Comparative Historical Analysis and Path Dependence in Political Science[1]

The genesis of Comparative Historical Analysis in political science and sociology has witnessed the emergence, refinement, and sophistication of concepts of path dependence and critical juncture. Some particularities distinguish these approaches to path dependence from other disciplines, especially the implication of institutional change during phases of stability. This paper displays the emergence of path dependence within CHA. Second, it elaborates its analytical framework consisting of the combination of a critical juncture with subsequent path-dependent developments. Third, it evaluates its state of the art, analytical strengths and problems.

Introduction: The emergence of a research agenda

In recent decades the disciplines of not only sociology and political science, but also economics witnessed a general methodological re-emergence of comparative historical traditions that shows no sign of losing force. In the wake of this revival, a wide range of studies on diverse topics have been published, interrelated by a dedication to historically grounded inferences on large-scale political and social outcomes.[2] Beyond conjoint methods, these historical approaches share the inheritance of classical authors,[3] important core concepts such as path dependence, critical juncture and historical legacy, and similar theoretical foundations either connected to rational choice theory or historical institutionalism.[4] Indeed, the most important feature remains to be the common methodological tools: depth analysis of historical materials, the generation of rich textual and contextual understandings, and the quest for evaluating alternative explanations through a process of valid causal inference (King/ Keohane/ Verba 1994: 4f, Skocpol 1984: 374).

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[1] This section draws partly on a working paper by Calaminus/ Müller (2010) presented at the Institute of Latin American Studies, FU Berlin.

[2] Among them are the following studies with relation to democracy and development: Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, Haggard/ Kaufmann 1995, Huber/ Safford 1995, Collier/ Adcock 1999, Wood 2009, Mahoney/ Thelen 2009; and the following studies with relation to Latin America: Bergquist 1986, Gereffi/ Wyman 1990, Huber/ Safford 1995, Collier/ Collier 2002, Mahoney 2002, Falleti 2010.

[3] In their survey article on "Comparative Historical Analysis – Achievements and Agendas" Rueschemeyer/ Mahoney name the classical scholars Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx, Otto Hintze, Max Weber and Marc Bloch as references (Mahoney/ Rueschemeyer 2003b: 3). Skocpol names John Stuart Mill as methodological reference and Alexis de Tocqueville and Marc Bloch as classical influences (Skocpol 1979: 39).

[4] Rational choice theory as a theory generating approach borrows from comparative historical analysis in order to justify theories *ex post* by the design of case studies. Within historical institutionalism with its empirical orientation, comparative historical analysis lies at the heart of all research projects. For a systematic distinction between the two see Thelen 1999.

From the onset, the scholarly work of CHA has been located at the interface of political science, economics and sociology. Therefore, and through the constant endeavour to make use of historical narratives, it exhibits a genuinely interdisciplinary character connecting political science, economics, sociology and historical material. In a nutshell, this "tradition of research thus combines well-thought-out comparisons with an appreciation of historical context, thereby contributing to an effort to 'historicise' the social science" (Collier 1993: 110, original emphasis). However, this kind of historisation does not serve as an end in itself and CHA scholars refuted on various occasions a simple "history matters"-argument as being "both true and trivial" (Levi 1997: 28, see also Mahoney 2001: 4). The overall aim can, in fact, be described as using the explanatory power of historical sequences in order to illuminate contemporary political, economic and social developments by detecting causal inferences. This aim is grounded in the conviction that "the historical past represents a context that is causally significant" (Rueschemeyer 2009: 148). Unlike quantitative analyses, CHA studies primarily employ a qualitative, small-N research design and put an emphasis on in-depth analyses of a small number of cases. Therefore, the claim of a universal applicability of results is often bargained for a thorough understanding of a few (contrasting) cases (Mahoney/ Rueschemeyer 2003b: 13). An overview of the academic development of this sub-discipline, focussing on its implications for political science, points out its increasingly sophisticated theoretical frame and its auspicious use of historical narratives for scientific comparisons.

A crucial moment for CHA's reification as a sub-discipline within the fields of political science and sociology can be pinpointed to the *American Political Science Association* meeting in 1998. At this meeting, prominent scholars[5] agreed on the important innovations and vital impulses brought about by recent historical comparisons, and, at the same time, claimed the lack of an overarching programmatic statement on "the substantive contributions, methodological strategies, and theoretical accomplishments of this body of work" (Mahoney/ Rueschemeyer 2003a: xv). In the aftermath of the meeting, three accomplishments have lead to a more coherent research agenda of CHA: First, important empirical studies using a CHA design were conducted (Marx 1998, Thelen 2004, Mahoney 2001, Mahoney 2010, Falleti 2010). Second, conceptual and methodological contributions were made (Pierson 2004). Third, through the publication of an edited volume on *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Rueschemeyer/ Mahoney 2003), the promise of a conjoint statement was kept. But, although the reification of CHA can be pinpointed to 1998, that year is far from

[5] Among them David Collier, Paul Pierson, James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (Rueschemeyer/ Mahoney 2003: xv).

being its founding moment. The emergence of CHA reaches back to landmark publications in the 1960s and can be divided into three phases: During the first phase, important macro-historical analyses of democratic developments and revolutions laid the foundation of a re-emergence of historical traditions (Moore 1966, Lipset/ Rokkan 1967, Skocpol 1979, in the same tradition: Collier/ Collier 2002, Mahoney 2001). The second phase saw methodological systematisations that lead to a broad discussion of conceptual and methodological issues in sociology and political science (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992). And most recently, conceptual refinements incorporating institutional change and actors' choices improved CHA methodologically and theoretically (Streek/ Thelen 2005, Mahoney/ Thelen 2009, Mahoney 2010). All three phases added valuable improvements to the methods and concepts employed within CHA.

First phase: macro-historical analyses

Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorships and Democracies* (1966) represents a central founding text and a continuous source of inspiration for most of the scholars working with CHA (see for example Wiener 1974, Smith 1984, Katznelson 1997, Goldstone 2006). Katznelson described it as a "breakthrough book that transformed the objectives and aspirations of historical macroanalysis" (Katznelson 1997: 88). This statement holds true primarily in relation to Moore's early descriptions of path-dependent political and social developments, the careful identification of causal mechanisms and his comprehensive, inductive implication of historical context. The depiction of three routes – a democratic, a communist, and a fascist one – identifies core criteria for path dependent ways to modernity without claiming a universal applicability for these. On the contrary, the strengths of Moore's approach lies in its openness to causal explanations that are not backed by social science theories and the thorough treatment of outliers.[6] To Moore, this inductive approach bares an epistemic value that can only be extracted by referring to historical detail (Moore 1974: 11f). Despite their general praise, Moore's critics addressed several methodological shortcomings. Primarily, his non-systematic research design fails to define variables and to detect their isolated effects on a country's modernisation (Skocpol 1973: 5, Pickel 2009: 119). For example, Skocpol sees the strength of *Social Origins* rooted in its comprehensive content more than in its methodological rigour.

[6] In his book, Moore dedicates an entire chapter to the case of India which, in spite of its belonging to the modern world, does not fit into the scheme of the three routes to modernity. To Moore, the case of India therefore "constitutes both a challenge and a check upon the theories advanced in this book" (Moore 1974: 315).

> It is rather like a giant mural painted in words, in which a man who has contemplated the modern histories of eight major nations seeks to convey in broad strokes the moral and factual discoveries that he has personally made […]. (Skocpol 1973: 5f)

Skocpol herself tried to address and improve these methodological shortcomings in her book *States and Social Revolutions* (1974). By analysing social revolutions in France, Russia and China, Skocpol looked for a new model that causally explains regime change and gets into dialog with other theories explaining revolutions. The essential value added to the emergence of CHA can be seen in a comprehensive discussion of the applied methodology, a more rigorous case selection, and the identification of causal mechanisms through comparisons of positive and negative cases. Particularly, Skocpol deals with the distinctive value of CHA.

> Comparative historical analysis is distinctively appropriate for developing explanations of macro-historical phenomena of which there are inherently few cases. This is […] in contrast to other phenomena where there are a large number of cases required for statistical analysis. Comparative historical analysis is, in fact, the method of multivariate analysis to which one resorts when there are too many variables and not enough cases (Skocpol 1979: 36).

To a greater extent than Moore, Skocpol was careful to present the limitations of CHA designs. She points out the problem of too few cases, the impossibility of perfectly controlling for all relevant variables, the omittance and covariance of variables, and the insufficient substitution of theory by CHA (Skocpol 1979: 38f). Skocpol's solutions for coping with these problems are to start with "strategic guesses" about causes, to make allowance for "unique effects of the world setting and timing, and for the interrelations among the units" and to inform comparative methods by the "theoretical debates of the day" (Skocpol 1979: 39). Applied along these lines, CHA serves as a "valuable check, or anchor, for theoretical speculation", and thus represents to her an "ideal strategy for mediating between theory and history" (Skocpol 1979: 40).

Skocpol's study was the first attempt in spelling out the prospects and limitations of CHA. While to some critics her reliance on a qualitative "inductive generalism" and the according centrality of "strategic guesses" was problematic (Kiser/ Hechter 1991), many scholars were inspired by the analytical clarity of this systematic CHA approach. In the following decades, CHA established itself as a genuine sub-discipline and was further framed through publications that concentrated on CHA's methodological impact and its theoretical ties. Moreover, studies in the macro-historical tradition of Moore (1966) and Skocpol (1979) were published by Collier/ Collier (1991), Luebbert (1991), Rueschemeyer et al. (1992) and Mahoney (2001, 2010). This consolidated and enhanced Moore's and Skocpol's early applications of CHA.

Second phase: methodological systematisation

Besides carrying out comprehensive historical comparisons, the major merits of *Capitalist Development and Democracy* by Rueschemeyer et al. (1992) are a methodological systematisation of CHA and a subtle shift in relation to theoretical issues. Rueschemeyer et al. successfully tackled the problem of combining quantitative, large-N analyses with historical comparative approaches. Studies in the former methodological tradition typically detect a positive correlation between capitalism or economic development and democracy.[7] On the other hand, studies grounded in historical comparisons show that for each nation-state specific political constellations condition the start of a development path and are causally significant for the later relationship between democracy and capitalism. The main goal of *Capitalist Development and Democracy* is a productive synthesis of these two methodological traditions (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992: 3). Indeed, this endeavour represents the substantive value added to the genesis of CHA.

While reducing the number of cases compared to large-N studies and introducing the concept of "analytical induction" Rueschemeyer et al. paved a middle way through the divide between studying few or many cases. Notably, they compared the developments of 39 capitalist countries in Europe, North America, Australia and Latin America. By putting an emphasis on historical sequences, Rueschemeyer et al. are sensitive to agency and actors-induced processes and make complex and coherent causal inferences. Beyond that, the high number of cases compared to qualitative case studies reduces the general problems of small-N approaches (Rueschemeyer/ Stephens 1997: 58ff). Although they resort to an inductive approach, Rueschemeyer et al. put a greater emphasis on theoretical frames than their predecessors. A power-centred definition of democracy serves as the underlying theoretical basis (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992: 5). This starting point explicitly opposes the assumption of a causal relationship running from capitalism to democracy brought forward in political economy. It also challenges the interpretation of the bourgeoisie as a *per se* democratic actor postulated in marxist and liberal approaches. Rueschemeyer et al. assume that

> […] capitalist development is associated with democracy because it transforms the class structure, strengthening the working and middle classes and weakening the landed upper class. It was neither the capitalist economy nor capitalists as the new dominant force, but rather the contradictions of capitalism that advances democracy (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992: 7).

[7] See for example Lipset 1959, Cutright 1963, Banks 1970, Dahl 1971, Bollen 1979, 1980, Huntington 1984, Barro 1989, Diamond 1980, 1992, Vanhanen 1997, and for a partially positive correlation Przeworski et al. 2000. For an overview of studies on democracy and development see Muno 2001 and Rueschemeyer et al. 1992: ch. 2.

How do Rueschemeyer et al. combine theoretical assumptions with an inductive approach? Bridging this antinomy, they advance a new concept called "analytic induction". This strategy "begins with thoroughly reflected analytical concerns and then seeks to move from the understanding of one or a few cases to potentially generalizable theoretical insights" (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992: 36). Hence, the understanding of individual cases is used to build up the argument and consequential generalisations are tested and retested. In the process, causal mechanisms remain embedded in the historical context and a complex interplay of numerous variables is traced. The complexity of the empirical case accounts prevents theoretical speculation. To Rueschemeyer et al., theory formation is a continuous process channelled through on-going research that takes into account the interplay of empirical-historical context and theory-driven analysis. At the beginning of this process stands the selection of a theory frame which the researcher applies to the individual cases. Thereupon theories are further elaborated and newly framed, taking into account the results of the case studies.[8]

Through the introduction of "analytic induction" and the implication of quantitative analyses, Rueschemeyer et al. advance the methodological and theoretical discussion of CHA and compensate Skocpol's shortcomings of an "inductive generalism" and Moore's little systematic approach. Within their study, they opt for bridging two divides that lie at the heart of social science research: the gap between quantitative and qualitative methods, and the antinomy between inductive and theory-driven research. In the wake of *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, many scholars, influenced by Rueschemeyer et al.'s approach, carried on with the advancement of CHA methodologies. Among them were articles that focussed, for example, on the use of small-N analyses (Lieberson 1991), case-oriented research (Ragin 1997), institutional analysis within CHA (Thelen 1999), periodisation strategies for historical comparison (Lieberman 2001), and comparative-historical methodology (Mahoney 2004). The most important progress of CHA has indeed been its stronger linkage to theory. This linkage went beyond getting theory back in – as postulated by Rueschemeyer et al. – but implicated and developed concepts that are inherently connected to the methods of CHA as the following section will display.

Third phase: conceptual refinement

[8] For the theory frame applied in *Capitalist Development and Democracy* see Rueschemeyer et al. 1992: ch. 3. Rueschemeyer elaborates his concept of analytic induction and theory frames further in his book *Usable Theory* (Rueschemeyer 2009).

In his book *The Legacies of Liberalism. Path Dependence and Political Regimes in Central America*, James Mahoney (2001) examines the regime dynamics of five Central American countries: Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras and Costa Rica. His central argument is that the decisions of political elites during the so-called reform periods between 1870 and 1930 represent the crucial causal factor for the later development paths of these five countries. Facing two different political options with regard to the modernisation of society – a reformist and a radical option – political leaders chose reform paths under the influence of the immediate political situations. The initiation of these paths was causally significant for the following forms of land privatisation, for the size of agrarian enterprises, and for the degree to which state coercion was used. Thus, through the effect of these intervening variables, the decision for radical or reformist reforms determined the nature of the later regimes: military-authoritarian, liberal democratic and traditional dictatorial (Mahoney 2001: 39ff).

This very brief account of Mahoney's main finding shows three advances in relation to former studies within CHA. First, Mahoney puts emphasis on the theoretical implications of CHA and presents a theory of path dependence. Second, he implies actor-centred explications of causal effects in his analysis. Third, he brings elements of contingency into the framework. The methodological basis of his argument is a classical CHA design which, in contrast to Rueschemeyer et al., employs a small number of cases.[9] Mahoney explains the usefulness of CHA for his purpose as follows:

> Comparative-historical analysis is designed to discover and test hypotheses by engaging theory with history; when successfully employed, it can both inspire new theoretical formulations and stimulate new interpretations of historical cases (Mahoney 2001: xi).

To a greater extent than his predecessors, Mahoney sees his study as a theoretical contribution to CHA. His underlying theoretical model puts the concept of *path dependence* in the centre of the analysis and links it to the idea of *critical juncture*. Following his observation that theses concepts are often employed in form of a simple "history matters"-argument, Mahoney seeks to specify and operationalise them. Assuming that "antecedent historical conditions define a range of options available to actors during a key choice point" he calls the phase of the initiation of a development path a critical juncture and analyses its following legacy under the assumption that it is path dependent. This analytical concept guides and structures his analysis.[10]

[9] This is less problematic than in other studies because the main ambition of Mahoney's book is to explain regime development in a limited regional area which is Central America. He does not aim at generalisations that reach beyond this

[10] For a detailed discussion of path dependence and critical juncture see 3.5.2.

By bringing into focus the political decisions that lead to the initiation of a development path, Mahoney dismisses the strong emphasis that previous studies put on structures over actors. In contrast to his predecessors, he links the historical conditions, i.e. the structure that embeds a critical phase, to the decisions political actors are able to make under limited options. Actors therefore play a crucial role during the phase of a critical juncture which represents a "key actor choice point" for the initiation of a development path (Mahoney 2001: 6).[11] To the same degree that Mahoney defeats deterministic explanations, he is also careful about conceiving of decisions as entirely rational. Indeed, an element of contingency as the importance of small, contingent events is inherently built into his concept.[12]

Mahoney's study was a starting point to the deeper theoretisation of CHA-related concepts and to the reification of CHA as a sub-discipline within sociology and political science. Notably, as mentioned above, the edited volume by Mahoney/ Rueschemeyer (2003) set standards for future historical comparisons. Furthermore, several articles and books connecting CHA and path dependence advanced the theoretical basis (Raadschelders 1998, Mahoney 2000, Pierson 2000, 2004, Boas 2007), while others analysed critical junctures (Cappoccia/ Kelemen 2007), causality (Mahoney 2008), comparative-historical methodology (Mahoney 2004) and particularly, the drivers of institutional change (Streeck/ Thelen 2005, Lütz 2006, Mahoney/ Thelen 2009). A series of articles and books applied the refined concepts of CHA to questions of, for example, democratic consolidation (Alexander 2001), institutions of skill formation (Thelen 2004), property rights reforms (Prado/ Trebilcock 2009), capitalism (Streeck 2009), public management policy cycles (Barzelay/ Gallego 2010), decentralization (Falleti 2010), and postcolonial development (Mahoney 2010). As the recent dates of these publications show, seven years after the release of *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Rueschemeyer/ Mahoney 2003) the application of CHA concepts and methods gained thrust and extent. Additionally, important critiques and specifications were brought forward by Liebowitz/ Margolis (1995), Peters et al. (2006) and Schwartz (2003). This accumulation of knowledge over nearly four decades generated high methodological standards and comprehensive theoretical frameworks for CHA designs. Against this background, the state of the art of the most important theoretical concepts and methods will be discussed in the following section.

[11] In the edited edition on *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power* Mahoney and Thelen (2010) refine the definition of path dependence and the implication of actors into the analytical concept.
[12] For a more detailed discussion of actors' choices and contingency see 3.5.2.

An analytical framework: *critical juncture* and *path dependence*

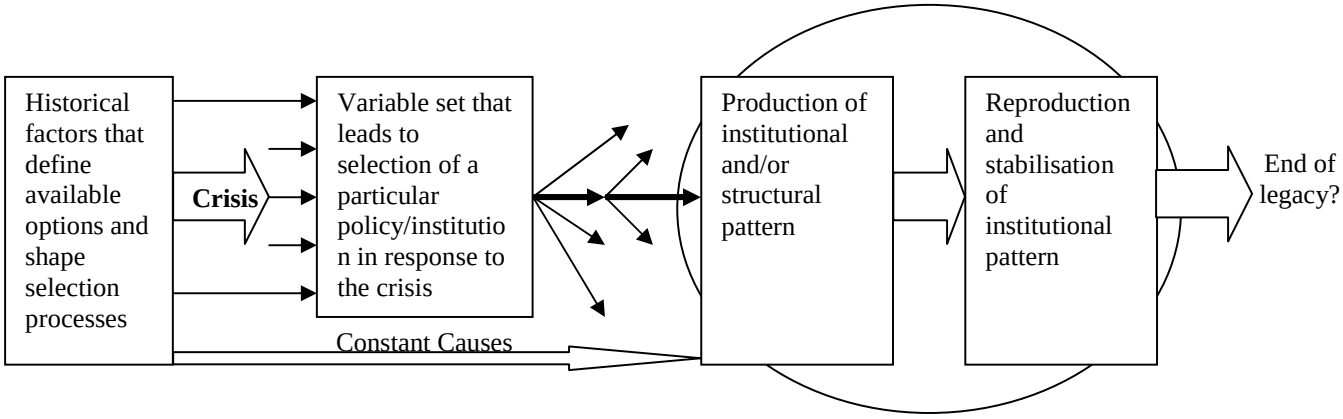
In spite of different disciplines, diverging degrees of formalisation, and varying terminologies, political and sociological research in the tradition of CHA[13] share the centrality of two analytical concepts that are logically linked to each other:[14] *critical juncture* (or *exogenous shock*, *exogenous shift*, *turning point*, Mahoney/ Thelen 2009: 7) and *path dependence*. These two concepts are integrated into a coherent analytical framework that models a repeating circular process of institutional change and persistence, although the degrees of formalisation differ substantively among scholars. The model serves for avoiding "infinite historical regression" and for, instead, identifying a "meaningful beginning point" for historical comparisons (Mahoney 2000: 527, see also Collier/ Collier 2002, Mahoney 2001, Mahoney/ Thelen 2009).

In short, the combined frame of *critical juncture* and *path dependence* can be described as follows: periods of institutional stability are explained by the continuity of "paths" which were adopted and maintained during a *critical juncture* that emerged after a crisis or a shock. Developments preceding the crisis are specified as *antecedent conditions* and serve as a background against which the emergence of a crisis and the subsequent critical juncture are analysed. The *critical juncture*, as such, represents a short period of fundamental change that allows for choosing a path, i.e. selecting a certain political option among others, whose consequences are more and more irreversible and whose alternative options less and less eligible (Collier/ Collier 2002: 29, Mahoney 2000: 513). Thus, the choice of a path produces a *legacy* that entails the production and reproduction of institutional arrangements. These institutions are formed and reinforced by positive feedback processes, increasing returns, adaptation and learning processes. The chosen path lasts until a major discontinuity ends the *legacy* and another *critical juncture* emerges (Collier/ Collier 2002: 34). Figure 3 displays the stylised model of this analytical structure.

Figure 3: Analytical structure of path dependent processes

[13] In economics, scholars commonly work only with the concept of path dependence and conceptualise critical junctures to a far lesser degree.

[14] Cappocia/ Kelemen call it a "dual model" with a "punctuated equilibrium" which refers terminologically to the proximity with economic models (Cappoccia/ Kelemen 2007: 341).



Source: Own elaboration, partially based on Mahoney (1999) and Collier/ Collier (2002).

Although in recent studies the integration into one analytical framework became more and more coherent, the concepts of critical juncture and path dependence represent originally two genuine units of analysis. Thelen describes them as "two related, but analytically distinct claims" (Thelen 1999: 387). They are rooted in divergent traditions and disciplines and refer to different standard works.[15] Nevertheless, I follow the assumption that the analytical potential of CHA is particularly grounded in the combination of critical juncture and path dependence as they form a model explaining the emergence, change and death of institutions. Furthermore, the related concepts of causality, timing, sequence, positive feedback, layering, and conversion provide powerful tools of analysis.

The integration of critical juncture and path dependence can indeed be qualified as a middle-range theory of institutional emergence and change. However, it does not meet all the requirements for a unified theory of institutional development.[16] Therefore, I understand this analytical structure as a theoretical set or *theory frame* following Rueschemeyer (2003, 2009). This term is useful because, as Rueschemeyer showed, a theory frame guides the hypotheses formation without predetermination, it helps to identify causal mechanisms and processes and its different parts can be stressed and put together in relation to the research question (Rueschemeyer 2009: 1, 15f). Moreover, while guiding the empirical analysis, a theory frame remains open to an inductive approach.[17] In this way, a CHA research design that uses the structure of critical juncture and path dependence as a theory frame is able to tie in with the

[15] The notion of "critical juncture" was first used by Lipset/ Rokkan (1967: 37ff). The term "path dependence" derives from economic research in the 1980s that dealt with technological developments (Boas 2007: 33f).
[16] Mahoney/ Thelen (2009) come closest to unifying this structure theoretically by elaborating a theory of institutional change.
[17] With regard to the aforementioned concept of "analytic induction" (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, Huber et al. 1993: 72), the inductive approach can be qualified as an inherent component of a theory frame as Rueschemeyer explains: "As they focus on causally relevant factors for a well-defined problem, theory frames are good places to assemble causal mechanism hypotheses" (Rueschemeyer 2009: 292).

results of preceding studies, uncovers contextual factors for hypotheses formation, sees theory development as a goal of empirical research and is open to corrections through subsequent findings.

Critical juncture

This section discusses the definitions, the strategies for identifying causalities and different techniques of historical accounts with relation to critical junctures. These will serve as tools for the following studies of cases of population policies and developments in chapter 4.

Collier/ Collier (2002) define a critical juncture as "a period of significant change, which typically occurs in distinct ways in different countries (or in other units of analysis) and which is hypothesized to produce distinct legacies" (Collier/ Collier 2002: 29). They add three components to this definition: within every case a significant change has to occur; this change has to take place in different ways in different cases; and an explanatory hypothesis relating the critical juncture to the following legacy has to be made (Collier/ Collier 2002: 30). Such a period of institutional change is marked by fluidity and insecurity in the sense that the range of possible development paths of the unit of analysis increases. The unit can be an institution, a single organisation (e.g. a political party, a labour union), an institutional system (e.g. party system, government, legislative), a set of policies, or a political system as a whole (Cappoccia/ Kelemen 2007: 349). Mahoney emphasises in his definition the institutional consequences of a critical juncture and links them to path-dependent processes:

> Critical junctures are characterized by the adoption of a particular institutional arrangement from among two or more alternatives. These junctures are "critical" because once a particular option is selected it becomes progressively more difficult to return to the initial point when multiple alternatives were still available (Mahoney 2000: 513).

One condition for the occurrence of a critical juncture are thus the specific consequences that a critical juncture entails and that are merely observable as new and dominant developments through an *ex post* examination. These consequences turn out to be the less reversible the further they move away from their point of initiation. Therefore, only an *ex post* analysis can determine if any period of political change has indeed been a critical juncture.[18]

Because of its constitutive function for subsequent path-dependent developments a critical juncture is the decisive component within a CHA design: it is a moment of initiation, caesura or punctuation of a succeeding equilibrium (Cappoccia/ Kelemen 2007: 345). Nevertheless, some CHA scholars define this centre piece of analysis rather diffusely, "without careful

[18] See also Peters/ Pierre/ King 2005 who criticise this retrospective logic because it focuses the analysis on the dominant, established policy.

elaboration" (Mahoney 2001: 4), and apply it merely with regard to its constitutive function for path-dependent processes. Important exceptions are Mahoney (2000), Pierson (2000, 2004) and Collier/ Collier (2002) that establish further criteria for a critical juncture: its antecedent conditions and crises, its duration and its contingent unfolding.

Collier/ Collier use the antecedent conditions as a base line against which a critical juncture can be analysed. Under these circumstantial conditions an exogenous or endogenous shock or the aggravation of a societal cleavage triggers a crisis that entails the direct or temporally lagged emergence of a critical juncture (Collier/ Collier 2002: 30f). Examples for these shocks are wars, revolutions, the depression after 1929, the debt crisis of the 1980s or a wave of international protests. However, in recent formalisations the critical juncture does not necessarily have to entail an implementation of a new development path, but it has to bear the potential for such change. This means that a critical juncture represents a fork in the road that enables political actors to choose between different institutional paths.

> Hence change is not a necessary element of a critical juncture. If change was possible and plausible, considered, and ultimately rejected in a situation of high uncertainty, then there is no reason to discard these cases as 'non-critical' junctures (Cappoccia/ Kelemen 2007: 352).

In conceptualising the concept of critical juncture, I follow this specification of Cappoccia/ Kelemen as it implies the logically plausible assumption that any moment of open choice can also result in choosing the track that one has already been on.

As to their temporal unfolding, critical junctures set off immediately after a crisis, as for example, the responses to the depression of the 1930s or to the financial crisis of 2008, or kick in with a time lag of up to several years. The subsequent incorporation of new institutions can encompass relatively short periods of time or longer phases of structural change, for example, one or two legislative periods (Collier/ Collier 2002: 31f). For the causal examination, different characteristics in timing and sequencing among cases are a central category as they account for diverging shapes of the successive legacies.

Pierson stresses the importance of contingency for the triggering and unfolding of a critical juncture. Precisely, relatively small and contingent factors can be responsible for the selection of a development path and, thus, account for the production of large-scale results (Pierson 2000: 251).[19] However, these factors unfold their effects not at random:

[19] Scholars employing CHA differ as to the degree to which they conceptualise the selection of the path as actors' choices. Thelen (1999), Mahoney (2000, 2001) and Mahoney/ Thelen (2009) put actors' choices in the centre of the analysis and conceive of the selection of a path as a decisional process. Accordingly, the application of CHA methods is oriented along the tracing of decisional processes.

> Although sometimes these junctures are treated as highly contingent or random, generally analysts seek to generate convincing explanations for why one path rather than the other was chosen. The explanations, however, will often emphasize events or processes that seem "small" when compared with large effects (major, lasting divergences across cases) that they produce […] (Pierson 2004: 51).

In this context, contingency means the impossibleness to predict *ex ante* – deterministically and theory-deduced – the results of a transformational process (Mahoney 2000: 513). Thus, following Pierson, Collier/ Collier (2002: 36) and Goldstone, I conceptualise causal analyses as probabilistic rather than deterministic inferences. As Goldstone emphasises in this regard:

> Path dependence is a property of a system such that the outcome over a period of time is not determined by any set of initial conditions. Rather, a system that exhibits path dependence is one in which outcomes are related stochastically to initial conditions, and the particular outcomes that obtains in any given 'run' of the system depends on the choices or outcomes of intermediate events between the initial conditions and the outcome (Goldstone 1998: 834).

Like many CHA scholars Golstone puts the focus on path dependence although the critical juncture or the "initial conditions" that constitute and lead to subsequent processes are a necessary condition for developments exhibiting path dependence. The critical juncture therefore remains a centrepiece of the analysis.

Path dependence

In political science, research designs that work with the analytical frame of path dependence derive their root concepts from economic research, particularly studies of technological developments. The most often cited example for a path-dependent technological development is that of the QWERTY-keyboard which has first been described by David (1985). David observed that the arrangement of keys on a QWERTY-keyboard was, once introduced, more and more resistant to attempts of modification. He attributed the causes for this development to the increasing costs of an introduction of a new keyboard as adaptation and learning processes, the spread of QWERTY and investments in QWERTY made it superior to other keyboards, even though those were more ergonomic and more useful for faster typing (David 1985: 335). The massive reference to the QWERTY-example is due to a concise explicitation of the difficulty to leave a development path, once it has been taken, and due to the emphasis it puts on early decisions for the unfolding of posterior results. As Boas observes with regard to political science applications, the example obliterates though the composite, multi-layered nature of political institutions, policies, and developments. Therefore, he judges examples on a more general level where different technological developments are joined – for example the internet – more appropriate for illustration (Boas 2007: 38f). Also, Thelen denotes that this example, for a political science adaptation, is "both too contingent and too deterministic"

(Thelen 1999: 385). Notably, during political processes, the selection of a political option does not come to pass without the determining influence of prerequisites and, for example, adaptation to the dominant policy is not always rewarded, but also oppositional comportments might be recompensed (Thelen 1999: 385f).

The round tour of economic literature brought CHA scholars to the integration of different drivers of path dependence into their concepts, for example, the effect of economies of scale which describes developments that are the more profitable the bigger their extent, the effect of decreasing fixed costs, the impact of learning and coordination processes and the gains from adapting expectations to the dominant path (Pierson 2004: 24). In the end, this integration also contributed to avoiding simple equalisations of path dependence with "history matters"-arguments (Mahoney 2000: 512). While transferring economic concepts to political institutions, CHA scholars indeed focus on different aspects: path dependence is conceived in diverging ways and, for example, seen in increasing returns and lock-in (Pierson 2000), in self-reinforcing processes (Mahoney 2000), in high reverse costs (Levi 1997), or in mechanisms of reproduction (Collier/ Collier 2002). In order to use path dependence for the analysis of population policies, the following components are of key importance and will be used in the fourth chapter: the analytical focus that benefits from the integration of timing and sequencing into the analysis, the drivers of path dependence, such as, lock-in, positive feedback, and causal reaction chains, and the triggers of institutional change during path-dependent phases, notably, layering and conversion.

An experiment from probability theory illustrates the relevance of sequencing for path-dependent explanations – the example of the polya urn. At the beginning of the drawings there are two balls of different colours in the urn. After every drawing, the ball that has been drawn is put back in the urn together with a ball of the same colour, until the urn is filled. Thereby, drawings at the beginning of the experiment are particularly significant, because they have a higher influence on the repartition of colour shares within the urn than drawings towards the end when the urn is nearly full. This probabilistic experiment can be adapted to the importance of sequencing for political events: The first drawing can be seen as a meaningful beginning that kicks off a development process. Events and decisions at the beginning exhibit a higher impact on the process than later events that take effects on already established patterns (Pierson 2004: 17f). Thus, not only the order of the drawings is important, but also the point in a process when a specific event occurs during a sequence of events with a beginning and an end point. Through this kind of thought experiments, path-dependent concepts serve as a basis for examining political processes under the lens of temporal

orderings. Early political developments are analysed in their embedding context and the changes that they exhibit on incentive structures, actors' behaviour, resource endowments etc. are conceptualised as meaningful for the unfolding of subsequent events (Pierson 2004: 64).

Moreover, sequencing and timing provide a focus for analysing the drivers of path dependence – self-reinforcing processes and lock-in, positive feedback, economies of scale, and causal chains. With reference to the conceptual refinements outlined in 3.5.1, it can be observed that among CHA scholars the focal point moved from lock-in and punctuated equilibrium-models (Collier/ Collier 2002, Pierson 2000) to the conceptualisation of incremental institutional change (Pierson 2004, Streeck/ Thelen 2005, Mahoney/ Thelen 2009, Mahoney 2010). Within the logic of the former, path-dependence implies a state of relative stability and persistence during the legacy following a critical juncture which comes close to equilibrium. This equilibrium cannot be disturbed by deviant political opinions, social protest, oppositional actions etc. because the returns from an adaptation to the dominant path or the costs of the modification of the institution or policy are too high. Through its recurring production, the institution or policy disposes of a high assertiveness (Pierson 2004: 44). In contrast, within the logic of the latter, path-dependent, self-reinforcing elements are conceived as a reactive sequence. This chain of temporally ordered and causally linked reactions and counter-reactions has its seeds in a critical juncture, while its outcomes often bear no direct connection to their initiation. Actors' choices are the trigger for the initiation of a path and the cause for institutional change. These perpetuate like domino-effects even if the causal variables that lead to the selection of a path vanish or cease to apply. Most importantly, although institutions and policies are established in a stable and solid way, the behaviour of counter-actors represents an incessant challenge to the dominant path and can change it successively and incrementally (Mahoney 2001: 10).

Examining these diverging conceptualisations of the drivers of path dependence, one is able to disentangle the different meanings of continuity and change that the above cited scholars employ. Notably, Streeck/ Thelen (2005) criticise the all too hieratic concentration on continuities in virtue of a punctuated equilibrium-model that merely explains fundamental change during periods of critical transformation. In order to avoid an argumentative amalgamation, they introduce five *modi* of institutional change that were taken on by Mahoney/ Thelen (2009, see also Thelen 2003: 222ff). Out of the five *modi* – *displacement*, *layering*, *drift*, *conversion*, and e*xhaustion*[20] – the concepts of layering and conversion will be discussed in greater detail, because they embrace important aspects with regard to an

[20] Thelen/ Mahoney (2009) take on all of the modes except for exhaustion.

examination of population policies. Layering describes a process in which additional rules are attached to already existing norms and, thus, give actors' behaviour a new dynamic (Mahoney/ Thelen 2009: 16f). For example, in an existing system of scholarships, the introduction of new university scholarships could change the incentive structure for potential scholarship takers in a way that exhibits important changes on the old system. This process could challenge the old system and eventually put into question its entire existence. Such processes, brought about by the addition of supplementary layers, often occur when actors lack the possibility of modifying the former rules (Mahoney/ Thelen 2009: 17).

Conversion ensues at the time when existing institutions are re-shaped and re-organised through a new interpretation and adjustment from the inside, without any alteration of their formal goals and functions: "[…] institutions designed with one set of goals in mind are redirected to other ends" (Thelen 2003: 228). These institutional transformations imply elements of a lock-in, because structures formally endure. In contrast to other path-dependent argumentations, economies of scale do not operate through actors' adaptation of their behaviour to dominant institutions, but through actors' redefinition of existing institutions without running through the costly process of formally changing the path (Streeck/ Thelen 2005: 26).

In view of the advancement of path-dependent analytical frames and the ensuing discussion on the implication of change and continuity, the analytical structure of critical juncture and path dependence now disposes of greater flexibilities towards the research question. Applying this more flexible frame, scholars in the tradition of CHA have shown that the combination of the two concepts in one analytical framework works (see for example Collier/ Collier 2002, Mahoney 2001, 2010).

Methodological strategies and techniques

Within their inductive research designs, CHA scholars apply different methodological strategies in order to detect causes for the selection of paths. As a matter of principle, the detection of causalities is a central goal of all comparative social sciences and, in particular, CHA. This procedure means to identify for each case the specific values of variables or variable sets that produced observable outcomes, such as, the selection of a path (Mahoney 2008: 412). As to a qualitative design, the occurrence of causal mechanisms is analysed with the help of dense descriptions of the interplay between causation and effects – and not with

the help of statistical probabilities (King/ Keohane/ Verba 1994: 85).[21] In this perspective, independent variables are conceived of as necessary conditions for the occurrence of an event. A prominent example can be found in Moore's *Social Origins for Democracies and Dictatorships*. With regard to the causes of the development of parliamentary democracy Moore concisely resumes: "No bourgeois, no democracy" (Moore 1993: 418). However, a single variable is, in this context, rarely a sufficient cause for an effect. Rather, it is entrenched in the interplay with other independent variables and should be analysed in its particular embeddedness. Ragin calls these multiple interconnections "causal complexity" and opts for the investigation of a "multiple conjunctural causation" (Ragin 1997: 33).[22]

Adapting terminologies from quantitative approaches and concepts from other comparative disciplines as well, scholars in the tradition of CHA developed strategies for defining, evaluating and testing causal mechanisms; among them *historical causes*-analysis, *counterfactuals*- and *constant causes*-analysis, and *omitted* or *suppressor variables*. These strategies do neither represent a unified body of instruments nor are they applied systematically and exhaustively within CHA, for pragmatic and conceptual reasons. Qualitative comparative research pursues the aim of applying methods and strategies with a high degree of sensitivity towards the research questions and flexibility during the research process. Qualitative comparative research therefore remains open to methodological modifications during the process of investigation. This constitutes an important difference in comparison with quantitative, large-N methods.

The strategy of *historical causes*-analysis tests the hypothesis that specific historical conditions operating in a limited time frame are responsible for the initiation of a development path – in contrast to causes that operate in a constant temporal way or to shocks. Hence, in a path-dependent design, a *historical causes*-analysis serves the verification of the hypothesis that path-dependent developments were causally initiated by the incidence of a set of variables brought about by a critical juncture. In this test, the researcher assesses if during a critical juncture a set of variables can be identified which carries out a causal effect on the initiation of a path, but ceases to operate in the following process. Because of its path-dependent, self-reinforcing, and self-preserving nature, the subsequent development path can

[21] The conception of causality differs between "small-N" or "case-oriented research" and "large-N", "variable-oriented" (Ragin 1997) or "population-oriented research" (Mahoney 2008). The latter aim at identifying causalities as mean effects over large amounts of cases and at expressing them statistically (Mahoney 2008: 412).

[22] In contrast to quantitative approaches, the aim of CHA is neither to isolated effects nor to quantify their relative, partial influence on the dependent variable.

evolve and reproduce itself without the persistence of the historical causes (Collier/ Collier 2002: 35).

This mechanism can further be assessed by the analysis of *counterfactuals*. Within this strategy, the researcher runs through a scenario assuming unactualised conditions for an important explanatory variable, i.e. assuming that this variable would have displayed a different value. This *ex post* analysis allows for implying contingent events: "Taking contingency into account requires researchers to analyze what happened in the context of what could have happened" (Cappoccia/ Kelemen 2007: 355). In order to run the counterfactual analysis, the researcher selects an explanatory variable, notably, one that does not constitute a component of the critical juncture itself, but represents a *constant cause* that has been operating before a critical juncture was triggered (Collier/ Collier 2002: 35). For instance, the influence of an international actor, the economic development, the social structure, or the colonial heritage could be conceptualised as important constant causes. Subsequently, the researcher assumes that the set of variables identified as causally responsible for the selection of a path has not kicked in. In terms of general propositions, assuming that *A* is a set of constant causes, *B* a set of variables appearing during a critical juncture, and *C* the path that has been selected, a historical causes-analysis would verify the hypothesis that "Under the condition that A, if B occurs, than C occurs". On the contrary, a counterfactual analysis would, for example, examine the hypothesis that "Under the condition that A, if B had not occurred, C would have occurred anyhow". This means, a counterfactual analysis within a path-dependent design assumes that the selection of a path would have been causally induced by constant causes A even if historical causes B had not emerged. If this hypothesis has to be affirmed, than the occurrence of a critical juncture must be rejected (King/ Keohane/ Verba 1994: 78f, Mahoney 2000: 513, see also Fearon 1991). Hence, a counterfactual can be seen as a within-case comparison: for a same case, history is run again under hypothetically changed conditions in order to detect if rival explanations have to be sustained. The recourse to constant causes can be categorised as a specific form of counterfactual analysis within CHA. As to quantitative analyses, constant causes are the factors that a regression analysis normally controls for.

Another form of testing rival explanations is the quest for *omitted variables*. These are variables that have been ignored or excluded from the analysis even though they possibly

execute causal effects.[23] They can cause systematic biases, especially if they correlate with other explanatory variables and display important influences on them.[24]

Among the techniques that are applied in order to realise the aforementioned strategies are *process tracing*, *process analysis*, *analytical narratives*, and other forms of dense and structured historical narrations that are often not specified as genuine techniques. A research approach that uses the technique of process tracing implies as a basis that the researcher concentrates her or his attention at the process that translates causes into observable effects or conditions into outcomes. Evidence for these translation processes can be derived from literature research, but also from interviews, statistical data or other sources. The technique generally implies that a chain of causal mechanisms that constitutes a process outcome is deconstructed into its smaller parts. Subsequently, every smaller part is conceptualised as the dependent variable of the preceding process (King/ Keohane/ Verba 1994: 226f). These links are often named intervening variables (Checkel 2005: 9). For example, during the process of a policy implementation the adoption of a law or a personnel decision can be seen as an intervening variable in the broader implementation chain. In comparison to historical explanation, process analysis is formally more structured as it requires the identification of variables and their linkages to each other. Moreover, it is apt for taking the dimensions of temporality and sequence into account.

Applying the technique of process analysis, the researcher lays down theory-deduced predictions about the unfolding of processes and their respective outcomes. In a second step, these predictions are compared to the empirically observable outcomes of a process (Hall 2003: 393f). This procedure is also called process verification and, contrarily to process analysis, follows a strictly deductive reasoning.

The "analytic narratives project" was conceived by a group of scholars that seek to combine historical comparative research with rational choice models and game theory (Bates et al. 1998, 2000). This approach reaches beyond other methods as it clearly aims at finding generalisations. As a method relying heavily on formalised model, analytic narratives represent purely deductive procedures (Levi 2002).

With regard to the topic of investigation of population policies, a primarily inductive research approach is best suited for enlightening the complex causal processes between political

[23] See Skocpol 1979 who pays careful attention to omitted variables in her analysis of social revolutions.
[24] Beyond CHA, omitted variables can be seen as a general problem of qualitative social science research. There are very few instruments for explaining the consequences of missing out variables (see also King/ Keohane/ Verba 1994: 168).

regimes, population policies, and demographic development. In line with this inductive advancement, the fitting technique for analysing complex conjunctural causation is process analysis. Therefore, in chapter four, I will apply this method along the lines that have been established by Hall (2003), Bennett (2008), and Bennett/Elman (2006, 2008).

Conclusion

In spite of conceptual and methodological refinements, CHA scholars see themselves confronted with repeated criticisms, primarily in relation to their strong assumptions on the inflexible persistence and sluggishness of institutions. The central arguments against the theoretical implications of CHA can be summarised as follows. First, a dichotomous distinction between politics and policies masks small, incremental steps of institutional change. Second, the retrospective logic of the critical juncture concept concentrates the analysis on the dominant policy and other potential development options are ignored. This same logic also excludes predictions about future path dependences. Third, the study of ongoing conflicts is neglected, for example, when the dominant coalition successfully fends off attempts of oppositional forces to change the path. Fourth, political change is only explained through dramatic, incisive moments and not during phases of relative stability (Peters et al. 2005: 1277f). As discussed in 3.5.1., the criticisms have led to a serious refinement and sophistication. All too hieratic models have been conceptualised in a more flexible way. For instance, the theory of institutional change by Thelen/ Mahoney (2009) represents the most mature analytical framework in this regard.

Drawing on the important theoretical potential of the discussed concepts, I will build my analysis on the following strengths of a research design that uses critical juncture and path dependence as analytical frames:

1. Through the conceptualisation of critical junctures, the identification of meaningful beginning points is feasible. This approach goes beyond arbitrary choices for historical starting points.
2. Processes of timing and sequencing obtain high importance within the analysis and can be made transparent through techniques of historical narration.
3. Policies, institutions, and political systems are analysed under the lens of ruptures and continuities while, at the same time, the investigation remains open to incremental change.

4. The development of far-reaching outcomes can be explained through the occurrence of small, contingent events.
5. The assumption of rational actors implementing optimal solutions with regard to their interests can be questioned and put into perspective (Pierson 2000: 252, Thelen 1999).
6. Through the strategies for the detection of causal mechanisms, the identification of causalities is put at the centre of the research goals and model assumptions become falsifiable.

Finally, one of my main assumptions is that historical analysis and comparative political science do not represent an "antagonistic partnership" (von Beyme 2010: 23ff) in which each of them can be assigned to either an idiographic-historiographic or a nomothetic-analytical perspective (Welzel 2009). On the contrary, a historical perspective represents a value-added to conventional comparative methods. As Charles Tilly put it: "explanatory political science can hardly get anywhere without relying on careful historical analysis" (Tilly 2006: 521).

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