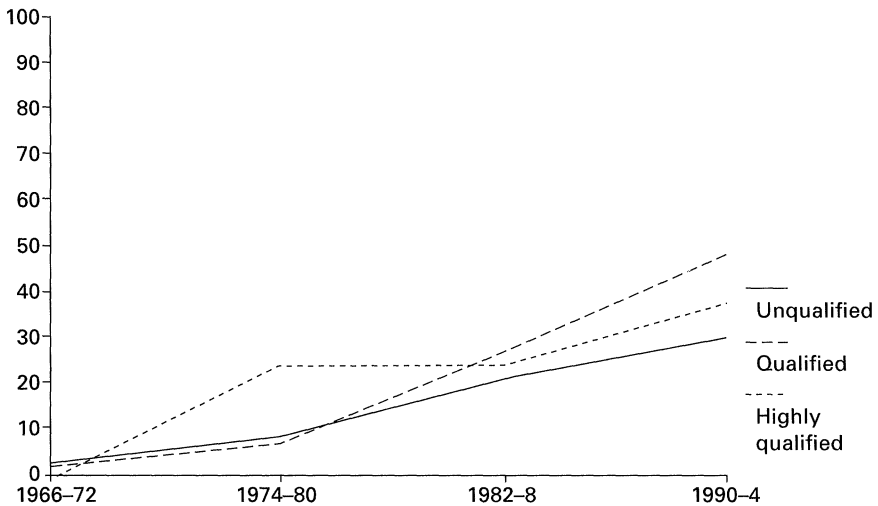
Figure 4   *Percentage of Newly Introduced Names by Different Classes*

seems warranted. *In-dividuum* is of Latin origin and means 'the indivisible'. In this sense, a human being is an individual to the extent that she or he does not share particular qualities with others: that is, she or he has some special quality or qualities which are not divided among her- or himself and others. Individualization can, accordingly, be understood as the aspect of the modernization process which reduces the number of qualities which particular human beings share with others. This etymologically derived definition can easily be operationalized for first names: the less frequently particular people have the same name as others, the more likely they are to be recognized as distinct units, and the higher is the degree of individualization.

The classical sociologists Durkheim and Simmel each formulated a theory of individualization. Both describe the development of modern society as a process of increasing differentiation and extension of the division of labour. Simmel (1983: 305ff.) depicted the consequence of social differentiation as a cross-cutting of social circles (Blau, 1994: 22ff.). Individuals arise, according to Simmel, when the social contexts in which each person must act are so varied that each constitutes the centre of a social network that is unique to her or him. Precisely through this constellation of social relationships which no one else quite duplicates, the individual derives her or his unique qualities. As each person's social condition begins to have less and less in common with others', the more distinctly 'individual' become that person's preferences and, more specifically,

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personal taste. Durkheim's (1977: 444) theory is based on the same premise: 'the individual personality emerged in the division of labour'. The division of labour – which Durkheim understands primarily as the development of distinct occupations – produces specific skills. Such skills distinguish the professional from others and thereby renders her or him an individual. Furthermore, the development of distinct occupations leads to independence from family, relatives and community. This second notion couples the theory of individualization with the dissolution of family ties which we have described in an earlier section. Individualization is just the other side of the coin of the process which leads to the change of family traditions.

In his classic study of suicide, Durkheim (1983) links the individualization process with secularization. Durkheim describes Protestantism as the first individual religion. The individual believer essentially creates her or his own religion by interpreting the Bible for themselves and maintaining a personal relationship with God without the aid of an intermediary. She or he does not have to submit their day-to-day life to a high degree of normative regulation in order to belong to the Protestant Church. Accordingly, Durkheim interprets the rise of Protestantism as the first step towards secularization; he understands individualization as the other side of the coin of the process through which religion loses its social significance. Being an individual becomes a new commandment. 'Today, no one disputes the decree that commands each of us to be not only a person, but more and more of a person' (Durkheim, 1977: 445ff.). Classical sociologists, then, link individualization with three cultural developments: (1) the progressive differentiation of distinct occupations and the cross-cutting of social circles; (2) the increase of independence from family; and finally (3) the secularization process.

We measured two aspects of the individualization process. The less that particular people share their names with others, the more likely they are to appear as distinct social units, that is the higher is the degree of individualization. Accordingly, we determined how many different names, that is to say unique names, were used in each year. By unique we mean a name given to no other child in that year of our sample (Lieberson and Mikelson, 1995: 930). We call this measurement the individualization index. We suspect that the individualization index will increase over time.

A dramatic change takes place (see Figure 5). In 1894, 32 percent of the names given were different. One hundred years later, the percentage had increased to 77 percent; however the upward trend is already tapering off by 1950.[28]

The individualization index represents the relationship of different names to the total number of names for each individual year. Two different years may have the same individualization index even if the same
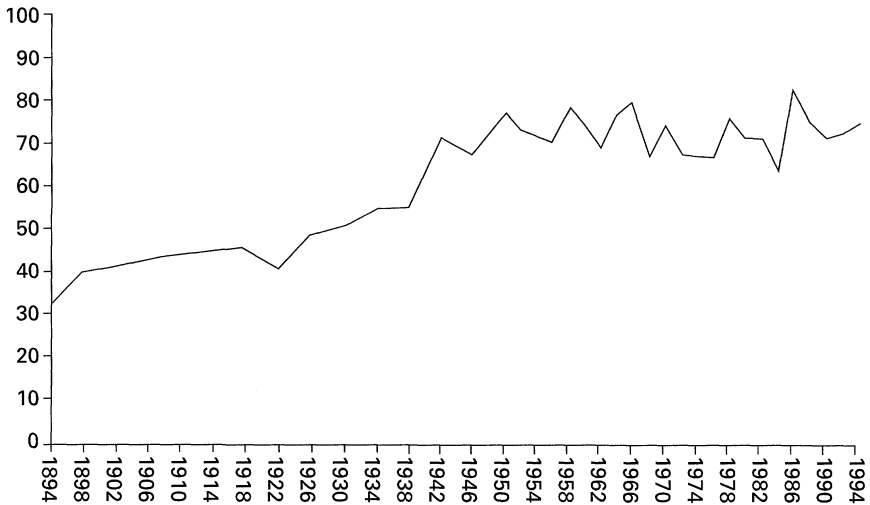
Figure 5 *Individualization Index I: Frequency of Different Names Divided by the Total Number of Names*

names were used. Children with the same names who were born in different years are regarded as different, which could lead one to challenge the validity of the measurement. For that reason, we also calculated the number of new names introduced each year. Parents who introduce a new name distinguish their child not only from those born in the same year, but from those born in past years as well. Our results are displayed in Figure 6.[29] These results confirm our speculations – the percentage of new names rises steadily.[30]

Durkheim and Simmel name three factors which propel the individualization process: (1) the progressive differentiation of distinct occupations, (2) the change of family traditions as a consequence of the development of career opportunities outside the family and (3) secularization. We measured the change of family traditions and the advance of the secularization process as described earlier. In order to calculate the degree of occupational differentiation, we drew on the data collected by Hohls and Kaeble (1989) to calculate a heterogeneity index for the occupational structure in Gerolstein and the surrounding area.[31] The heterogeneity index rises from 59 in 1895 to 89 in 1970. This means that the degree of heterogeneity in the occupational structure increased. This increase correlates strongly with both the increase of the first individualization index (.86) and the second individualization index (.87).[32] Occupational differentiation and the degree of individualization are intimately connected.[33]
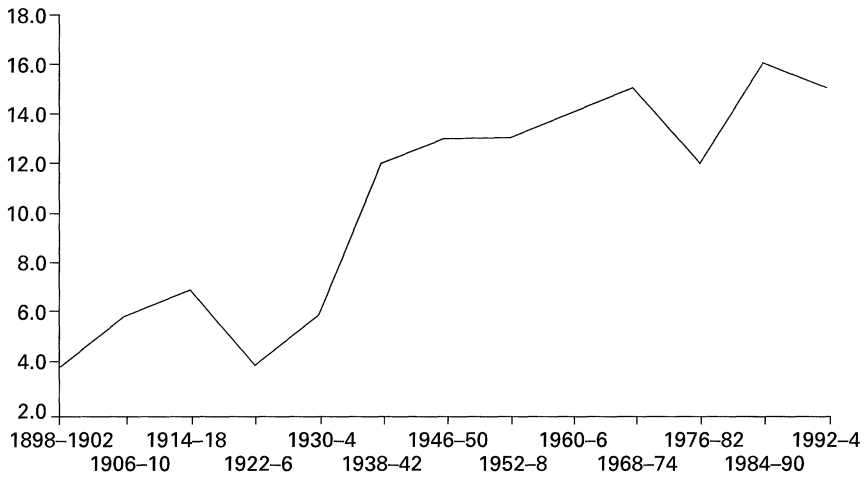
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Figure 6 *Individualization Index II: Frequency of Newly Introduced Names*

Also, secularization has an impact on the two individualization indices. The Pearson's correlation coefficients are −0.9 and −0.89, and the co-efficient for the Cochrane–Orcutt model with the first index is −0.77 (significant at the 0.1 percent). So this hypothesis is also confirmed. Individualization seems to be not only a product of the increase of the heterogenization of occupations, but also of the process of secularization. In contrast to our hypothesis, the dissolution of family ties does not have an effect on individualization. Although there exists a strong correlation between the dissolution of family ties and individualization (−0.73 for the first individualization index and −0.75 for the second), the coefficient of the Cochrane–Orcutt model for the first index is −0.16 (and is insignificant).

Globalization of Culture

Individualization means that the number of names and their distribution have increased – each child is more likely to have a different name than the one before. That tells us nothing, however, about the cultural origins of the various names. We expect that, over the course of time, the number of names drawn from other cultures will increase, allowing us to speak of a globalization of the local culture.

The idea of globalization is a classical topos of modern sociological theory. From the expansion of international travel and trade described by Simmel, to the Marxian theory of economic internationalization, to Deutsch's thesis about the increasing volume of communication, and

above all to Horkheimer and Adorno's notion of the 'culture industry', modern sociological theories have emphasized the globalization of culture. In the course of modernization, national and regional cultures are increasingly subsumed into a supra-national culture.[34] Horkheimer and Adorno see this development as a consequence of the growth of mass media, above all of television. These developments create a sort of world society in which every place on the globe is within reach – information and entertainment are diffused through a network which spans the entire planet. Transnational film, television and music industries based primarily in the USA continually seek to increase profits, in part by opening new markets across the world. Consequently, a transnational culture arises which gradually eclipses regional and national ones, giving rise to a 'global village', in which all cultures and lifestyles can be experienced in the comfort of one's own living room.

We speculate that the globalization of culture is reflected in the globalization of first names. First names have distinct cultural origins. We suspect that the number from foreign cultures has steadily increased over time, while the number of traditional Christian and German names has decreased.

Figure 7 shows that the number of names from non-Christian, non-German cultures does, in fact, rise over the course of time. This trend takes off in the 1950s.

In the literature one can find different explanations for the assumed process of globalization. The most important ones are (1) the immigration of foreigners, (2) the increase of mobility of the inhabitants which brings them into contact with other cultures and (3) the expansion of the mass media and popular culture.

Until the 1970s the proportion of foreigners in Gerolstein remained very low and has increased from that time on only slowly. Yugoslavia and Turkey are the two main countries where foreigners came from.[35] But the expansion of first names that we described as globalization is primarily caused by the expansion of names coming from the Anglo-American and Francophone cultures. So the increase of immigrants has only a low explanatory power for the globalization of first names.

In respect to the mobility of the people and especially the mobility connected with journeys, we do not have any data available. Nevertheless, we know that trips in Germany have increased since the 1950s, but that these trips went primarily to other German-speaking countries (Austria at first) and to Italy and Spain.

Most important for the explanation of the globalization process seems to be the development of the media, especially the development of television. Horkheimer and Adorno attribute the globalization of culture to the growth of the mass media. Television brings previously foreign
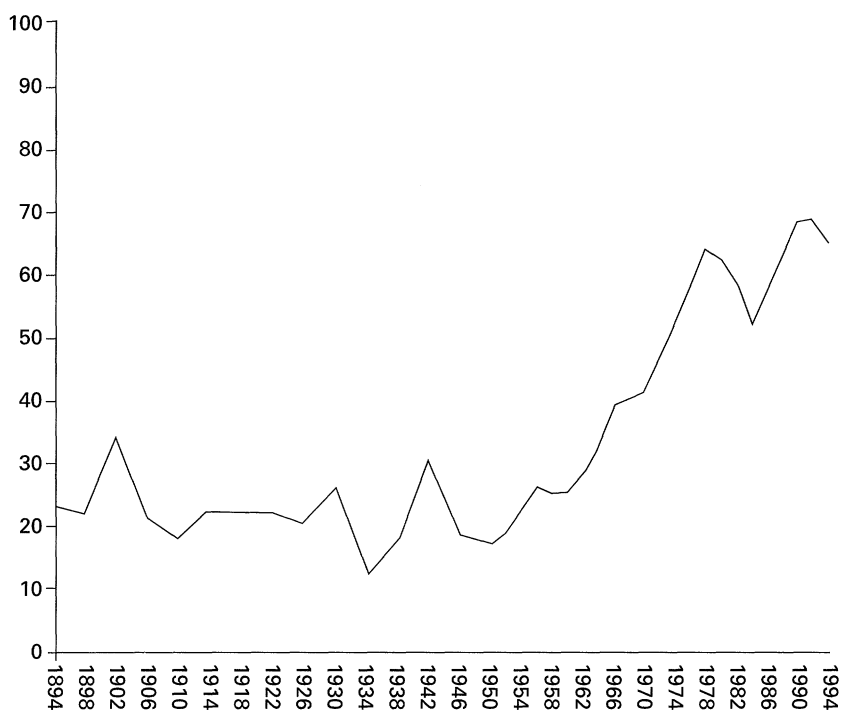
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Figure 7   Percentage of Names from Non-Christian and Non-German Cultures

cultures into the living room of the native culture. In addition, we know that the proportion of films from foreign countries – mostly from the USA, Great Britain and France – is very high in German television programming (Schneider, 1990).

In fact, the portion of names from other cultures and especially from France and Britain/USA has grown rapidly since the 1950s,[36] when at the same time the number of households with televisions rose dramatically.[37] The number of households with televisions is strongly correlated with the globalization index – the correlation coefficient is 0.90. This strong correlation provides evidence that the extension of the globalization process to the choice of first names is intimately connected to the spread of television.[38]

Discussion of the Results

We have discussed several theories of cultural modernization, each of which places a different sort of change at the centre of the modernization

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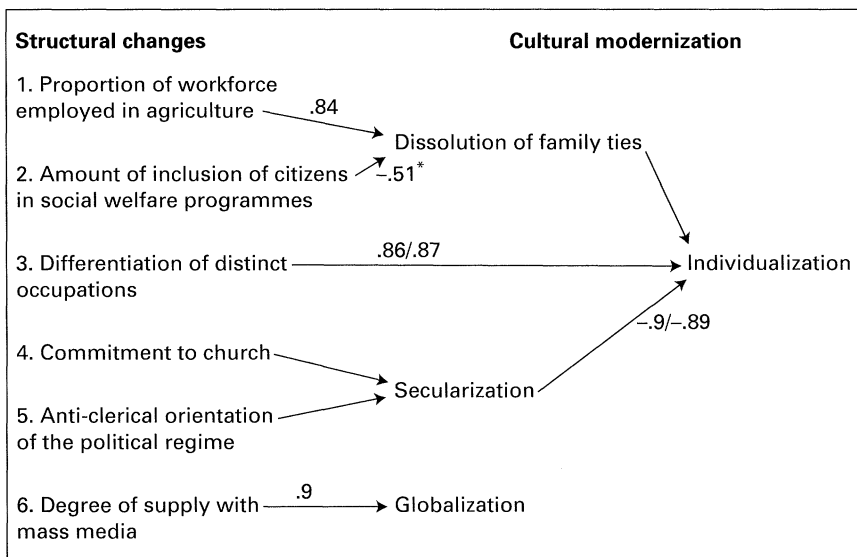
Figure 8 *Explanation of Processes of Cultural Modernization*
*This value concerns the correlation between unemployment insurance and the dissolution of family ties. The corresponding correlation concerning the social security and the health insurance equals $r = -.7$ and $r = -.62$.

process. Cultural change proceeds from the erosion of the integrative power of collective and group-specific sources of meaning, such as religion, family and class. Consequently, individuals must increasingly provide their own meanings, which they often accomplish by drawing from foreign cultures. We started from the assumptions that these macro-cultural changes are reflected in the choice of first names.

Our study provides empirical evidence to support the notion that cultural modernization involves secularization, the change of family traditions, individualization and globalization. The choice of names, however, does not seem to reflect a breakdown of class structures – strong associations between particular names and particular classes persist.

We did not only try to describe the various processes involved in cultural modernization, but also tried to explain them in terms of structural transformations. Figure 8 summarizes the various factors which propel the modernization process.

As the individual correlation coefficients suggest, we were able to substantiate almost all of our hypotheses. With the exception of the correlation between church ties and secularization and family ties and individualization, all coefficients are above 0.50. Essentially, five factors

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propel the process of cultural change: the anti-clerical orientation of the political regime, the decline of the proportion of the workforce employed in agriculture, the differentiation of distinct occupations, the establishment of social welfare programmes and the rise of the mass media. But one has to interpret these findings very carefully. They allow us only to calculate ecological correlations between the various processes involved in cultural modernization and certain structural transformations. Ecological correlations tell us little, however, about causal relationships. As such, our conclusions about the connections between culture and structure are hypothetical in character.

In conclusion, we address the representativeness, reliability and validity of our findings.

1. We examined changing trends in the choice of first names in one region of the Eifel. We drew a random sample from the data available from the Gerolstein register of deeds. We presume that the resulting sample is representative of all births in the area surrounding Gerolstein. The principles of statistics do not allow us to infer anything about another population (for example, Germany) from these data, since they do not constitute a randomly selected sample of births in all of Germany – as such, they are not representative. Does this mean that our results are only relevant for one relatively remote region of Germany? Simon (1989) has written and published a very precise and exhaustively researched dissertation about trends in the choice of names in three small towns in Westphalia from the 17th century until 1980. In an appendix, he lists all of the names covered in his study. We isolated the data for the last 100 years from his study – the exact period covered by our analysis – and created a data set. This allowed us to compare his results with ours. The pattern of individualization, secularization and globalization in the three towns in Westphalia proved quite similar to that in Gerolstein (see Gerhards and Hackenbroch, 1997). This suggests that we can reasonably generalize from our results for the entire country.

2. While unable to calculate a reliability coefficient, we are confident that our data collection satisfies the reliability criterion. The collection and organization of the data proceeded in two steps. Employees of the Gerolstein Register of Deeds collected the information we needed on forms which we provided. We ensured that few mistakes were made and were able to correct the few that were easily.

3. Concerns about the validity of our data raise the most serious questions about our study. The various accounts of cultural modernization describe developments thought central to the evolution of modern societies. As macrological theories, they consider a plethora of individual phenomena. The choice of particular first names is, by contrast,

a single, isolated micro-phenomenon. First names are only one of numerous possible indicators which could be used to measure cultural change and modernization. Certainly, it would be asking too much of this one indicator to expect it to serve as a valid indicator of cultural modernization as a whole. We cannot deny the weight of this objection to our findings. This does not mean that our findings are irrelevant; rather, it highlights how much we need empirical research to examine whether, when, in what areas and why cultural changes are evident.

Notes

1. A group of researchers led by Karl Erik Rosengren attempted to examine Swedish culture, past and present, in the 'CISSS (Cultural Indicators of the Swedish Symbol System)' research project. Eva Block (1984), for instance, attempted to reconstruct the changing significance of values like freedom and equality in Swedish culture by analysing front-page articles from the five leading daily newspapers. Studies by Karl-Wilhelm Grümer and Robert Helmrich (1994) and from Jürgen Gerhards and Astrid Melzer (1996) have attempted to illustrate the secularization process by analysing obituaries.
2. The interesting book by Wolfsohn and Brechenmacher (1999) on first names in Germany during the last 200 years came out after our manuscript was already completed and accepted for publication by *International Sociology*.
3. In Germany, access to the register of births is restricted by law. The fact that one of the authors of this article spent his youth in Gerolstein made it possible to gain access to these data, after several attempts to access similar data for other regions had failed.
4. The development of religious denominations for the last 100 years can be drawn from the data we collected at the register of births. For selected years the percentages are as follows: proportion of Catholics 1894: 96 percent; 1910: 95 percent; 1918: 92 percent; 1942: 93 percent; 1950: 91 percent; 1970: 93 percent; 1990: 84 percent; and proportion of Protestants: 1894: 2 percent; 1910: 1 percent; 1918: 3 percent; 1942: 6 percent; 1950: 5 percent; 1970: 4 percent; 1990: 4 percent.
5. One can find some reports about the development of Gerolstein in the last 100 years which were done by amateur historians. But there is no systematic

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collection of material (number of inhabitants, development of the occupational structure, etc.) that could have been used.

6. For selected years, the number of births was distributed as follows: 1894: 140; 1910: 198; 1930: 136; 1950: 201; 1960: 251; 1970: 321; 1980: 209; 1990: 425.

7. With regard to access to data on first names there is a decisive difference between Germany and the USA. In the USA there are data sets of first names based on millions of births. One can use these data sets for a secondary analysis (Lieberson and Mikelson, 1995); in Germany there are no such data available. In addition primary research is very difficult because there are strict rules with regard to the protection of personal data.

8. Because of the fact that Germany, unlike other countries, had a well organized and professional public administration early on in the century, the collection of the data presented few problems: although the names were written by hand one could read them very easily. Names that have the same denotation but were written in a different ways (for example Herrmann and Herman) were coded as the same names.

9. In Germany, all names other than the family name are considered *Vornamen*, 'introductory names'. Many people in contemporary Germany only have two names (a first name – called the *erste Vorname* or 'first introductory name' – and a family name), and there is no word in the German language which corresponds to the English 'middle name'. The word *Vorname*, however, is used in all cases where English speakers would say 'first name'. The name a person actually went by was underlined in cases where he or she had more than one introductory name. We entered the underlined name as the first introductory name in our database. We consider only first names in our analysis (except in Figure 1).

10. The importance of recognizing various dimensions of relationships when working with empirical evidence has been demonstrated by Diewald (1991), among others. Family support has a number of dimensions, each of which take on a particular meaning for each individual.

11. Our measurements appear that much more conservative when one considers that the likelihood of a parent passing on his or her name to a particular child increases as the number of children per family decreases, since at most one of the children in any given family will generally be named after each parent. The number of children per family has, in fact, decreased over the course of time.

12. This argument presumes that the ratio of names passed on from grandparents to names passed on from parents has remained constant.

13. Smith (1985) and Main (1996) have shown that in New England there was already a decline in naming sons and daughters after their parents in earlier time periods (1641–1880; 1620–1794).

14. The following figures indicate the portion of the entire workforce employed in agriculture for each year: 1895: 62.7 percent; 1907: 67.0 percent; 1925: 63.9 percent; 1950: 54.7 percent; 1961: 38.4 percent; 1970: 22.3 percent.

15. These correlations were derived using linear interpolation. If one uses the original figures derived for the portion of the entire workforce employed in agriculture rather than the interpolated values, the correlation decreases to 0.81.

16. One could argue, that the Pearson's correlation coefficient is a spurious one because of the potential impact of time on the dependent variable. Therefore we calculated a Cochrane–Orcutt model (Pindyck and Rubinfeld, 1991). The coefficient of that model – a standardized B – is 0.83 (significant at the 0.1 percent level).

17. For selected years, the percentage enrolments in various social programmes were distributed as follows:

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970
Social security	21	22	27	31	33	30	37	34
Unemployment	–	–	–	22	22	20	28	32
Health insurance	18	22	28	29	29	36	42	43

18. Again we have calculated a Cochrane–Orcutt model. The coefficients are –0.73, –0.69 and –0.62 and are at least significant at the 5 percent level.

19. We make the following assertions about the decline of the agricultural society: (1) the decreasing percentage of the workforce employed in agriculture makes an economic existence independent of the family available to a growing number of individuals; (2) for such individuals, certain family traditions – such as passing on names from generation to generation – are less and less important; (3) individuals who are little concerned with maintaining family traditions by passing on their names to subsequent generations produce a change on the societal level in the direction of dissolution of family ties.

20. Our presumption is that naming children after saints did not change its meaning over time, for example in the sense that naming children after saints in earlier times was a routine praxis, but today it is not.

21. Main (1996: 16) has shown that there was already a decline in use of biblical names in New England in the period 1620–1794.

22. The percentage of German names decreased after 1945, slowly at first and then more and more rapidly beginning in the 1960s, paralleling the picture of the development of political culture in the Federal Republic we have from empirical research and analysis. This research has been able to show that the influence of National Socialist ideology on the political attitudes of German citizens declined only gradually (Conradt, 1980).

23. The fading commitment of individual members of society to the Church and its rituals may itself be related to structural changes as the change of the occupational structure and the level of education.

24. Merton (1968: 238) defines ritualism as follows: 'Ritualism refers to a pattern of response in which culturally defined aspirations are abandoned while one continues to abide almost compulsively by institutional norms.'

25. The division into three occupational groups is based on the description of occupations. In contrast with the USA, in Germany the entry into almost all occupations depends on the level of the formal education: occupations that do not need any degree or only a high school qualification were coded as unqualified occupations; occupations that need a high school qualification

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and an apprenticeship were coded as qualified occupations; jobs where at least a bachelor degree was needed were coded as highly qualified occupations.

26. The results shown in Figure 3 are calculated by using only the 20 most frequent names.

27. Our thesis could not be tested for earlier time periods because the number classified as 'highly qualified' was too small. However, combining the 'highly qualified' with the 'qualified' yields similar results.

28. Some scholars have put forward the argument that in the process of modernization the rhetoric of individualism increases, but the behaviour does not. Our research shows that this is not true for first names. Individualization increases over time.

29. The results shown in Figure 6 are calculated by using only the 20 most frequent names per time step.

30. The somewhat surprising increase of the index during the Nazi period is a result of the increase of newly introduced German names.

31. The heterogeneity index was calculated according to the formula: $H = 100 (1 - \text{sum } p^2)$, in which H is the heterogeneity index and p the portion of the entire workforce occupied by the occupational group in question. Given a certain number of occupational groups, an increasingly even distribution of the entire workforce throughout these groups produces an increase in the heterogeneity index. If, instead, the workforce is heavily concentrated in a few occupational groups, the heterogeneity index is smaller. We calculated the heterogeneity index for each of the following years: 1895: 59; 1907: 54; 1925: 58; 1950: 68; 1961: 81; 1970: 89. The calculation of the heterogeneity index is based on the Herfindahl–Hirschmann index (H-index) of industrial concentration. For a discussion of this index, see Taagepera and Ray (1977). The H-index is exactly the same as the Aw-index (Lieberson, 1969).

32. For the first index we computed a Cochrane–Orcutt model. The coefficient is 0.65 (significant at 1 percent). It was not possible to calculate a Cochrane–Orcutt model for the second index, because we had to aggregate different time points for the individualization index II.

33. In addition we computed a heterogeneity index for first names (as a third measurement of individualization) and correlated it with the H-index of occupational differentiation. The correlation coefficient (Pearson's correlation: 0.73) shows that there is a strong relation between occupational differentiation and individualization.

34. For a more differentiated view on the process of globalization of culture, see Hannerz (1992).

35. We do not have exact data about the proportion of foreigners in Gerolstein. Our assessment is deduced from a book published by the municipal government of Gerolstein (Stadt Gerolstein, 1986).

36. The percentages of names of French or Anglo-American cultural origin are as follows: French names, 1950: 2 percent; 1960: 6 percent; 1970: 11 percent; 1980: 19 percent; 1990: 8 percent; 1994:17 percent; Anglo-American names, 1950: 3 percent; 1960: 3 percent; 1970: 2 percent; 1980: 9 percent; 1990: 15 percent; 1994: 11 percent.

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37. The percentage of households in the Federal Republic of Germany which owned a television was: 1955: 0.5 percent; 1960: 17.4 percent; 1964: 55 percent; 1970: 85 percent; 1974: 95 percent; 1980: 97 percent; 1990: 98 percent; 1995: 98 percent. (Percentages for 1955 and 1960 were calculated using data from the Hans-Bredow-Institut, 1982; percentages for the other years were taken from Berg and Kiefer, 1987, 1996.)

38. As there are only very few time points for the variable 'number of households with television' available, it was not possible to calculate a Cochrane–Orcutt model. Instead, we used a maximum likelihood estimator. The result for the unstandardized coefficient is 0.4 (significant at the 1 percent level).

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Biographical Note: Jürgen Gerhards is professor of sociology at the University of Leipzig, Germany. His research interests include culture (in a comparative perspective) and the public sphere.

Biographical Note: Rolf Hackenbroch was assistant professor of sociology at the University of Leipzig (1994–99); he is now a researcher at the Institute for Media Analysis, 'Media Tenor'.

Address: Institut fur Kulturwissenschaften, Universität Leipzig, Burgstrasse 21, 04109 Leipzig, Germany. [email: gerhards@rz.uni-leipzig.de]