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History and the Social Sciences: Toward an Interdisciplinary Research Agenda

1. Introduction

The call for a combination of methods, methodologies and theoretical insights of the historiography and the social sciences certainly has strengthened in recent years. Yet, the overall knowledge of the main themes and practices across the disciplinary borders remains rather distorted and the readiness to engage with different academic approaches very limited. This *status quo* appears rather unfortunate for a strengthened dialogue between these disciplines might greatly enhance their respective explanatory power. This paper makes a strong case for an interdisciplinary research that would combine the “best of both disciplines”. It consists of three substantive sections. *Firstly*, I will outline an intellectual history of the long-term relationship between the historical and the social sciences, taking into account the inner-disciplinary and national variations over the last 150 years or so. *Secondly*, I will identify the possible added value as well as the limits of a stronger interdisciplinary synthesis. In this section, I will be concerned with some of the apparent methodological and theoretical deficiencies of historical-idiographic and systematic-nomothetic modes of inquiry. I will then point to their possible correction through a combined methodological tools and theoretical insights. *Thirdly*, I will indicate and test those analytical approaches that seem to most effectively combine the findings and research practices of the social sciences and historiography. I will be particularly concerned with the “multiple-causal narratives” and the “event-structure analysis”.

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2. Remarks on an Intellectual History of the Relationship between Historiography and the Social Sciences

In his essay on “History and Sociology”, Andrew Abbott begins his case for “historical social sciences” by complaining about the current state of the interdisciplinary research (1994: p. 77). As “sociology meets history” (Tilly 1981), one might have predicted a demand for synthesis that would combine “the best of both disciplines”. Yet, the synthesis has not arrived. Instead, lack of familiarity with the developments across the disciplinary borders leads to misconceptions about the nature, aims, and research techniques prevailing among the academic “others”. Consequently, skepticism about the feasibility and fruitfulness of combined research agendas seems to be widely spread (Abbott 1994: p. 77).

On one hand, it appears that the lack of dialogue between historiography and the social sciences has partly its causes in the more general problems of interdisciplinary research. The recent seemingly “natural” academic divisions have their origins in the (rather contingent) creation and institutionalization of professional academic organizations from the late 19th century on. The organizationally entrenched academic divides do not only delimit academic career paths but also confine, to a great extent, the exchange of ideas to the separate academic communities (Monkkonen 1994: p. 2). The impeding effects of institutional segregation on interdisciplinary projects are further enhanced by the sheer amount of the current scholarly work. The post WW II expansion of the academic professions has made it nearly impossible to master the literature of more than one’s “own” discipline (*Ibid.*). Nevertheless, from the very beginning, researchers dissatisfied with the prevailing practices within their disciplines looked for concepts, methods, and differing kinds of empirical evidence to the neighboring academic communities. In many cases, the resulting joint endeavors have been institutionalized in academic journals, sections of research institutes and academic associations, university departments etc. Yet, interdisciplinary research has been mostly practiced at the margins of historiography and the social sciences and it has never entered the academic mainstream (*Ibid.*: p. 3-4).

On the other hand, the recent divisions and stereotypes about the “goings-on” in and the relationship between the various academic communities are a result of the

specific history of inner- and inter-disciplinary developments. On the first sight, these developments seem to be characterized by two overarching trends. Firstly, throughout the twentieth century (and particularly in its second half) historians have gradually questioned the dogmatic belief in the possibility of immediate access to the historical reality, (partly) abandoned traditional exclusively idiographic positions, and opened up toward methods and theories of the social sciences. Yet, they have mostly remained reluctant to generate their own theoretical propositions or even to actively participate in the “grand” theoretical debates characteristic of sociology, political sciences, anthropology, or economics (McDonald: p. 93-104). Secondly, in spite of the dramatic changes in the historical practice, social scientists have continued to emphasize the subordinate status of historiography as one of social sciences “*Hilfswissenschaften*”. The historical studies are still partly seen as unable to generate valid “scientific” generalizations or deliver rigorous causal explanations (*Ibid.*). Their value is often degraded to that of a mere source of empirical evidence, fertile ground for generation of hypotheses, or an illustration of the more “scientific” empirical and theoretical arguments (see e.g. Pierson 2004: p. 4).

Of course, a closer look at the history of interactions and reciprocal impacts among the various scholarly groups subsumed under the labels “historiography” and the “social sciences” reveals a far greater complexity than suggested by the two simplified notions described above. The extent of cooperation as well as openness toward the insights and working styles across the disciplinary divides varies over time, subjects of analysis, ontological and epistemological traditions as well as the disciplinary and nation-state boundaries (see e.g. Iggers 1993). To illuminate this complexity is a daunting task beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless an overview of some of the defining trends characterizing the interactions of historiography and the social sciences is to be included into this paper. Aware of the danger of oversimplification and thorough incompleteness, in the remainder of the first section, I will seek to at least sketch out some of the main themes of an intellectual history of the relationship between social sciences and historiography.

1.1. The early Phase

From the last quarter of the 19th to the half of the 20th century, the co-existence of the professional historiography and the emerging social sciences seems to have been

majorly antagonistic. The German historicist tradition, established at the beginning of the 19th century by conservative state- and elite-oriented political historians (e.g. L. v. Ranke; J. G. Droysen; J. Burckhardt), strongly impacted the greater part of the professional historiography on the north-western hemisphere (Raphael 2003: p. 97). The historicism was primarily defined by ontological beliefs in the uniqueness of social phenomena (*historische Individualitäten*); emphasis on the temporal dimension of social causality and historical change; by a sophisticated method of source-criticism and hermeneutic approach to the illumination of the past; and an “empiricist” skepticism toward theoretically informed analysis (Iggers 1993: p. 12-15). The historicist idiographic positions were strongly opposed by the early behaviorist as well as structuralist traditions of the “*Gesellschaftswissenschaften*” that, mostly oriented at the positivist epistemology and the systematic experimental methodologies of the natural and physical sciences, aimed at generation of time-independent and universally valid causal explanations and theoretical generalizations about the social world (Kocka 1991: p. 347).

Although the dichotomy between historic-idiographic and nomothetic-systematic stances seems to accurately capture the early phase of the relationship between historiography and the social sciences, important differences across the disciplinary as well as nation-state boundaries may be discerned. For instance, the founding figures of the French *Annales* School, Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, or the “progressive” historians in the United States (e.g. Ch. A. Beard, F.J. Turner) could successfully establish first *nuclei* of institutionalized interdisciplinary research between historiography, political sciences, geography, economics, or sociology already in the interwar period (Raphael 2003: p.89, 104, 206). On the other hand, the conservative state-affirmative character of the German historiography seriously hindered, and in the end impeded, the great majority of academic projects that aimed at integrating social scientific insights into historical analyses (e.g. on the well-known “*Lamprecht-Streit*”, see *Ibid.*: p. 73-76).

It further seems that while economics or sociology have already begun to adopt strongly “ahistorical” positions by the end of the 19th century (*Ibid.*: p. 78), the institutional as well as academic bonds between historiography and the political sciences, dominated by the “old” institutionalism as well as historical and philosophical studies in political theory, were more close and solid (Von Beyme 2006:

p. 34-36). In the early period, the notion that “history is past politics and politics present history” (Waldo 1975: p. 29) appears to have been shared by the majority of political scientists and historians alike. Within the U.S. political sciences, it was not before the 1920’s that the analysis of behavior, inspired by psychology and the physical sciences, began to ultimately eclipse the historical institutional studies (see e.g. Robertson 1994). In Germany and Britain, the 19th century political sciences and academic historiography shared partially institutional origins in the state-affirmative “*Staatsrechtslehre*” (e.g. Kokott and Vesting 2004) and the conservative-liberal “*Whig*” historiography on the “exceptional” development of the British constitutional parliamentarism (e.g. Schuster and Yeo 1986: p. 259-98). The close relations established in the early period have, despite the many turns and turnovers of the second half of the 20th century, never ceased to be of constitutive importance for both disciplines in those countries (Von Beyme 2006; Berger 2002: 49-77).²

1.2. The Period after the WW II

The relationship of the social sciences to historiography in the post-WW II period was marked, on one hand, by the decisive turn away from historical analyses in sociology, economics, and political sciences. The economic prosperity and socio-political stability of the two decades after 1945 and the availability of new sophisticated computerized technologies for public opinion surveys and data processing fostered the ontological belief that “politics can be reduced to individual behavior and political outcomes result from individual decisions and actions” (March and Olsen 1984: p. 4-5). The behavioral turn in the political sciences was accompanied by general disinterest in the studies of long-term macro-structural developments of political institutions and their impact on socio-political processes and their outcomes. The lack of attention to these traditional issues of historiography was accompanied by skepticism about the “scientific” value of historical primary source based event- and process-oriented types of analyses (Robertson 1994: p. 117-120). In sociology, the theory-heavy structural functionalist paradigm of the 1950’s and 1960’s was characterized by complete lack of empirical research program and thorough

² I have not yet surveyed any literature concerned with the interwar period, which is therefore not included in the survey.

inattention to questions of temporal change. Consequently, historical analysis was driven out of sociology's analytical focus (e.g. Abbott 1994: p. 78-80).

While this development was most pronounced within the U.S. *academia*, it seems that the behavioral and functionalist revolutions affected the European social sciences to a lesser extent (Von Beyme 2004: p. 36). To name but the two most visible examples, the early post-WW II political sciences in Germany, defined by the "re-education" policies of the allied powers, adopted a strongly interdisciplinary approach with focus on democratic and liberal theory combined with illumination of the historical trajectories leading to the ascendance of national-socialism (see, e.g. K.D. Bracher 1956; K. Sontheimer 1962; A. Hillgruber 1969). German sociology was also less affected by the functionalist turn and adhered primarily to older German traditions established by scholars such as Max Weber or Norbert Elias, whose work was characterized by the combination of theoretical conceptions of social sciences with historical analysis (Ay and Borchardt 2006; Esser 1984).

On the other hand, the period after the end of the WW II was characterized by a deep crisis of the traditional state- and elite-centered national historiographies and an opening of a new generation of historians toward the theories and methods of the social sciences. The hitherto prevailing politically affirmative functions and belief in unmediated access to historical "facts" were challenged. The combination of rigorous source-analysis with systematic-nomothetic, often quantitative, methods and the explication of the "frames of reference" based on the insights of the social scientific theories were seen as the only plausible way to achieve the ideal of scientific and political objectivity and explanatory plausibility. (McDonald 1996: p. 95)

This general trend toward an "analytical history" that would formulate and empirically test falsifiable hypotheses, seek plausible limited generalizations and explicate their theoretical conceptions took manifold forms along the national divides (see e.g. Iggers 1993). In the United States, the "social science history" of the 1950's and 1960's was distinguished by particular attention to micro-structural approaches and quantitative methods of economics and sociology (Abbott 1994: p. 82). From the 1960's to the 1980's, the quantitative history was gradually supplanted by various strands of the Marxist and "new" urban, labor, feminist etc. historiographies of "peoples without history" that, although less quantitatively oriented, also adhered to the theory-driven and problem-oriented explanatory approaches of the social

sciences (*Ibid.*: p. 85-86). In Western Germany, the belated crisis of the traditional historicism at the end of the 1950's was accompanied by the ascendance of social and economic history, institutionalized in the 1970's as the academic discipline "*Historische Sozialwissenschaft*". In opposition to the descriptive agency- and event-centered narratives of the classical historicism, German social and economic history illuminated primarily the long-term developments of political, social, and economic macro-structures (with the primary focus on the long 19th century's processes of industrialization and modernization) and their explanations were explicitly based on theories and methods of sociology, economics, psychology, and to lesser extent, political sciences (Wehler 1980).³ Furthermore, the scientific program of the *Annales* school, distinguished by high levels of interdisciplinarity and effective combination of qualitative and quantitative methods has dominated the French historiography ever since the beginning of the 1950's (Berger 2002: p. 67).

By the late 1960's, the general belief in the various national "exceptionalisms" (Fredrickson 1995), in the structural stability of the western political and economic systems as well as the explanatory power of quantitative synchronic analyses of behavior or the "grand" structural-functionalist theories were scattered (Robertson 1994: p. 126). Consequently, history found its way back into the research agendas of political scientists and sociologists. Within the U.S. American political sciences, a historical form of behaviorism emerged that combined micro-structural assumptions and quantitative methods with primary source-based analysis of long-term historical developments (e.g. Dahl 1961; Burnham 1970). Since the end of the 1970's, the institutionalist tradition has been revitalized and adopted new, in contrast to its descriptive predecessor, rigorously analytical forms (Robertson 1994: p. 131-132). In opposition to the synchronic micro-behavioral approaches, the emphasis of the "new institutionalism" lied on the impact of developments of political structures on socio-political processes and their outcomes, with special focus on the critical "turning points" and their effects on later developments (see e.g. Steinmo 2008: p. 123-125). Further important link between historiography and the political sciences has been established in the field of history of political ideas by the founding figures of the "Cambridge school" Quentin Skinner and John Pocock (see e.g. Hampsher-Monk

³ For the general program of the *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, see the editorial of the first issue of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (GuG 1975: p. 1-9).

2006), whose influential studies in political languages and applications of the speech-act theory highlighted the performative dimensions and context-dependent transformations of political communication (e.g. Pocock 1975; Skinner 1978).⁴

Within U.S. American sociology, since the beginning of the 1970's, the (Parsonian) theoretical and (quantitative) methodological orthodoxies had been attacked by the emerging tradition of historical sociology. Historical sociologists criticized the lack of attention toward structural factors and historical change plaguing their discipline (e.g. Tilly 2001) and consequently focused on the analysis of events and macro-structural change of nations and political systems, emphasized the use of qualitative methods and highlighted the "immense value of the factual mastery" of the in-depth historical studies (Abbott 1994: p. 86).

1.3. Recent Developments

Since the 1980's, following trends appear to define the relationship between social sciences and historiography. Firstly, the primary interest of the various analytical histories of the 1960's and 1970's in socio-economic and political structures as well as long-term macro-historical processes has been supplanted by studies of cultural dimensions, "subjective" understandings and experiences of individuals, with a special focus on social groups hitherto marginalized by historical analyses. Consequently, while the structure-oriented analytical history of the 1970's borrowed most of its theoretical conceptions and methodological tools from the political sciences, sociology or economics, the various strands of discourse-oriented cultural history and "*Alltagsgeschichte*" adhere primarily to theories and methods of cultural anthropology, ethnology, literary studies etc. (see Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt 1994) Secondly, the cultural and post-modernist "turns" were accompanied by a partial revival of the historicist positions. Neo-historicist scholars criticize the utter simplification of complex historical processes through the application of social

⁴ Its German pendant, the "*Begriffsgeschichte*" that illuminated the alterations in understandings and use of central political conceptions (e.g. democracy, freedom, state) through the analysis of social-political historical context seems to have been less important for the already close connection of historiography and the political sciences in the BRD (Koselleck 2006).

science theories, and even partly question the long time taken-for-granted scientific objectivity of theoretically informed historical analyses (e.g. Veenser 1989). Consequently, neo-historicists propagate a hermeneutic, and to great extent theory-free, reconstruction of the human past through less systematic and more narrative forms of analysis (Kocka 1986: p. 165-166).

The current relationship of social sciences to historiography, on the other hand, seems to be further defined by great variation, dependent on subjects of analysis, epistemological traditions as well as disciplinary and (despite the globalization trend) national idiosyncrasies. In political sciences, the acceptance of historical epistemologies and methods lies on the continuum between the (largely ahistorical) rational-choice paradigm of the quantitatively oriented political economy and comparative politics on its one end and the historically oriented institutionalist and normative-philosophical studies in political ideas on the other.⁵ Also within sociology, the links to historiographic research vary. The bonds seem to be strong either in particular substantive areas, such as historical demography or labor history, or within particular analytical approaches, such as feminist studies or the neo-Marxist literature (Abbott 1994: p. 97).

The general lack of theoretical and methodological synthesis is best visible in the mounting critique on the prevailing practices within the sociological sub-discipline where one would presuppose a strong connection to historiography: historical sociology. Analyses on the cooperation between historical sociology and historiography have demonstrated that not only does the former not have any clearly established academic links to the latter, but that historical sociology partly seeks its disciplinary legitimacy in respect to the sociological mainstream by overemphasizing the differences between its own “analytical” and the historiography’s “descriptive” approach to the study of the past (Abbott 1994; McDonald 1996). On the other hand, a mounting number of social scientists decry the widely spread trivialization of history

⁵ According to Von Beyme, the current state of the discipline is characterized by a fruitful, yet often problematic, coexistence of the institutionalist, behaviorist, functionalist, comparative, the rational choice, and the historical approaches. In the near future, due to their partly opposed ontological and epistemological stances and related analytical interests, a synthesis toward a unified understanding of the surplus and deployment of historical analysis is, obviously, not to be expected. (2006: p. 41)

and argue in favor of a stronger synthesis of historical and social scientific methods and theories within a unified “historical social sciences”⁶ (see e.g. Giddens 1984: p. 355-63; Sewell 1996: p. 272-4; Abbott 2001: p. 183-209; McDonald 1996: p. 112-13). Although persuasive, these interdisciplinary claims remain at the very margins of the recent academic work. The general doubt in regard to the usefulness and “scientific value” of historical approaches appears to still define the greater part of today’s academic praxis.

1.4. Concluding Remarks

To sum up, the ongoing skepticism toward historical approaches seems to lie at least partly in the over a century old equation of the idiographic-nomothetic dichotomy with the general academic divisions between historiography and the social sciences. Even the preliminary investigation in the intellectual history of the relationship between the two groups of disciplines leaves no doubt that the widely spread notion that historical studies adopt purely idiographic modes of analysis is utterly mistaken. For hundred years or so, various traditions of analytically oriented historiography have applied a broad range of social scientific methods in order to test the existing, or generate new, theoretical and empirical propositions (see also Rueschemeyer 2003; Iggers 1993: p. 26-41). On the other hand, it is not to be denied that historiography remains primarily “fact-centered” and tends to leave the generation of theories and generalizations to the social scientific disciplines. It would seem that the “rather empirical” and the “rather theoretical” orientation of the two subjects make historiography and social sciences ideal candidates for strong and fruitful interdisciplinary dialogue. The remaining sections of the research project will seek to elaborate this argument as well as illustrate the possible themes of such an enterprise in greater detail.

⁶ Their critical arguments as well as methodological and theoretical ideas will be the subject of the second and third part of this article-outline.

2. The Flaws of systematic-nomothetic Research Methods and their “narrative Remedy”?

In the second thematic part, I will set out by considering the flaws of the systematic-nomothetic methods currently prevailing in sociology and the political sciences and then seek to indicate the possible added value of an increased attention of social science’s methodologists to historical analysis. Both the systematic-nomothetic stances that aim at generating generalized knowledge and are skeptical about the possibility of theoretical gains from historical single-case, or “small-n” comparative research (Rueschemeyer 2003: p. 306); and the purely idiographic analyses that approach history as a thoroughly contingent “process inscribed with its own causation” (Thompson 1978: p. 34) display specific shortcomings. Increasing number of scholars emphasize that the flaws might be partly overcome through the combination of the main methodological approaches of the two academic traditions: On one hand, it seems obvious that any plausible explanation of historical occurrences must rest on firm theoretical foundations and identify the particular and the more general features of the phenomenon in question. On the other hand, in-depth single-case narratives, especially in combination with limited number of cross-case comparisons, might yield considerable theoretical outcomes (for similar argument, see e.g. Gerring 2006; Rueschemeyer 2003). In the following, building mainly on the work of Andrew Abbott, I will briefly outline some of the main topics and arguments regarding the flaws of systematic-nomothetic research methods. I will then point to the possible “remedy” of the deficiencies through an increased attention to in-depth historical narratives.

Growing number of scholars is expressing doubts about the explanatory potential of the “quasi-experimental” (Sewell 1996) methodology currently *en vogue* in the social scientific research (e.g. Sewell 1996: p. 245-56; Abbott 1990, 2001: p. 37-63, 129-35; Rueschemeyer 2003: p. 332-33; Pierson 2004: p. 1-17). It appears that the methods adopted by the analytical models based (to varying degrees) on the ontology of “general linear reality” (Abbott 1990) pursue explanations by radically simplifying and distorting the complexity of the social world (already at the beginning of the analysis) and thus ignore large proportions of empirical data of potential explanatory value. The related assumptions in regard to the properties of social scientific “cases” and the temporal and agential dimensions of social causation may be seen as highly

problematic. In particular, concerns have been expressed about the overtly parsimonious construction of cases as temporarily and spatially “fixed” units to which only a limited number of variable properties are assigned; about the simplistic and agency-free notions of causality that attribute to each explanatory “variable” only one constant causal effect, deny the possibility of temporarily shifting mutual interrelations and the contextual dependence of causal factors and do not allow causality to flow from “small” (micro-structural and short-term) to “large” (macro-structural and long-term) developments and events; about denying the causal importance of the temporal order of occurrences; and about utterly ignoring the contingency and path dependency of historical processes and their outcomes. (For the whole argument, see Abbott 1990; 2001: chapter 4)

Some scholars have identified the theoretically grounded historical single-case studies as the major alternative that might successfully address many of the flaws of the systematic-nomothetic analyses (Rueschemeyer 2003; Mahoney 2003; Abbott 2001: 140-147). Firstly, rather than looking for bounded and “fixed” units with a limited number of clearly discernable attributes, historians start delineating their cases (“central subjects”; see Hull 1975) with the assumption of complexity and contingency of social dynamics, defined primarily by the interactions among “subjects participating in events” (Abbott 2001: p. 141). The delineation of central subjects of analysis is seen (due to the temporal continuity and relational complexity of the social world) as both a problematic and crucial task of historical analysis.⁷ Theoretically informed historical case-studies then lead to plausible explanations by gradually reducing the complexity of their cases through what E.P. Thompson called the constant “dialogue between concept and evidence” (Thompson 1978: p. 39). This analytical strategy, characterized by ongoing generation, testing, and revision of explanatory propositions, does not *a priori* exclude potentially relevant information gathered by the within-case empirical research, and ultimately allows for a (possibly) optimal matching of theoretical propositions and historical data (Rueschemeyer 2003: p. 318). Furthermore, historical single-case narratives⁸ typically 1) focus on the chains of “events” in which contingent configurations of social processes, short-term

⁷ For the so called “colligation problem” of historiography see (Abbott 1984).

⁸ See on historical narratives the last section of this paper.

occurrences, and individual actions alter the previous developmental paths and 2) trace the causal links through which events are connected in temporal sequences that ultimately lead to the historical outcome under scrutiny. Due to this general narrative strategy, historical case-studies do not seem to suffer under any of the problems of systematic-nomothetic methods related to agency, temporal causality, and historical contingency mentioned in the previous paragraph (see e.g. Mahoney 2003: p. 365-366; Abbott 2001: p. 140-147; Isaac 1997).

Nevertheless, the theory-generating and explanatory potential of historical single-case studies is clearly limited. Firstly, despite their theoretical foundations and internal comparisons, the single-case studies of analytical historiography remain exposed to the dangers of misrecognizing the general features and overstating the idiosyncrasy of their cases; of leaving important factors or causal processes out of the account; and of mistaking temporal correlations of occurrences for causal relations⁹ (e.g. Rueschemeyer 2003: p. 319-321; Gerring 2006: p. 717). Secondly, it certainly is problematic to expand the level of generality of explanations and theoretical suggestions based on the analysis of a single case beyond the boundaries of the unique phenomenon under scrutiny. For these reasons, increasing number of scholars plead for a general research strategy that complements the in-depth historical narratives with cross-case comparative analysis (Rueschemeyer 2003, Gerring 2006, Abbott 2001: p. 158-160). Such a strategy importantly strengthens the ability of researchers to recognize the “general” and the “particular” features of the studied phenomena; enlarges the empirical material for generation and testing of hypotheses; and greatly weakens (although it does not completely solve) the “correlation problem” (Rueschemeyer 2003: p. 319-324). Furthermore, combined within-case and “small-n” cross-case comparisons allow for higher levels of generalization than the single-outcome studies and thus enhance the explanatory power of the theoretical and empirical suggestions.

Of course, even the combination of in-depth historical analysis with (small-n) systematic comparisons will ultimately neither allow for universally valid propositions that would transgress the temporal and spatial confines of the cases under scrutiny nor be able to uncover the social causality in its full complexity (*Ibid.*). Nevertheless, if

⁹ For arguments about the “correlation problem” see (Mahoney 2003: p. 363-4).

one still agrees with Elster that “social sciences are light years away from formulating general law like regularities about human behavior” (Elster 1989: viii), the generation of explanations and theories with limited temporal and spatial validity that take the context-dependent and contingent character of historical causation into account may be the best of what social scientists might hope for. A number of analytical tools have been currently developed that seek to combine the strengths of historical narratives and cross-case comparisons. In the last section, I will particularly elaborate on “multiple causal narratives” and “event-structure” approaches of historical sociology that seem to be the most promising tools hitherto developed on the path toward a “historical social science”.

3. “Multiple Causal Narratives” and the “Event Structure” Analysis

The “multiple causal narrative” and the “event-structure” approaches, developed relatively recently within the U.S. American historical sociology (Heise 1988; Heise and Durig 1997; Sewell 1996; Abbott 2001; see also Mahoney 2003: p. 365-367), seem to be particularly effective in combining historical analyses with systematic research methods. On one hand, these techniques successfully exploit the strengths of historical narrative¹⁰: Its emphasis on the constitutive role of human interactions for social causality as well as the contingency and the path-dependency of historical processes and their outcomes; and its related focus on temporal sequences of “formative events” that shape the successive developments by exerting causal influence on later occurrences (Griffin 1993: p. 1096; for conception of “turning point” see Abbott 2001: chapter 8; on “conjunctures” and “threshold effects”, Pierson 2004).¹¹ On the other hand, scholars propagating the “multiple causal narratives” and the “event-structure” analysis also acknowledge the aforementioned explanatory limits of historical narratives and the need for their complementation with more systematic research tools: “Sociological explanation requires events and their

¹⁰ “A narrative is an analytic construct that is used to unify a group of events into a single story...A narrative explanation relies on these unfolding interconnections to investigate why something happened in the change process and how individuals understood those events.” (Stevenson and Greenberg 1998, p. 742 - 743)

¹¹ Because of their special attention to temporality and social action, both approaches are also deemed particularly well-equipped to capture one of the central subjects of sociological inquiry - the dynamic multilayered processes through which structural factors both constrain and are (re-) produced by the relational dynamics of social development (Sewell 1996: p. 265-268).

contexts be openly theorized, factual material abstracted and generalized, and the causal connections among narrative sequences established in a way that can be explicitly replicated and criticized” (Griffin 1993: p. 1100).

Thus, the primary aim of the approaches presented in this section is the generation of empirical and theoretical generalizations and causal explanations that would take temporality, agency, and “context” into account and would not sacrifice the contingencies and particularities of historical occurrences. In order to achieve these goals, historical sociologists working with the two analytical tools often advocate a strategy that seems at odds with the greater part of recent methodological tenets of the social sciences: Identification and classification of general patterns of social processes (see e.g. Abbott 2001: p. 209-240; Sewell 1996).

The “multiple causal narratives” (Sewell 1996) combine a within-case and comparative cross-case analysis of chains of events that appear to constitute the process (or to lead to the historical outcome) under scrutiny. The main analytical steps of this approach consist of narrative reconstruction of the conceptual event-chain¹² followed by within-case and cross-case causal analysis of the links between its constitutive elements (i.e. events; see Mahoney 2003: p. 365-367). This dual strategy enables researchers not only to account for the “unfolding” of the contingent configurations of occurrences specific to the unique historical case, but also, through the comparative method, to make plausible within-case causal inferences as well as identify the more general processual patterns (Griffin and Ragin 1994: p. 14-15; Abbott 1984). The “multiple causal narrative” with its emphasis on causal analysis of the links between events and cross-case comparisons is certainly one possible way of accomplishing the aim of narrative generalization. Moreover, it seems to be particularly effective when combined with the rigorous tools of the event-structure analysis (ESA), to which I turn in the last section of this paper.

The ESA is another heuristic and methodological tool for developing causal explanations of and generalizations about sequences of historical events (Heise 1988; Heise and Durig 1997). (The related computer-program *Ethno* as well as a

¹² The ordering of the events and occurrences that are deemed causally relevant for the unfolding of the “story” into a loose temporal order. For conceptualization of event-sequences, see (Abbott 2001: Chapters 5 and 6).

detailed tutorial are free to download under the web-site link in the footnote 10).¹³ In general, as the “multiple causal narratives”, ESA proceeds by unpacking and analytically rebuilding narratives in replicable causal interpretations of event-sequences. Yet, the event-structure approach seems to (explicitly) pursue causal interpretations through a broader set of heuristic tools than the comparatively oriented “multiple causal narratives”.¹⁴ The ESA analysis is pursued through ongoing combination of general theoretical explanations and empirical generalizations with cross-sequence comparisons as well as illumination of the immediate historical context, the particularities, and the temporal order of the events (Griffin 1993: 1100-1101). It seems that this strategy thoroughly conforms to E.P. Thompson’s demand for historical explanations pursued through “ongoing dialogue between concept and evidence” (see p. 13 of this paper) and thus ultimately allows for the best possible elucidation of the general and particular features of historical events as well as their causes and consequences.

Furthermore, the particular research design (steps of analysis) integrated in *Ethno* seems to effectively synthesize the interpretive and the systematic-analytical modes of inquiry as propagated by the advocates of “historical social sciences”. On one hand, ESA stimulates the “thick description” and thus the attention to the idiosyncrasies and details of the events, while the logical rules based on the causal presumptions of *Ethno*¹⁵ make analysts explicit about their reasoning, leading to possibility of replication and generalization (see also Griffin and Ragin 1994). It is important to note that task to generate the causal explanations or generalizations rests further on the researcher. *Ethno* is not but a tool that helps the analyst to identify and extract evidence of causal significance from the event-sequences by constantly displaying and testing researcher’s assumptions about the particular and

¹³ <http://www.indiana.edu/~socpsy/ESA/>.

¹⁴ The ESA analysis of causal links between events typically combines theoretical -deductive and historical-general, particular and contextual, temporal and culturally interpretive perspectives (Griffin 1993: p. 1100).

¹⁵ Based on the tenets of the “production systems” theory (Fararo and Skvoretz 1984), the ESA analysis in *Ethno* is preconfigured according to three logical rules about the causal connections between events:

1. Event cannot occur until all its prerequisites have occurred;
2. Event depletes or uses up its prerequisites;
3. Event is not repeated until the conditions that created it are not used up by another event. (Heise 2001)

the general causal connections constituting the scrutinized event-sequence (see e.g. Stevenson et al. 2003: p. 5). I will close this paper by at least sketching out the basic analytical steps required by the event-structure analysis with *Ethno*:

1. *Narrative ordering of the conceptual event-chain.* Researcher inserts the events that are deemed relevant for the evolving of the “story” in strict temporal order into *Ethno*.

2. *Analysis of causal links among events identified in the previous narrative construction.* *Ethno* asks a series of factual/counterfactual questions about the interconnectedness of the events based upon its logical rules (see Fn. 14). The questions are to be answered by the analyst with yes/no.

3. *Ethno creates a diagram of event structure.* After the substitution of the temporal narrative order by the causal order in step two, *Ethno* creates a diagram that mirrors analyst’s interpretation of the causal interconnections within the event chain.

4. Generalization:

4.1. After the analysis of the particular event-sequence, researcher is asked to rid the narrative (step 1) of all events that are deemed as contingent, idiosyncratic, or causally irrelevant.

4.2. The rest of events are to be redefined in more general conceptual terms (as a case of general category of social phenomena, theoretical conception etc.).

4.3. The altered temporal sequence is transformed into causal chain in strict accordance to the causal postulations of the previous analysis of the particular case.

4.4. *Ethno* creates a second diagram for a generalized event-sequence and tests¹⁶ its compatibility with the diagram of the particular event-sequence. The analyst is thus confronted with the logical or substantive inconsistencies of his (both general and particular) explanation. The procedure is repeated until coherence between the general and the particular processes is achieved.

4.5. Through comparison of the generalized event structures of “similar” event-sequences, the level of generality may be further extended.

¹⁶ According to its logical rules, yet these may be relaxed or altered by the researcher.

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