

Whither Historical Sociology?

A Review Essay

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JACK GOLDSTONE.

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THEDA SKOCPOL.

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Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

HOWARD KIMELDORF.

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Ten years ago, Theda Skocpol (1984) noted how historical sociology in the mid-1980s brought in new scholars and new visions to almost revolutionize sociological practice. Describing this process of transformation, she asserted:

(H)istorical sociology is no longer exclusively the province of the odd, if honored, grand older men of the discipline. Students and rising young sociologists, even women and middle-Americans, can and do make modest or major contributions to sociology through historical genres of research. Nowadays, historical questions or methods are the stuff of which conferences, courses, and sessions are made. . . . (357)

Historical sociology did indeed bring in a new cadre of scholars and an innovative approach to historical events and, with it, a growing body of literature that continues to flourish. Partly as a consequence of this expanding corpus of work, greater attention than ever before is being devoted to questions of research strategy. A decade ago, Skocpol identified three research strategies comprising what can be termed the *extensive* strategy, whereby a general, overarching model was applied to explain numerous historical instances, the *intensive* strategy that employed concepts to develop a meaningful historical interpretation of a single case, and the *broad* strategy that analyzed causal regularities in history (362–63). Do these research strategies still define the practice of historical sociology today?

This review argues that research strategies in historical sociology have recently gravitated around three approaches with distinct epistemological and methodological features, namely the experimental approach that has dominated the field since its inception, and the experiential and eventmental¹ approaches that have recently emerged to counter that domination. Although these approaches take diverse positions on the primacy of structure, agency, and contingency in historical explanation, there is also much overlap.² The experimental approach applies the scientific method of sociology to history by investigating manifest patterns in the social structure, often relying on secondary³ sources of evidence lodged in public discourse⁴ to illuminate those patterns. The eventmental approach problematizes the event as a theoretical category, focusing on sources of evi-

dence often embedded in public discourse to historically reconstruct the structure and agency involved in the event. The experiential approach explains patterns in history through the interpretation of social action, typically utilizing sources of evidence located, instead, in the private discourse to illuminate the role of agency. Hence, whereas experimental approaches use a significant number of historical cases within a comparative scientific framework, evenemential approaches focus on events and the social actors engaged in them, centering their research problematic around the ordering of historical events. Experiential approaches tend to focus on one historical case in depth, investigating it mainly through bringing in sources often embedded in private discourse.

Within this framework, the essay reviews nine recent examples of scholarship in historical sociology that range from the experimental to the evenemential to the experiential as follows: McDaniel (1991), Brubaker (1992), Goldstone (1991), Skocpol (1992), Abbott (1988), Kimeldorf (1988), Aminzade (1993), Rose (1992), and Dorothy Smith (1990). A tenth current study (Dennis Smith 1991), tracing the rise of historical sociology, sets the stage for the argument.

The Resurgence of Historical Sociology

Dennis Smith (1991) contextualizes the postwar resurgence of historical sociology within larger political and social processes. He argues that historical sociology searches for “the mechanisms through which societies change or reproduce themselves” (1), and in a related manner, inquires into “the social preconditions and consequences of attempts to implement or impede such values as freedom, equality and justice.” These endeavors also demarcate the three distinct phases in the development of historical sociology as a field: the battle with totalitarianism and ensuing political transformations covering the period before the mid-1960s constitutes the first phase; the rediscovery of domination, inequality, and the subsequent emergence of resistance movements in the early 1960s marks the second phase; and the impact of the fragmentation of the stable bipolar world of the Cold War in the 1970s and 1980s comprises the third and final phase. Although one could criticize this periodization for its almost exclusive reliance on the Western European experience, it nevertheless captures the reflexive link between large-scale societal transformations and the development of a scholarly field. This periodization also enables Smith to speculate on the future course of historical sociology.

Smith (1991, 156, 163) argues that the most relevant issue of the 1990s for historical sociology will be the tension between involvement and detachment. While involvement necessitates “the capacity to empathize with and evoke the situation of particular participants in specific historical situations,” detachment requires “the capacity to

observe processes and relationships objectively, discounting political/moral commitments and emotion laden responses.” This tension between involvement and detachment is reflected, Smith contends, in setting the research agenda of historical sociology: Should one profess detachment in order to analyze historical processes objectively, or should one openly embrace subjective commitments to fully capture the human agency? Yet, this tension between involvement and detachment has pervaded the social sciences from their inception in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From the onset, issues of objectivity have been discussed by social thinkers from Emile Durkheim and Max Weber to C. Wright Mills. Hence, even though all nine scholars reviewed here attempt, based on the insights they gain through historical analysis, to delineate the factors that would facilitate human progress toward a more democratic social existence, the research agenda Dennis Smith sets for them is not novel but reiterative of an old sociological agenda. Following the model of their predecessors, who had conflicting interpretations of the agenda in the past, the nine also widely disagree on how to operationalize that agenda. While some experiment with the structural processes that inhibit or enhance historical transformation, others focus on the events that construct the particular configuration between structure and agency, and still others highlight the agency of the actors in producing such a transformation.

This review argues that the prevalent experimental approach in historical sociology has been currently challenged by the formation of the evenemential and experiential approaches. It traces the epistemological and methodological roots of each approach to the works of three scholars, Barrington Moore Jr., Fernand Braudel, and E. P. Thompson. Moore, who emphasizes the application of scientific rigor to historical analysis, and the significance of structural variables in formulating the ensuing sociological explanation, molds the research agenda of the experimental approach. The works of Braudel and Thompson, which alert historical sociologists to the significance of events and actual experience in the construction and reconstruction of history, form the bases of the evenemential and experiential approaches.

Moore’s (1967) seminal work on the social origins of dictatorship and democracy analyzes the structural patterns that generate different political outcomes. As Moore compares England, France, the United States, Germany, Russia, China, Japan, and India within this structural framework, he often reduces the agency of the historical actors in each society to cultural values of slight significance (485). Given that Moore places little or no analytical emphasis on variations within these societies other than those surrounding class variations, it is not surprising that the reinterpretation of historical accounts located in the public discourse forms his main research strategy. Among the historical sociologists reviewed in this essay, McDaniel (1991), Brubaker (1992), Goldstone (1991), and Skocpol (1992) follow

Moore's lead. Although starting from this lead, Abbott (1988) develops a more historically textured experimental approach.

Braudel's (1975) outstanding analysis of the Mediterranean Sea in the sixteenth century focuses on the social conditions that generate this unique historical space. In explaining his organizing narrative, Braudel outlines three types of histories, that of the environment referring to "a history of man in his relationship to the environment, a history in which all change is slow, a history of constant repetition, ever-recurring cycles"; that of the groups and grouping indicating a history of "economic systems, states, societies, civilization and warfare, where time has slow but perceptible rhythms"; and, finally, that of the history of events, "surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs" (21–22). It is Braudel's insistence to study all the structural, social, and contingent forces that merge to produce the foam enabling historical sociologists to generate a sociology of the event. Among the historical sociologists reviewed in this essay, Kimeldorf (1988) and Aminzade (1993) expand on this approach by undertaking extensive analyses of the structural and narrative construction of historical events as substantiated by primary and secondary sources embedded in public discourse.

Thompson's (1963) pivotal analysis of the making of the English working class departs from this experimental approach. He explicitly states that "the notion of class (which) entails the notion of historical relationship (has) a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any given moment and anatomise its structure" (9). To capture the agency of social actors, we are told to focus on historical processes and specifically on the experience of the worker within them.⁵ Thompson's emphasis on social action leads him to employ a research methodology that involves the in-depth analysis of one case through a multiplicity of archival sources, especially ones that capture the everyday lives of the workers. Among the scholars reviewed here, Rose (1992) and Dorothy Smith (1990) follow Thompson's approach in attempting to reveal the agency of social actors through detailed sociological analyses of the historical experience as documented through sources located in private discourse.

This essay concludes by stating that only a *synthesis* of the experimental, evenemential, and experiential approaches can capture the complexity of the structure, agency, and contingency interaction in historical sociological analysis.

The Experimental Approach to Historical Sociology

McDaniel's work (1991) on autocracy, modernization, and revolution in Russia and Iran; Brubaker's study (1992) of citizenship and nationhood in France and Germany; Goldstone's analysis (1991) of revolution and rebellion in England, France, and the Ottoman and Chinese empires;

and Skocpol's examination (1992) into the political origins of social policy in the United States exemplify the experimental approach. Abbott's study (1988) on the system of professions and the emergence of the expert division of labor improves this approach by introducing a new historical/sociological methodology. In defining and explaining historical transformation, all confer priority to independent variables embedded in the social structure, and all define these variables with the rigor of scientific analysis. McDaniel emphasizes the nature of political authority, Brubaker stresses political and cultural geography, Goldstone highlights the significance of concomitant demographic and political crises, and Skocpol focuses on policy formation within the context of the polity. Abbott systematically delineates the boundaries of professions. Another common feature is their emphasis on culture in defining the meaning frameworks around political structure; all tend to explain differences in outcome in these meaning frameworks. With the exception of Abbott,⁶ all underline the need for the employment of the comparative method when the small number of cases in historical analysis renders the application of mainstream statistical methods impossible. Therefore, they reiterate the main scientific research paradigm of sociology.

Tim McDaniel's (1991) analysis on autocracy, modernization, and revolution in Russia and Iran offers a corrective to Moore's (1967) possible routes to dictatorship and democracy. Focusing on the 1917 Russian and the 1978–79 Iranian revolutions, McDaniel argues that these historical events display a distinct, previously neglected route to industrial society; both occur after autocratic modernization, "a distinctive route to modernity not identified in Moore's work" (5). McDaniel states that it is his new research strategy that, rather than employing Moore's model of studying development across a large number of cases, focuses on two cases within a single development type, thus enabling him to uncover this new route (11–12). He presents this approach as a partial compromise between the historian's attention to a single case and the sociologist's inclination for maximizing the number of cases. McDaniel argues that his approach compares similarities and differences more carefully, incorporates the historical context of the cases more successfully, and thus develops a more historically textured approach to the study of revolutions, premised on "a new sense of historicity" (13). He also includes cases that extend beyond Russia and Iran, such as corporativeness in Europe (40), and the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Mexican revolutions in the Third World (112).

According to McDaniel (1991), "historically shaped physiognomies" (15) emerge within this framework as the determinants of the disparate patterns of revolutions in Iran and Russia. When these physiognomies are analyzed in more depth, the nature of political authority emerges specifically as "the independent variable which cannot be reduced to economic or class variables alone" (70). While political

autocracy in Russia and Iran explain the occurrence of revolutions in both contexts, the historical particularities of each case account for the differences in revolutionary outcomes. McDaniel first sets the stage for the problem by means of a thorough analysis of the historical legacies, the political nature of autocracy, and the dimensions of modernization; he then introduces cultural and social elements of the historical contexts as the explanatory variables of the differences. It is specifically the urban character of change, the social agency of landlords and peasants, and the cultural frameworks of revolution that determine the outcome in Russia and Iran. The discussion of Russian Marxism and Shi'ism as revolutionary cultural frameworks (189–202), and of the decisive agency of the socialist parties and workers in Russia and the ulama and urban groups in Iran (202–17) is original, fascinating, but very brief. Only then does McDaniel discuss the human agency in revolutions, still leaving behind a strong sense of the determinacy of the political structure, rather than social agency, in the occurrence of both revolutions. McDaniel's research strategy suffers from a problem that has been directed to comparative analysis in general: by focusing on the similarities and differences between the two cases, the researcher ends up missing the whole picture in both. Rather than focusing on the historical processes and narrative discourses in either society in their own terms, McDaniel focuses on the comparable dimensions in both. What emerges is not an explanation of two historical processes that produced similar outcomes at different historical junctures, but instead a description of the similarities and differences between the two processes.

Rogers Brubaker's (1992) study on citizenship and nationhood in France and Germany examines the difference between the two cases with respect to civic self-definition and patterns of civic incorporation. He attempts to explain why the French citizenry is defined expansively as a territorial community, whereas the German citizenry is interpreted restrictively as a community of descent. He argues that it was the disparate political and cultural geography of the two cases that produced these opposing constructions of citizenship. Brubaker's innovative use of cultural geography as an independent variable and his redefinition of the state as an association of citizens rather than as a territorial organization, partially restores the agency of social actors. The role of citizens in generating meanings and maintaining political boundaries is recognized. Still, in empirically grounding his argument, Brubaker traces these cultural idioms to "pivotal moments in the shaping and reshaping of citizenship law" (17). He undertakes a very thorough analysis of citizenship law in France and Germany and employs as his sources legal codes, state statistical tables on naturalizations, public reports, and speeches (79). His analysis ably demonstrates the different interpretations of civic definition that emerge in France and Germany.

Brubaker's (1992) study of interests that shape citizenry narrows to legal policy analyses, however. By concentrating

on legal texts as his source, he bases his analysis only on formal civic forms of participation, narrows the social interests that shape citizenry to legal policy analyses, and thus inadvertently privileges the agency of the state and of those social actors who are already included in the French and German citizenry. Brubaker does not adequately cover the possible perspectives of the dispossessed, of those excluded from citizenship. Even though he does indeed cite interviews with Franco-Algerians in France and Turks in Germany, and other immigrant groups excluded from citizenry, these brief references are based on already-published interviews from newspapers (146). The agency of these marginalized social actors is sacrificed to the structural determinants of legal codes as they are interpreted by the state; hence, law is privileged over other possible independent variables such as class dynamics, ethnicity, and racism. This stand may also account for his cynical conclusion that the nation-state and national citizenship "will remain very much—perhaps too much—with us" (189). By not adequately focusing on the agency of those excluded from citizenry in each case, Brubaker reifies the political power of the state and minimizes the possibility of social change.

Jack Goldstone's analysis (1991) of the periodic waves of state breakdown in the seventeenth century through the English and French revolutions and the Ottoman and Chinese crises closely follows Moore's model of comparative research on political transformation across several cases. Focusing on the historical conjuncture of the English Revolution (1639–42), the French Revolution (1789–92), the Ottoman crisis (1590–1658), and the fall of the Ming dynasty in China (circa 1644), Goldstone asks why it was that only the European breakdown produced "the rise of the West" (3–4). Like McDaniel and Brubaker, Goldstone puzzles over a difference in political outcome. By focusing on the pre-modern era and on a spectrum of societies ranging from the West to the non-West, Goldstone is able to develop a finely textured sociological analysis. He argues that the simultaneous occurrence of four factors—a state financial crisis, severe elite divisions, a high potential for mobilizing popular groups, and a subsequent increase in the salience of heterodox cultural and religious ideas—leads to revolutions. State breakdown occurs in turn when the demographic factors of population growth and climate changes combine with these social structural changes (24). The pattern of ensuing state reconstruction, Goldstone contends, is shaped by the cultural frameworks of each case. Goldstone, like Brubaker, highlights the significance of culture in shaping the political structure. Goldstone's other contribution to historical sociological scholarship is methodological. He analyzes social structure at a multiplicity of levels that expand beyond the micro-macro, ideal-real, and conflict-consensus, dichotomies; he identifies a "fractal" scale of causal factors whereby structures show similar features, regardless of the scale on which they are observed (46). Goldstone also combines quantitative statistical methods

with case-centered approaches more typical of qualitative research (37–38). It is his development of a quantifiable and therefore empirically testable model of revolutionary change that distinguishes Goldstone's research strategy. Focusing on population movements and their consequences, particularly as measured through price movements, he deals with measurable quantities so that his argument "could definitely be proven to be wrong." He even empirically defines types of state breakdown through the bivariate analysis of 128 different kinds of events (10–11).

As Goldstone (1991) himself also readily admits, there are two serious problems with this novel approach (xxvi). One is that he may be accused—wrongfully, he contends—of espousing geographic determinism. The other, more serious problem concerns the use of mathematical models. Goldstone argues that "because the data for the Asian cases are *weaker* than for the European cases [emphasis mine]," he "has dispensed with the mathematical models entirely in addressing those cases." The grave issue that lies behind both these problems concerns Goldstone's capacity to methodologically and epistemologically overcome the determinism of his "Western" cases. He analyzes the English Revolution at length with a full mathematical model, the French Revolution "somewhat differently" by "using only very slightly the mathematical model developed for England," and, in the cases of the Ottoman crisis and the fall of the Ming dynasty in China, he proceeds "much more rapidly, providing briefer analyses of these political crises and examining how they resembled or differed from those of Europe" (xxvi–xxvii). By analyzing England and France in depth at the expense of the Ottoman Empire and China, Goldstone inadvertently ends up privileging his Western cases. Furthermore, Goldstone explains Western cases in terms of "structural" differences versus the Eastern ones in terms of "cultural" variations (61–62). This structure/culture difference in explanation is reminiscent of the Orientalism that contrasts Western rationality (read structure), with Eastern emotionality (read culture).

Goldstone (1991) defends his epistemology as a function of his limited linguistic skills that make his discussion of the Asian cases "*necessarily* more discursive [emphasis mine]" (351). By defining his research strategy in this manner, Goldstone shortchanges the agency of the margins; like Brubaker's neglect of the agency of the immigrants in France and Germany, Goldstone neglects the agency of the Ottoman and Chinese empires. It is therefore not surprising when he concludes that "England and France had *dynamic* futures after their revolutions, and China and Turkey entered long periods of *stagnation* [emphases mine]" (450). One is left to contemplate how Goldstone's causal explanation would have been different had he anchored his analysis in the Ottoman and Chinese cases rather than in the English and French ones.

One of the most interesting aspects of Theda Skocpol's recent work (1992) on the political origins of social policy

in the United States is her shift in historical methodology. Rather than employing the multiple-case approach to revolutions in France, Russia, and China that she developed in her earlier work (1978), Skocpol follows, in her recent study (1992), a single-case approach to social policy construction in the United States. She argues that her approach is a comparatively informed historical case study of U.S. social provision, and even though she brings in comparative material at various points, no national history besides that of the United States is fully explored. Skocpol explains how she delved into Civil War pensions and how this source led her in turn to the involvement of women's voluntary groups, the exploration of which soon became an "obsession" (vii). Her analysis and discovery of a maternalist welfare state is a novel contribution to the field that had so far been dominated by a model of the paternalist welfare state followed by other Western nations (525). Skocpol's lessons for the future pungently point out how, unlike in the past, the recent advocates in the United States for mothers and children are not supported by federations that attempt to encompass all politically active women (531–39).

The change in Skocpol's research strategy also makes her model more processual and contingent (1992, 58, 531); policies, once formed, have feedback effects on state capacities and on social groups and their political goals and therefore also make some future developments more likely than others. This change in research strategy affects her selection of historical evidence as well. Rather than focusing on secondary sources as she did in her previous book, Skocpol employs "fresh cross-state quantitative data," with "secondary" evidence from "published historical studies, government records and the organizational records of women's groups and their activities as recorded in state records and national compendia, as well as the records of the American Federation of Labor." She also probes into the sources mentioned in the works of historians when "secondary works were sparse or not fully convincing" (61). The use of archival evidence is the most significant methodological change that enables Skocpol to capture the agency of the people engaged in policy construction, especially that of women. She employs illustrations, including period charts, cartoons, title and content pages of books, charts, programs for the Congress of Mothers, and the like; each part of the book also starts with quotations from speeches, newspapers, and period works.

Nevertheless, Skocpol (1992)—like McDaniel, Brubaker, and Goldstone—relies solely on historical sources that have been exclusively constructed for the public political arena. There is no mention of diaries, memoirs, poems, or personal accounts that would have located the social actors in society at large and would have also brought in their ties with other underrepresented groups. The focus is exclusively on carefully constructed causal narratives when there is no mention of evidence that does not fit her model. Her insistence on a "polity-centered approach" (41) also arrests

Skocpol's brief focus on the subjectivities of the social actors (25). The agency of these actors is often based on ethnicity, race, and gender and is also frequently textured by class. Like McDaniel, Brubaker, and Goldstone, Skocpol once more focuses and reifies the agency of the causally relevant, the visible, the public, and the politically included. In doing so, she overlooks variations in policy formation and execution within and between immigrant groups, blacks, and lower-class women and avoids all those historical instances that do not fit her model. Had it not been for the visible participation of white upper- and middle-class women in policy formation, Skocpol would have missed the gender dimension and does still largely overlook the agency of social groups underrepresented in the polity. Even though Skocpol admits to spending hours gaining a "feel" for the perspectives of policy actors and to following her "working hunches" (61), whenever she brings in the subjectivity and the agency of social groups, her narrative becomes uneasy, rampant with quotation marks, and she becomes, in her own words, "unsystematic." Confined by the experimental approach, Skocpol fails to fully capture the agency of social actors.

Andrew Abbott's study (1988) on the emergence of the system of professions and the division of expert labor captures both the epistemological and the methodological issues of the experimental approach. He is able to break, for the first time, the iron hold of the experimental method on historical sociology by problematizing the nature of historical events. Rather than treating them as facts upon which to build structural variables, Abbott takes into account the social construction of these historical facts. He first problematizes the "natural" temporal order of professions by studying the order of eight events that occur in the establishment of 130 American and British professions (16–17). Abbott analyzes the gathered data by calculating the mean distances between the events to establish an "order of professionalization" based on a single one-dimensional scaling algorithm. In both the British and American professions, Abbott finds no empirical support for the view that organizations seen in professionalization arrive in a particular sequence. Yet, his methodological rigor lies not only in this empirical refutation but also in the "system model" through which he proposes to study professional development. His system model asks three questions: What are the external disturbances and their effects on social action? What are the internal changes in knowledge and structure that create jurisdictional competition? How does internal differentiation interact with system structure to create temporary stabilities? (226). Abbott combines quantitative and qualitative data, employing a narrative presentation of contrasting cases with a quantitative analysis of the testable ideas one generates from them. This system model encompasses the whole spectrum of professional experience from success to failure, thus overcoming the selectivity bias of the experimental approach that inadvertently focuses on the survivors

at the expense of the failures. Another significant aspect of the system model is its ability to operationalize historical contingency through the "fractal interpretation reappearing within itself at many different levels of measurement" (316), a concept Goldstone also employs.

One problem still remains, however, in the constant interaction between the historical sociologist and his or her subject matter. This interaction affects both the epistemology and the methodology employed in the analysis. Abbott (1988) notes the nature of this interaction as he portrays how the historical sociologist "disentangles the threads of determinants, structures, and intentions, then reweaves them into an analysis, and then recounts the analysis in some readable form" (386). The most significant challenge then becomes the development of a research strategy that could capture the agency of the social actors lodged in these multiple sites, one that would provide explanatory space to both the objective reality of social structure *and* its subjective consequences. Even though Abbott's system model develops a more textured approach in this respect, it nevertheless does not yet come up with a universally applied research strategy. How, for instance, can one study social issues such as gender oppression, racial discrimination, and political representation through the system model? Or can one investigate a social phenomenon such as prostitution that, unlike high-skilled professionalization, is not readily visible in the public sphere? The succeeding works by Kimeldorf (1988), Aminzade (1993), Rose (1992), and Smith (1990) analyze sociological issues surrounding the working class, political issues, and gender and therefore help develop a more articulated conception of agency.

In summary, the analyses of McDaniel, Brubaker, Goldstone, and Skocpol have refined Moore's experimental approach in historical sociology by providing elegantly textured causal explanations, introducing culture as an independent variable to capture the structures of meaning and attempting to include the agency of social actors through an innovative use of historical sources. Yet, given their emphasis on structural factors—whose blueprints always rest on the Western experience—these analyses cannot revise the "tyranny" of structure in their analyses. The one constructive deviation in this mode is Abbott's, as he attempts to operationalize an analytical model that studies the error terms, the mismatches, and the unexplained in addition to the meticulously defined variables of the experimental approach.

The Evenemential Approach to Historical Sociology

One can argue that, in capturing the agency of the social actors through the thorough analysis of historical events, the *evenemential*⁷ approach succeeds where the experimental approach falls short. Focusing on the historical ordering of events, this approach assumes that events are normally path dependent, whereby earlier events qualify the temporal and

causal construction of later events. As such, the approach introduces a sense of reflexivity that takes into account both the social structure and the human agency in the formation of events. While events are assumed "to be capable of changing not only the balance of causal forces operating but the very logic by which consequences follow from occurrences or circumstances," they also transform "the very cultural categories that shape and constrain human action" (Sewell 1990b, 16–17).

Howard Kimeldorf's analysis (1988) of East Coast and West Coast longshoremen in the United States attempts to explain why these two groups came to embrace different political orientations. Although both groups were based in the same industry, confronted the same shipping lines, and engaged in the same occupation, the East Coast longshoremen developed a conservative union, while the West Coast longshoremen formed a radical one. Rather than explaining away the West Coast radicalism as an exception, as labor historians tended to do, Kimeldorf asks instead the neglected question of why there was some "socialism" in the West and why radicals attained positions of prominence. By reconstructing the research question in a manner that encompasses the agency of the workers themselves as well as the structure of production relations, Kimeldorf develops a research strategy that takes into account both structure and agency. It is this posing of the question that leads him to capture the agency of his workers by "poring over rare archival material, seldom used documents, and other primary sources," and by interviewing retired longshoremen "as a way of interrogating the data" (x). Only then is he able to reconstruct the distinct experience of longshoremen "from the standpoint of those who actually lived it." Hence, the historical analysis that Kimeldorf develops is one that "combines a classical narrative approach in emphasizing the importance of timing, unique events, and conscious choice with a more sociologically focused analysis of how such historical particularities were played out within the limits and possibilities established by existing social structural arrangements" (16–17). Indeed, Kimeldorf's research strategy of combining sociological analysis and historical narrative, simultaneously constructing narratives and explaining causal patterns through analyses of the social structure, brings historical sociology closer to overcoming the structure-agency tension. Kimeldorf concludes that, in the final analysis, both human agency and social structure were significant in the formation of the radical union, with the final outcome resembling "Weber's historical analogy of throwing 'loaded dice,' where each toss is partly contingent on the one before it and where a particular outcome becomes more favorable" (161).

One needs, however, to ask if this proposed resolution to the structure-agency tension does indeed capture the agency of the working class in its entirety. Kimeldorf's (1988) research strategy focuses on the longshoremen's experience insofar as it relates to the workplace. But one needs to con-

sider the multiple sites of the worker's experience that extend beyond the workplace to the family household, the neighborhood, and the political arena. As Sewell (1990a) suggests, Kimeldorf does bring in the objective structures that condition the worker's actions concurrently with the subjective interpretations of the workers that he captures through his interviewees. But the works of Aminzade (1993), Rose (1992), and Smith (1990) explore the other political and gender dimensions of the working-class experience that need to be incorporated into Kimeldorf's research strategy.

Ron Aminzade's (1993) study on early industrialization and class formation in the French cities of Toulouse, Saint-Etienne, and Rouen seeks to understand the different political consequences in each city. Even though the three cities shared a common cultural, political, and economic experience, Toulouse moved from liberal republicanism to an alliance of radicals and socialists, Saint-Etienne witnessed the triumph of radical republicanism, and Rouen represented the triumph of liberalism. Aminzade argues that it was "the prior local histories of republican party formation . . . which varied through the intersection of changing national political opportunity structures with divergent local patterns of industrialization and class formation" that produced the varying outcomes (10). Aminzade's contribution to historical sociology lies in bringing together structure, agency, and historical contingency and also employing the narrative as a research tool in his analyses. He stresses the "role of nonclass factors including shifting opportunity structures, and the importance of contingency, of temporally and spatially specific events" in class formation (7). By comparing three cities spatially and temporally in one nation-state at relatively close time periods, Aminzade develops a historically grounded theory that, unlike the comparisons of McDaniel or Goldstone, incorporates more fully the concept of contingency (25). He also undertakes an in-depth discussion of narrative as a methodological tool in historical sociology. Using analytic narratives that are "theoretically structured stories about coherent sequences of motivated actions" (26–27), Aminzade develops a more event-centered historical sociology, one that treats events not simply as manifestations of large-scale processes but as key causal factors in trajectories of political change. This, for Aminzade, is much more preferable to the "formal logical or mathematical proofs often devoid of events and even of actors" (27) of the type that Goldstone undertakes to argue for structural and environmental determinacy. What sources does Aminzade use for his novel approach? Newspapers, public lectures, photographs, and lithographs from the city archives, as well as records on local factories, number of workers employed, and their wages in each city form the main historical sources. Having restored the agency of the social actors, in the end, Aminzade argues, it was the "timing and content of local economic development with respect to party formation processes, shifting national polit-

ical opportunity structures, and differences in balance of power within parties” that determined the character of political action in the three cities (252).

The Experiential Approach to Historical Sociology

Hence, with Aminzade’s analysis, the component of historical contingency gets systematized and restored into the evenemential approach. But it is specifically this contingency and the role of the dominant social groups within that produce another epistemological problem. Even though contingency takes into account temporal and spatial factors as well as structural ones, it favors the agency of some actors over others. Although Kimeldorf (1988) and Aminzade (1993) capture the agency of social actors in history through their evenemential research strategies, their social actors are almost exclusively males participating in the public sphere: in Kimeldorf, they do so through their labor; in Aminzade, through their political behavior. Still, would the evenemential research strategy⁸ they develop apply equally to all social actors across class, race, gender, and ethnic lines?

E. P. Thompson’s (1963) analysis of the formation of the working class in England provides the blueprint for the experiential approach to historical sociology. Thompson captures the agency of social actors by studying one historical case in depth through a wide collection of sources that map out the worker’s experience. The works of the two scholars (Rose 1992, Dorothy Smith 1990) engage in similar in-depth analyses of one case through primary sources; Smith further proposes to revise sociological methodology to capture the agency of one often-underrepresented social group, that of women. Given the nature of multiple social realities that fragment along gender lines,⁹ both Rose and Smith alert historical sociology to the need to further problematize the concept of agency and the role of experience in its reconstruction.¹⁰ Only with their works does the significance of the agency of women in historical analysis come to the forefront.

Sonya Rose’s study (1992) on gender and class in nineteenth-century England demonstrates how, in the massive reorganization of lives and livelihoods that accompanied the development of capitalism, gender was involved in the process from the start. Rose argues that work and wages in this transformation acquired meanings outside the workplace; economic relations were defined and reified in the families and households of men and women. By focusing on nonpublic, informal social experience, Rose is able to extend the worker’s agency beyond the workplace and to thus reveal the multiple realities of their lives (197). What differentiates her approach from Abbott (1988), Aminzade (1993), and Kimeldorf (1988) is the inclusion of the multiple sites of experience that expand beyond the public arena to particularly capture the experience of underrepresented groups such as women. One should add that by doing so,

she runs the risk of losing depth of analysis by spreading across multiple locales. In addition to studying the multiple realities behind the public and political rhetoric on women, Rose also extends beyond the realm of observable behavior to take into account structures of feeling, namely “experience not interpreted (that) remains in the imagination, and, is capable of being mobilized as a resource” (17). It is this epistemological stretch beyond the formal into the informal, the experiential, and the imagined that enables Rose to encompass the agency of women in historical sociological analysis. This research strategy brings with it the necessity to analyze a wide spectrum of historical sources, in particular those extending beyond the public realm, and it is the introduction of these that enables her to capture the agency of women. The sources Rose analyzes (70, 75, 80–81, 124, 163, 183) range from formal state documents such as government bills, state commissioner reports, and census reports; to the informal information contained in these government documents such as oral histories; to printed sources in the media such as letters; to newspapers (a source Skocpol also uses) and newspaper editorials; to oral evidence of the rhetoric of trade union leaders at congresses, in the press, and in labor disputes; to literary evidence in the form of verses of poems. In concluding her analysis, Rose argues that it is specifically this “spider’s web of interacting forces, all with gender distinctions built into them” (189), that makes it impossible to overcome gender inequality.

Although Rose’s research strategy generates significant insights into gender dynamics, is this new realm of the informal, or the experiential, adequately developed? And, more important still, does the analysis of this new realm have the legitimating power of the formal, or the institutional, sources of knowledge? Rose’s attempt to develop a new research strategy in historical sociology that would bring in the agency of women is just a starting point, even though a significant one, since in addition to women the underrepresented include racial, ethnic, and religious minorities and the Third World—all categories that are increasingly significant in contemporary world crises.

These concerns lead to Dorothy Smith’s analysis (1990) of the conceptual practices of power and the way these practices negatively affect the sociological analysis of gender. Smith delves into the epistemological barriers in sociological analysis that inhibit the agency of women and, with it, the agency of the underrepresented. She argues that it is the sociological practice of “analyzing experience and writing about society to produce an objectified version that subsumes people’s actual speech, eliminates the presence of subjects as agents in texts, and converts people from subjects to objects of investigation” that arrests this agency (27). Instead, Smith proposes to ground sociology in the activities of actual individuals, rather than in interpretations of them, and in the material conditions as Marx articulated them rather than on ideological reflections, so that sociological processes do not, as they tend to do, legislate a reality

rather than discover one (51). How would Smith's critical standpoint, which delves into "people's lived experience, the social organization and relations of objectified knowledge, and the structure of power that underpin them" (6-7), alter the way historical sociology is practiced? Smith, like Skocpol, Abbott, Kimeldorf, Aminzade, and Rose, emphasizes the need to extend beyond structure to the site of experience, where the connection between knowledge and power is also lodged. She argues that it would be impossible to restore the agency of the underrepresented without bringing this experiential realm into the domain of sociological analysis. For these reasons, Smith methodologically proposes to explore the social relations of power and their institutional base that underlie "the factual surfaces of textual realities" (84-86).

Hence, Smith, like Rose, cautions against the complex structural, institutional, and organizational factors that inhibit the human agency from fully surfacing in society. As Sewell also notes (1990a), the experiential still remains undertheorized, however, and it is unclear if it will ever be adequately theorized to include the subjectivities of both the social actors and the researcher. Even though Smith highlights the significance of the materialist analysis in developing an alternate research strategy, she does not reestablish its ties with the social structure. The site of experience and the process through which it converts to social action remain undertheorized. The structural variables that influence the construction of experience are not adequately studied. Within the context of the experiential approach, even though human agency in historical sociology is necessary, it is not sufficient unless accompanied by a thorough analysis of social structure.

Future Directions for Historical Sociology

Smith's (1990) critique is not yet able to provide an alternate epistemological and methodological framework for historical sociology. Even though it explicates the epistemological assumptions in sociological analysis that arrest human agency, it has not produced an alternate research strategy. After reviewing recent scholarship in historical sociology with respect to the emphases placed on social structure, human agency, and historical contingency, this essay argues that a novel approach to historical sociology needs to combine all these components into a new synthesis. One needs to delve into sources embedded in private discourse to capture human agency and, at the same time, analyze the underlying structure that shapes social action. What is thus called for is a textured, multidimensional approach to historical sociology, one that looks at silences in texts as well as articulated positions and also includes social experiences in the everyday, informal, and private as well as the public and the formal aspects of people's lives. Only then can one bridge the current divide in historical sociology among experimental approaches that marginalize

human agency, the evenemential approaches that focus on the event to capture both structure and agency, and the experiential approaches that privilege human agency at the expense of social structure.

Although the evenemential and experiential approaches provide significant insights into these epistemological and methodological issues, they have not been able to develop a research strategy that combines social structure and human agency. Among the works reviewed here, Abbott's (1988) system model carefully reviews the methodological issues surrounding structure and agency, and Kimeldorf (1988) and Aminzade (1993) self-consciously integrate structure and agency. The multiple sites of activity that the experiential approaches underline need to be included in the emerging research outline; one needs to carefully and systematically develop the multiple sites of human agency and social structure. Only then can historical sociology overcome the ascendancy of certain overpowering historical agents, organizations, and institutions at the expense of others and can thus capture more of the multiple dimensions of social reality.

In his analysis of the system of professions, Abbott (1988) comes closest to repairing the structure-agency divide, and it is therefore befitting to conclude this essay with a quotation from his work:

To search for all the causal ancestors, or causal descendants, of a given event is merely a rhetorical convenience . . . Openings created by one sequence of events may or may not be taken advantage of by another; structural necessities constrain, but sufficient actions determine the outcomes of situations. An analytic rhetoric must preserve this adventitious but structured character. Such a rhetoric must leave events in their immediate temporal context. It must follow the blind alleys as well as the thoroughfares by which history produced the present. . . . (280-81)

Hence, the current literature in historical sociology alerts the sociologist to the multiple sites of human agency and social structure in history, commanding the study of successes as well as failure, but not yet providing the analytical tools that could contain all these sites.

NOTES

I would like to thank Howard Kimeldorf and Myron Gutmann for their astute comments on this essay. The remaining weaknesses are, no doubt, my responsibility alone.

1. The three terms partially draw upon William Sewell Jr.'s (1990b, 2) problematization of the concept of temporality in historical sociology into the teleological, evenemential, and the experimental. His delineation of evenemential temporality has been a novel contribution to historical sociology.

2. For analytical purposes, this review essay sets apart the three approaches as ideal types. In practice, the differences among the approaches are less distinct.

3. This essay defines primary sources as those historical texts that reflect phenomena without mediation of knowledge except that contained in the text itself. Secondary sources comprise texts that include the mediation and interpretation of a scholar in addition to that contained in the text

itself. A sixteenth-century imperial decree would constitute a primary source, and its discussion by a historical actor or scholar would comprise a secondary source. Even though both sources include mediation, the latter has many more layers than the first that need to be critically analyzed.

4. This essay distinguishes public and private discourse in historical sociological analysis in terms of the speaker and the audience to which a particular historical text is addressed. Hence, public discourse includes those documents such as state promulgations, policy reports, and newspaper columns that are often drafted by civic actors for the populace at large; private discourse entails those records such as poems, songs, and diaries that are usually composed by private individuals themselves for their own interests without an explicit audience in mind. The essay once more bases the differentiation of public and private discourse in ideal terms; the distinction between the two discourses is often much more mute in practice.

5. E. P. Thompson fully criticizes the experimental approach in another work (1978).

6. Abbott attempts to develop a system model that takes into account the epistemological constraints of the experimental approach. Rather than employing the experimental approach, Abbott develops a "system" model that problematizes the selectivity and contingency of historical events. Although one can argue that Skocpol also does not employ a comparative research strategy in her recent work, she still uses the scientific rigor of this strategy by bringing in other cases to the U.S. policy analysis.

7. The term *evenemential* is the "anglicization of the French 'evenementiel,'" a concept coined by Lucien Febvre but theoretically articulated by Fernand Braudel (Sewell 1990b, 25, n.5).

8. Due to the nature of the reflexive relation between structure and agency, Sewell (1990a) proposes a new research strategy for the *evenemential* approach, one that includes "a dialectic between the structural and experiential, and between the synchronic and diachronic moments" (72). Such a multifaceted approach may overcome the epistemological constraints of the *evenemential* approach.

9. One must note that even though Skocpol (1992) also focuses on gender in relation to policy formation and attempts to capture the agency to women through her analysis of women's clubs, she stops short of confronting the epistemological issue of recovering women's agency in histor-

ical analysis. For her, recovering the agency of gender is not the starting point of her research; she happens upon it while searching for the social origins of the welfare state.

10. Yet, as Sewell notes (1990a, 59), it is exactly the concept of experience that also renders the experiential approach problematic because "the meaning of the term is intrinsically amorphous." E. P. Thompson's conception of experience, Sewell points out, captures not the events themselves, but the way social actors construe them. Hence, the agency of the social actors still remains structured in this conception.

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