

## Intercultural Transfer and Comparative History: The Benefits and Limits of Two Approaches

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For quite some time, transnational research has been experiencing a significant upswing in the social sciences and humanities in an academic landscape that is becoming more and more international. Meanwhile, historians are also expanding their horizons and no longer limit their research to their own respective national history. Aside from traditional diplomatic history, two approaches are available to them for transnational analysis: intercultural transfer and comparative history. There is an ongoing debate on whether these two approaches tend to be mutually complementary or exclusive, both sides expressing an entitlement to priority. In many cases, this claim either results in epistemological (more recently also historiographical [see below]) delegitimization of the respective other side or in degradation by attributing it a mere auxiliary function. The conflict may thus also be interpreted as a rivalry for the occupation of a promising research field, where the potential for institutionalization and financial support of one's own research field are at stake.

Most notably, Michel Espagne intervened particularly harshly in the debate and vehemently formulated claim to superiority for intercultural transfer over comparative history, presenting it as an "alternative to the traditional comparison."<sup>1</sup> He alluded to the phenomenon in research known as "Galton's problem," which asserts that comparison presupposes isolated entities and therefore already excludes the examination of reciprocal transfer processes. "One can, indeed, only compare what is not confounded."<sup>2</sup> According to Espagne, comparatively working historians artificially separate their objects of study from each other and tend to construct them anachronistically: in particular nations appear thus as isolated, durable, almost primordial units, which is first of all historically false and secondly strengthens the concept of nation, resulting in an emphasis on national differences while disregarding similarities. From his point of view, international comparative studies ignored the process of nation building as much as the mutual

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Espagne, "Kulturtransfer und Fachgeschichte der Geisteswissenschaften," in *Comparativ* 10 (2000), Vol. 1, 42. See also Michel Espagne, "Sur les limites du comparatisme en histoire culturelle," *Genèses* 17 (1994), 112-121. A reiteration of these reproaches can be found in Michel Espagne, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1999). See also Michael Werner, "Maßstab und Untersuchungsebene. Zu einem Grundproblem der vergleichenden Kulturtransfer-Forschung," in *Nationale Grenzen und internationaler Austausch. Studien zum Kultur- und Wissenschaftstransfer in Europa*, eds. Lothar Jordan and Bernd Kortländer (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1995), 20-33.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Espagne, "Sur les limites," 112.

“influence” of the emerging nations and the considerable “foreign” component within each culture. Espagne asserts that intercultural transfer on the contrary focuses on these “hybrid forms” by examining how even in the formation of dichotomies “the respective Other is included in one’s own creation dynamics.”<sup>3</sup> Thus intercultural transfer disposes of the necessary critical-reflexive potential to deconstruct identity certitudes. Here Michel Espagne defends a concept that he and Michael Werner had already developed in the 1980s.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, Matthias Middell entered the discussion and pointed to the instrumentalization of comparative history for nationalistic and Völkish history. He also stressed that even in the 1980s, comparison still concentrated too much on national entities in West German historical scholarship.<sup>5</sup> Following Espagne, he criticizes comparative history, suggesting that they isolated their objects of comparison – usually nation states – in order to confront them with each other. In addition, Middell criticizes that comparisons are often teleologically structured and have a tendency toward a certain objectivism. He maintains that intercultural transfer, on the other hand – historically more correct – emphasizes the *métissage*, the mutual entanglement of societies by working interdisciplinarily and using identity/alterity concepts from neighboring disciplines. He advocates a combination of both approaches, by calling upon comparatively working scholars to reflect on the constitution of their objects of comparison, and he defines intercultural transfer as:

[an] alternative that reveals the comparative approach as a one-dimensional conceptualization and overcomes the old problem of historical comparison, that is the constructed character of the objects of comparison, and the naturally occurring interaction between them. Synthesis consists, thus, not simply in a washed-out equation, but rather in the combination of both methods. In this process, it seems important to me that a clarification of the intercultural foundations, upon which the objects of comparison developed, precedes every comparison, and that no comparison is complete without at least one chapter about those intellectual processes of transfer, which have led to the creation of the objects of comparison.<sup>6</sup>

The proponents of systematic comparison were less committed to analyzing the relation between intercultural transfer and comparative history. Only a few observations can be found in the methodological writings of Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, who argue that comparative history and intercultural transfer are to be separated methodologically.<sup>7</sup> Hartmut Kaelble advocates the incorporation of the perspectives of intercultural transfer into comparative history, but he primarily maintains the precedence of the comparative method.<sup>8</sup> For the comparative

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Espagne, “Kulturtransfer,” 44.

<sup>4</sup> See among others Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, “Deutsch-französischer Kulturtransfer als Forschungsgegenstand. Eine Problemskizze,” in *Transferts. Relations interculturelles dans l’espace franco-allemand (XVIIIe-XIXe siècle)*, eds. Michel Espagne and Michael Werner (Paris: Edition recherches sur les civilisations, 1988), 11-34.

<sup>5</sup> Matthias Middell, “Kulturtransfer und Historische Komparatistik – Thesen zu ihrem Verhältnis,” *Comparativ* 10 (2000), Vol.1, 7-41.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>7</sup> Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, “Historischer Vergleich: Methoden, Aufgaben, Probleme. Eine Einleitung,” in *Geschichte und Vergleich. Ansätze und Ergebnisse international vergleichender Geschichtsschreibung*, eds. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (Frankfurt a. M.; New York: Campus, 1996), 9-43, here 10.

<sup>8</sup> Hartmut Kaelble, *Der historische Vergleich. Eine Einführung zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 1999), in particular 21.

scholars, discussions refer less to the intercultural transfer approach, but rather focus on approaches from within comparative history. Scholars struggle over the advantages and disadvantages of synchronic or diachronic, asymmetrical or symmetrical, individualizing or generalizing, total or partial comparisons or whether one should limit his work to two objects of comparison and whether one could also include even more cases in a comparison, without reaching methodological limitations.<sup>9</sup> A systematic discussion of the intercultural transfer approach, however, has not yet been presented by a proponent of comparative history.<sup>10</sup> Admittedly, there are mediating voices: for example in 1998, Johannes Paulmann asserted that comparative history and intercultural transfer are not mutually exclusive, but rather complement to each other, and that they are even mutually dependent.<sup>11</sup>

The neat separation of both approaches – in many cases suggested by their proponents and doubted by Paulman – is certainly only rarely observed in research *practice*. Hardly anyone who systematically compares aspects of the history of several regions or countries can avoid examining reciprocal interrelations. The closer the societies are temporally and geographically, the more they tend to be interwoven with each other and it is more likely that they mutually influenced each other. One can scarcely accuse comparative scholars – particularly the younger ones – that they ignore this fact. The logical starting point – to compare entities as separate from each other, although their mutual interrelations are known – is generally accepted by comparative historians, probably because the starting point does not considerably influence the research in a negative way. This is primarily due to the heuristic nature of the comparative method, which still needs to be addressed. However, the proponents of intercultural transfer are not consistently against the comparative approach in their practice: the scholar who focuses on the exchange relationships between two societies, always does an implicit comparison (even though usually not systematically) of the initial conditions in the country or region where the intercultural transfer emanated from, with the conditions in the country or region, to which this transfer was directed.

The goal of this essay is to highlight the benefits of both approaches using the example of the French and American historical profession during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> I will first describe the development of the history as an academic subject in both countries from the perspective of intercultural transfer, followed by a brief systematic comparison.

Both the French and the American historical profession are said to have been inspired by the German model. As Ursula Becher wrote in 1986 on French historians since the 1870s:

[French] historians [...] refer in [their] claims to the German model. German history and its great historiographical works, the institutionalization of the historical discipline at

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<sup>9</sup> See Christiane Eisenberg, “Die Arbeiterbewegung der Welt im Vergleich. Methodenkritische Bemerkungen zu einem Projekt des Internationalen Instituts für Sozialgeschichte in Amsterdam”, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 34 (1994), 397-410; Jürgen Osterhammel, “Sozialgeschichte im Zivilisationsvergleich. Zu künftigen Möglichkeiten komparativer Geschichtswissenschaft”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 22 (1996), 143-164.

<sup>10</sup> See the report of the summer school 1999 at the Berlin Center for Comparative European History: Alexander C.T. Geppert and Andreas Mai, “Vergleich und Transfer im Vergleich”, *Comparativ* 10, Vol. 1 (2000), 95-111.

<sup>11</sup> Johannes Paulmann, “Internationaler Vergleich und interkultureller Transfer. Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts”, *Historische Zeitschrift* 267 (1998), 649-685.

<sup>12</sup> The following results regarding intercultural transfer and comparative history between French, American and German historical science are based on Gabriele Lingelbach, *Klio macht Karriere. Die Institutionen der Geschichtswissenschaft in Frankreich und den USA in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003).

universities and schools are seen as an inspiration for institutional as well as disciplinary orientation for French history.<sup>13</sup>

The reports on American history are similar.<sup>14</sup> This interpretation is based upon contemporary testimony, which often emphasizes the supposed exemplarity of German history. J. Franklin Jameson, a major protagonist of the institutionalization and professionalization of American history, wrote for instance in 1920 retrospectively about the emergence of his discipline in the United States: “In those days [...] Germany was the Mecca of the ambitious American historical student, and the German seminary the place where his mind came into fructifying contact with historical scholarship at large.”<sup>15</sup> And in 1876, Gabriel Monod – Professor at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* and founder of the *Revue Historique* – wrote in the inaugural article of his journal: “No other country than Germany has more contributed to giving this character of scientific sternness to historical studies. [...] Germany can be compared to a vast historical laboratory where all efforts are concentrated and coordinated and where no effort is in vain.”<sup>16</sup>

This contemporary judgment has long been accepted without any empirical verification. However, in order to really prove a potential German “influence,”<sup>17</sup> the various channels and media of transfer need to be analyzed. Intercultural transfer can occur through personal contacts and travelling. In the domain of academia, studying abroad has to be mentioned first, revealing an evident difference between French and American historians. While probably between a third and half of those American historians who took up positions at American colleges and universities before the turn of the century had studied in Europe (and mostly in Germany),<sup>18</sup> it was a considerably lower number in the French case – much less than a quarter.<sup>19</sup> However,

<sup>13</sup> Ursula A. J. Becher, *Geschichtsinteresse und historischer Diskurs. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der französischen Geschichtswissenschaft im 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag, 1986), 25. See William Keylor, *Academy and Community. The Foundation of the French Historical Profession* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 42f.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Hartmut Lehmann, “Deutsche Geisteswissenschaft als Vorbild. Eine Untersuchung der American Historical Association über den Geschichtsunterricht an deutschen Gymnasien in den Jahren 1896-98,” in *Aus Reichsgeschichte und nordischer Geschichte*, eds. Horst Fuhrmann et al. (Stuttgart: Klett, 1972), 384-396.

<sup>15</sup> J. Franklin Jameson, “The American Historical Review 1895-1920,” in *American Historical Review* 26 (1920), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Gabriel Monod, “Du progrès des études historiques en France depuis le XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in *Revue historique* 1 (1876), 29, 28.

<sup>17</sup> In order to describe cultural contacts between societies, the term “influence” is often used. However, it suggests by mistake that something would be flowing quasi-naturally, passively and unchangeably from one location to another, negating the cultural immanent intention of reception processes. See also Peter Schöttler, “Französische und deutsche Historiker-Netzwerke am Beispiel der frühen ‘Annales,’” in *Regards et miroirs. Mélanges Remy Leveau*, ed. Hamit Bozarslan (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1997), 213-226.

<sup>18</sup> More comprehensive information cannot be provided here. It is hardly known how many historians were employed in the approximately 1,000 institutions of the tertiary education sector prior to 1900. In addition, the biographical information is so scarce that it is impossible to know for a significant part of American historians whether or not they had studied in Europe. The numbers stated here refer to four case studies: Johns Hopkins University, Cornell University, Harvard University and the University of Michigan. Supposedly, the share of lecturers with experience in Europe was more limited at smaller institutions that did not possess a graduate school. Statistical information on foreign students in German universities can be found in Peter Drewek, “‘Die ungastliche deutsche Universität.’ Ausländische Studenten an deutschen Hochschulen 1890-1930,” *Jahrbuch für Historische Bildungsforschung* 5 (1999), 197-224.

<sup>19</sup> Included are here the lecturers of the six main historically relevant institutions of the tertiary education sector: Facultés des Lettres, École Normale Supérieure, École des Chartes, Collège de France, IV. Section de l’École Pratique des Hautes Études (Sous-section “Histoire”), École Libre des Sciences Politiques.

among those French students in Germany were individuals who later rose to prominence such as Gabriel Monod, Camille Jullian, and Marc Bloch.<sup>20</sup> Another medium of intercultural transfer are research and teaching stays of professors to other countries. There are also clear differences between France and the U.S. here: While Americans and Germans initiated an exchange between the universities at the turn of the century, there were no similar opportunities for French and German historians. Americans then took better advantage of the transfer of knowledge on German history via individuals than the French.

Information about other academic systems, however, cannot only be transferred by individuals, but also by publications. In this respect, there are also clear differences between France and the United States: while French historians were well informed about the German university system and the structure of academic history through special French-speaking tracts,<sup>21</sup> English-speaking literature on the German university system in general and German history in particular was rather scarce in the last third of the nineteenth century. Whereas the products of German historiography were available in several Parisian libraries,<sup>22</sup> in the United States they were only to be found in larger quantity in those university libraries that had acquired the collections of German scholars.<sup>23</sup> Very few American university libraries regularly bought German historiographical books. While in France, several journals regularly published reviews of German historical research – between 1878 and 1885, the *Revue Historique* even reviewed more German than French books and articles –, access to German research was extremely limited in the United States: the few American journals did not provide information on the research of German historians. Whereas German books rather seldom crossed the Atlantic, France was an ardent importer of German books. In general, it becomes evident that French and Americans used very different sources to obtain information on German history. Only in the domain of translation, there was one – negative – similarity: neither in France nor in the United States were many books or articles by German professional historians translated. Between 1870 and 1914, more than 670 publications in the fields of geography, history and numismatics (excluding archeology and art history) were translated from German to French. But a closer look reveals that many travel guides, memoirs, travel accounts, and accounts on the war of 1870/71 were among them, as well as vulgarized overviews such as Georg Weber's *Basic World*

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<sup>20</sup> See Charles-Olivier Carbonell, “Les historiens universitaires français en Allemagne dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle,” in *Les échanges universitaires franco-allemands du Moyen âge au XXe siècle*, ed. Michel Parisse (Paris: Éditions recherche sur les civilisations, 1991), 181-192; Charles-Olivier Carbonell, “La réception de l’historiographie allemande en France (1866-1885). Le mythe du modèle importé,” in *Transferts. Les relations interculturelles dans l’espace franco-allemande*, eds. Michel Espagne and Michael Werner (Paris: Éditions recherche sur les civilisations, 1988), 327-344; Olivier Motte, *Camille Jullian, les années de formation* (Rom: École française de Rome, 1990); Olivier Motte, “Le voyage d’Allemagne. Lettres inédites sur les missions d’universitaires français dans les universités allemandes au XIXe siècle. Teil III: Sur le départ de Gabriel Monod en Allemagne,” *Francia* 17/3 (1990), 110-119.

<sup>21</sup> See Christophe Charle, “L’élite universitaire française et le système universitaire allemande (1880-1900),” in *Transferts. Les relations interculturelles dans l’espace franco-allemande*, eds. Michel Espagne and Michael Werner (Paris: Éditions recherche sur les civilisations, 1988), 345-358.

<sup>22</sup> See for example the research on the library of the École Normale Supérieure: Frédéric Barbier, “L’appropriation d’un modèle intellectuel. Les normaliens, leurs livres et leur bibliothèque au XIXe siècle,” in *L’École normale supérieure et l’Allemagne*, ed. Michel Espagne (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1995), 89-108; Pierre Petitmengin, “La bibliothèque de l’École normale supérieure face à l’érudition allemande au XIXe siècle,” *Revue de synthèse historique* 113 (1992), 55-70.

<sup>23</sup> For example in 1887, Syracuse University bought Leopold von Ranke’s voluminous private library, von Mohl’s library went to Yale University, Bopp’s to Cornell University and Bluntschli’s to the Johns Hopkins University.



*History*.<sup>24</sup> Works of German university professors are rather scarce. The list of corresponding American translations is even shorter.<sup>25</sup> Most of the translations from German to English were not done by American but by British publishers. In particular, overviews were translated by Americans into their language, such as Heeren's *History of the European State System*, Rotteck's *Universal History*, Ranke's description of the Reformation (incidentally, this was Ranke's only work to be translated in the U.S. and not in England), Mommsen's *Roman History*, and Sybel's *Founding of the German Empire*. Droysen's *Outline of the Principles of History* was only published in 1893 in an English version, while Bernheim's *Manual of Historical Method and Philosophy* has never been translated.

Some of the channels that transmitted information on German history to France and the United States were hardly qualified to create a "realistic" vision of German history.<sup>26</sup> This is illustrated, for example, by the study abroad visits of young American scholars in Germany. Very few stayed more than two semesters in Germany, and a large majority of the stay was dedicated to language acquisition, since few of them were knowledgeable in German prior to crossing the Atlantic.<sup>27</sup> Once arrived in Germany, most of Americans spent their time in American colonies, where they lived together with other American visitors and had little contact to German students and professors. They usually changed their location several times during their stay in Germany and they also attended lectures at universities in France, England or Italy. Consequently, the trip to Europe oftentimes resembled rather a grand tour than a serious university education. These stays were hardly an occasion to get more than a superficial impression from the structures of historical research and teaching in Germany. The same can be said about the German-American exchange of professors that was initiated at a point in time when most structures of American academic history were already well established and hardly to be modified. In addition, the international tensions in foreign policies grew, and in particular on the German side, the exchange was abused as an instrument of foreign cultural policy and propaganda in competition with France.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, there were few academically trained German historians who were willing to accept a professorship at an American university. Before

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<sup>24</sup> The analysis occurs on the basis of Liselotte Bihl and Karl Epting, *Bibliographie französischer Übersetzungen aus dem Deutschen 1487-1944* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987).

<sup>25</sup> A list of English translations of German literature can be found in Bayard Q. Morgan, *A Critical Biography of German Literature in English Translation 1481-1927* (New York: The Scarecrow Press, 1965).

<sup>26</sup> When examining the "reliability" or "objectivity" of the media of intercultural transfer, two things must be taken into consideration. Scholars who embraced the concept of intercultural transfer have pointed out that few media exist that reflect "objectively" the conditions in the other country, but rather that selection and reproduction of information depend on one's own impressions and interests (see below). In addition, it must be emphasized that there was no homogeneous model of professionalized academic history in Germany that could have been described. In Germany, regionally different institutional structures co-existed, historians were influenced by divisions along the lines of thematic as well as methodological orientation. In addition, institutional as well as cognitive structures changed strongly in the course of time. It is thus unreasonable to speak of a "German" model, as the historical discipline in Germany was too diverse in space and time.

<sup>27</sup> See more detailed Gabriele Lingelbach, "The German Historical Discipline in the United States. Following the German Model?," *Across Cultural Borders. Historiography in Global Perspective*, eds. Eckhardt Fuchs and Benedikt Stuchey (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 183-204.

<sup>28</sup> See Bernhard vom Brocke, "Der deutsch-amerikanische Professorenaustausch. Preußische Wissenschaftspolitik, international Wissenschaftsbeziehungen und die Anfänge einer deutschen auswärtigen Kulturpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg," *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch* 31 (1981), 128-182; Ragnild Fiebig von Hase, "Die politische Funktionalisierung der Kultur. Der sogenannte 'deutsch-amerikanische' Professorenaustausch von 1904-1914," in *Zwei Wege in die Moderne. Aspekte der deutsch-amerikanischen Beziehungen 1900-1918*, eds. Ragnild Fiebig von Hase and Jürgen Heideking (Trier: WVT, 1998), 189-221.

the migration and exile of German academics as a result of the Nazi takeover in Germany, Hermann von Holst seems to have been the only noteworthy scholar who went to the United States in the 1890s, where he taught for some time at the University of Chicago.<sup>29</sup>

While written information on Germany was as fragmentary as the personal experiences of American historians in Germany, French historians were much better informed about the teaching and research of their German colleagues than their American counterparts, even though only few of the French historians actually had studied in Germany. This was mainly due to the intense entanglement of French and German history, with the result that French historians could hardly avoid taking into consideration the writings of their German colleagues, in particular those of medievalists and diplomacy historians. In addition, national competition forced French historians to keep an eye on their German colleagues.

Neither the Americans nor the French developed an entirely positive image of German history: while young American scholars first spoke with praise about their experiences in Germany in public, they drew a clearly more negative picture in their private correspondences. George L. Burr, for instance, wrote from Leipzig in 1885 to his mentor Andrew D. White at Cornell University:

[...] on the whole, I have become convinced, that Cornell is, as to the quality of her instruction, as truly a University as Leipsic; and in some department at least, I should not hesitate to put our lectures beside theirs for comparison whether as regards depth of thought or thoroughness and effectiveness of treatment.<sup>30</sup>

The same can be said about French historians. While Monod found many words of praise for German history in his published works, at the end of the 1860s his letters from Germany were already critical about his experiences there: “Yesterday I saw Ranke – but by no means is there anything to take from it. He is bored by visitors and his lecture is incomprehensible.”<sup>31</sup> His comment on Gustav Droysen is also disparaging: “Droysen is amusing and interesting to listen to as an indignant representative of Borussianism – but he is superficial and affected.”<sup>32</sup>

Since the last decade of the nineteenth century, public enunciations of German research and teaching also became more and more negative in the United States. For example in 1897, Claude H. Van Tyne, historian at the University of Michigan described a German history lecture as follows:

The room is crowded with students and a horrible odor of beer. Several of these ardent admirers of science have in hand the remnant of a sausage or sandwich. [...] Fifteen minutes, a bell tinkles, the door bursts open and like a Jack-out-of-the-box in pops a snuffing, ill-dressed, nervous but fat old gentleman who dives into the box, and turning

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<sup>29</sup> See Jörg Nagler, “A Mediator Between two Historical Worlds. Hermann Edward von Holst and the University of Chicago,” in *German Influences on Education in the United States to 1917*, eds. Henry Geitz et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 257-274. Concerning the migration of German historians to the United States, see Hartmut Lehmann and James J. Sheehan (eds.), *An Interrupted Past. German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933* (Washington: German Historical Institute, 1991).

<sup>30</sup> Letter from C.L. Burr to A.D. White, 30 October 1884; Cornell University Archives, Burr estate, correspondence.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from G. Monod to his mother, Berlin, 15 July 1867; Monod estate (in hand of the Rist family).

<sup>32</sup> Letter from G. Monod to A. Geffroy, Berlin, 18 November 1867, Bibliothèque Nationale, Geffroy estate, NAF 12925.

with a jerk, screams “Meine Herren.” [...] Now is all still. For three-fourths of an hour the professor’s arms fly excitedly, his voice rises to the highest pitch and descends to mere mutterings as he becomes lost in his subject. The pine box has become an abyss of learning which are extracted inexhaustible stores of the dry bones of knowledge. Suddenly the bell tinkles. His gyrations cease, the shrill voice is hushed, the manuscript is whisked away into a pocket, and the professor rushes out encouraged in his flight by a wild stamping of feet. Now this is funny once, but when it is repeated in exactly the same manner at every lecture [...] it becomes a most monotonous comedy.<sup>33</sup>

In France, many indeed were those who spoke of the edge German historians had over French historians. However, hardly any report from and on Germany was entirely positive. Starting in the 1860s, an attitude of competition and rivalry with German historians emerged. This competition increasing significantly after the French defeat of 1870/71, French historians hoped to beat the German historians, or at least to catch up with them. If necessary, this could be achieved with similar means as applied in Germany. But this reference to the neighbor could never be formulated in an unequivocally positive manner, without being accused of Germanophilia. Consequently, many aspects of the German university system were openly criticized, such as the precarious situation of private lecturers or the too far-reaching specialization of German historical research. If German structures were praised, similarly, genuinely French approaches and traditions were invoked, which were to be revived or taken as a point of departure.<sup>34</sup>

American and French historians considered the seminar as the most advanced element of the German system. While German history lectures met with doubt about their value and while the non-university historical research institutions and publications only played a minor part, the perceived superiority of German history was ascribed mostly to the seminar. For example Abel Lefranc, staff member of the French National Archive, wrote the following after a visit at University of Leipzig:

These meetings [seminars] have surely a most beneficial influence on Leipzig’s young historians. They contribute to give them the taste of modern history, to familiarize them with the sources and the very complex critical approaches of our time. This is an occurrence that is lacking a bit at our universities I have to admit.<sup>35</sup>

And Charles K. Adams from Cornell University pointed out:

[...] at the present day there is no thoroughly good teaching of history anywhere in the world that is not found on that careful, exact, and minute examination of sources which was originally instituted and has ever since been encouraged by the German seminar system.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Claude H. Van Tyne: “In Heidelberg’s Famed University [excerpt from a newspaper of 1897]; University of Michigan, Bentley Historical Library, Van Tyne estate, Box 3, Folder 68.

<sup>34</sup> Fundamental for this is Monod’s already cited introductory essay to the first edition of the *Revue Historique* (Monod, “Du progress”).

<sup>35</sup> Abel Lefranc, “Notes sur l’enseignement de l’histoire dans les universités de Leipzig et de Berlin,” *Revue internationale de l’enseignement supérieur* 15 (1888), 247.

<sup>36</sup> Charles K. Adams, “Recent Historical Work in the Colleges and Universities of Europe and America,” *Annual Report of the American Historical Association 1889*, 37.



But even this German historical seminar was by no means imitated or copied either on the western side of the Rhine or across the Atlantic. While in Germany the term “seminar” did not only apply to a form of teaching but also to institutes, in which the leading professor had at his disposal an infrastructure in form of teaching rooms, a library, and financial support for research and publication, such a structure based on individual professors and the far-reaching rights of professors were virtually unknown in the United States and France. In addition, in Germany, the seminar was used by advanced students, whereas at American universities such as the University of Michigan freshmen were taught in seminars. While in Germany, they oftentimes functioned as “aides” for a history professor, for whom they conducted empirical research, seminars in the United States primarily taught survey knowledge, and in France they were mainly used to prepare students for the numerous exams. True research seminars were rather scarce in both countries. While the research seminar trained doctoral students in Germany, the participants in French seminars were mainly prospective high school teachers. Dissertation research was not accompanied by seminars in France. The introduction of the seminar in France and the United States built upon structural elements that had already existed in both academic cultures: a close contact between lecturer and student and an active role of the students in class had already influenced the daily university routine in certain forms of instruction long before the craze for the German university system.

Altogether, one can assess that the perception of the German model was selective and partly distorting (more so in the United States than in France), and that the reception in turn can by no means be described as an “import” of unchanged elements, but at best as an adaptation of small parts of the German system, in many cases even rather as an enhancement of genuine approaches triggered by the discourse of the “German model.” In addition, this discourse coincided with the discourse of the supposed exemplary character of natural sciences and laboratories were praised by historians in both countries as excellent teaching and research institutions. Many reforms were probably induced by the upswing of natural sciences at universities rather than by an orientation toward a perceived “German model.” Thus, it is impossible to speak of an intentional “export” of German structures – German historians showed little interest in propagating or implanting German forms of institutionalization or professionalization abroad –, or of an “influence” of German history on its French or American counterpart or of an “import” of German structures. In both countries, the reference to the German model primarily served to claim prestige for one’s own objectives and reform plans. The reference to Germany was used for personal ends when Americans to advance their own career referred to their familiarity with the generally highly esteemed German history or the acquired German doctor title. The historian Henry E. Scott wrote from Germany to his colleague Albert B. Hart at Harvard University:

In regard to what you [= A.B. Hart] note about the value of a German degree compared with that of a Harvard Ph.D., I quite agree with you that a German degree is “a certificate recognized everywhere among educated men;” and it would certainly be a great help to you or to me in securing a good position in the United States [...]. Outside of Harvard, I have no doubt that a Harvard degree has much less influence than a German one, & it is outside of Harvard that we shall probably have to look for employment.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Letter H.E. Scott to A.B. Hart, 21 January 1883; Harvard University Archives, estate Hart, HUG 4448.5, Box “Correspondence – Personal.”

The reference to Germany was also used to discredit blocked structures in one's country and was used to support attempts at reform. Camille Jullian wrote the following:

Meanwhile, if it were possible to establish something similar [to the German historical seminar], these lectures [at the faculty of humanities] could serve as a frame: it would suffice if the professors [...] would be less preoccupied with exams and competitive examinations than science and knowledge. If this were the case, our lectures would have nothing to envy in seminars at German universities.<sup>38</sup>

But in France in particular, the negative, critical reference to German history also served to underline French scholars' own achievements.

These are the general trends of intercultural transfer between Germany and France and Germany and the United States. The systematic comparison of the emergence of historical research in France and the United States offer a different approach to the same phenomenon.<sup>39</sup> First the parallels are striking: in both countries, an academic historical discipline, journals edited by professional historians, historical associations and confederations, as well as research institutions abroad developed at about the same time. In addition, historians became a professional group. While the occupation with history had long been the concern of few, mostly rich amateur scientists (*Gentleman historians, Hommes des lettres*) or "leisure historians," in France and the United States, a group of full-time working historians emerged that financed themselves no longer through private wealth or the selling of their books, but who received salaries from universities. For them, a "normal career" developed, that required an increasingly codified training including a number of exams and examinations certifying the acquired knowledge. In both countries academic hierarchies developed that standardized the historians' career paths. However, neither here nor there were academic historians able to establish a monopoly on the study of history. Rather in both France and the United States, a large group of amateur historians continued to exist, which was, however, more easily "domesticated" by professional historians on the other side of the Atlantic in the United States than was the case in France. In both countries, standardization of historical research and historiography took place on the foundation of practices previously established. In both countries, the methodological consensus encompassed the demand for close work with primary sources, exactness, originality, objectivity, and the demand that scholars were aware of the secondary literature. Historians were, further, expected to practice a simple and clear writing style. Both countries it was the younger historians in particular who observed this consensus, while the older historians barely followed this vision.

The more closely one examines the institutionalization, professionalization and standardization of the historical discipline in these two countries, however, the more clearly the differences become evident. Only a few examples can be mentioned here: French academic history was shaped by secondary school history classes. Since the government of the Third Republic had expanded the school system in the 1880s, the need for educated history teachers

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<sup>38</sup> Camille Jullian, "Notes sur les séminaires historiques et philologiques des universités allemandes," *Revue internationale de l'enseignement supérieur* 8 (1884), 423.

<sup>39</sup> There are many books on this topic. Three works will be mentioned here that provide access to the older literature: Pim den Boer, *History as a Profession. The Study of History in France, 1818-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); John Higham, *History. Professional Scholarship in America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992); Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream. The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

increased significantly. They were taught at the *École Normale Supérieure* [elite university] and the *Facultés de Lettres* [Colleges of Liberal Arts], where classes focused mainly on the acquisition of the teaching license which was required for becoming a history teacher. All candidates had to take the same exams, which were run by the government. Since the candidates were tested on their ability to teach students survey knowledge, those candidates with mnemonic abilities had an advantage in the exams, while their colleagues trained in research techniques were disadvantaged. University training was to prepare students for these examinations. Consequently, the tendency to initiate students into research was very low. Rather, their mnemotechnical and didactic abilities were trained using topics and themes that were part of the school syllabi. At American history departments, the student population consisted less of future schoolteachers and more of individuals who would take up a political or journalistic career, and a majority of them for the career of university professor. The topics chosen for teaching was not aligned with school syllabi but was oriented towards the general politics of the respective university, the fields of research and interests of the respective professors, as well as the interests of the students, who could choose their courses more or less freely. (Freedom of choice varied from university to university). Certainly advanced students were also prepared to teach freshman classes in the future, but at the same time, the development of research skills was encouraged. All of the above led to great differences between France and the United States with regards to the thematic focus of academic history, as well as teaching methods.

Another difference between the two academic cultures consisted in the strong functional division of labor in French history that had no equivalent in the United States. In France, there was – next to what had been for a long time the rather weak *Facultés de Lettres* – a number of other history institutions. The *École Normale Supérieure*, independent until 1904, concentrated on the formation of secondary school teachers, while the *École de Chartes* qualified archivists and librarians. The fourth section of the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* [Practical School for Higher Studies], founded in 1868, concentrated on the formation of “researchers” for a not clearly defined job market and in addition attracted a great foreign public; the *École Libre des Sciences Politiques* [Free School of Political Sciences], founded in 1871, trained future journalists as well as politicians and executives of public administration. The institutes in Athens and Rome qualified future ancient historians and medievalists. At the *Collège de France*, professors held lectures for a general public and received much free time for their research. Depending on the institutional affiliation, lecturers had to teach survey classes (for example at the *Collège de France* or the *École Normale Supérieure*), repetitively teach a restricted, practically useful canon of knowledge for professional education (such as at the *École des Chartes*), or introduce students to research (such as at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*). In the United States, such a division of labor did not develop. Rather, mid-size and larger universities created their own history departments, whose professors taught undergraduates and also – if a graduate department existed – graduates at the same time. The departments tried to attract a preferably wide audience and adapted to different student expectations. Professors had to be able to train future history teachers, professors, politicians, journalists, researchers, and they were obligated to give survey classes as well as research seminars. At least potentially, teaching and research remained united in one institution and as such in the daily practice of historians. Specialization in one area was hardly possible, so that in comparison, American historians could do less specialized research than their French colleagues (and in particular in comparison to those at research institutions) and also had a lower publication rate. While in France the preferred form of publication depended on the institutional affiliation at which the

historian worked – historians who gave survey classes wrote textbooks and handbooks; historians who taught at research institutions wrote research articles about specific topics or edited sources; historians who prepared for a profession often published textbooks) – such a differentiation with regards to publishing did not exist among American historians. Thus, the institutional basic structures had a decisive influence on the professional activities of their employed historians.<sup>40</sup>

The differences between the academic cultures in both countries – that much has become evident from the few examples – can be mainly explained by the different institutional frameworks in which these processes took place. While the French university system was government-run, the American system was structured in a market-like fashion and only at state universities did state officials had limited influence. Likewise, the two academic systems differed in the way that the French was functionally and the American geographically differentiated. In addition, the different relationship between the tertiary and the secondary sector of education created differences between the two academic systems.<sup>41</sup> These different frameworks can contribute to an explanation of why the transfer of the German model did not occur. When German history was declared a model, France and the United States already had university systems with their own structures, into which the German education system could not easily be integrated. The traditional French academic system was particularly inflexible due to its complex functional intertwinement. Thus, all reform attempts either failed because of these complex structures and the interests invested in them or lead to unexpected results.

Contrasting the results from the analysis of the two development of the two academic cultures from the perspective of inter-societal transfer<sup>42</sup> and comparative history reveals that in particular the latter is capable of pointing out causalities as well as developing systematic and comprehensive questions, as for instance questions with regards to the relation between social and institutional structures on the one hand and cognitive structures on the other. Looking at the results of this brief comparison of these two methods applied to the history of history as an academic subject,<sup>43</sup> it becomes clear that the results from both approaches are quite different. When analyzing inter-societal transfer, one always arrives at the same conclusion: people or groups of people interested in changing (or avoiding to change) their society acquire knowledge about a different society. In the study of this other society, specific conditions are not fully and comprehensively understood. The perception is selective and oftentimes diluted, and one's own conditions and interests are "inscribed" into the image of the other. One perceives only what one wants to and is able to and ignores what does not correspond to one's own expectations. The subsequent public reference to the alleged model structure of the respective other society is mostly determined by interests of the observer and is oftentimes of a strategic nature: it is used to

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<sup>40</sup> It would be possible to mention additional differences between the university systems such as the academic patronage system, which was stronger developed in France than in the United States, or the academic job markets, which were subject to economic up and down swings, etc.

<sup>41</sup> See among others Joseph Ben-David and Awraham Zloczower, "Universities and Academic Systems in Modern Societies," *European Journal of Sociology* 3 (1962), 45-84.

<sup>42</sup> This term is to be preferred over the term of "intercultural transfer" as the latter suggests exclusive dealing with perception and reception processes in the realm of the so-called high culture. In contrast, the term inter-societal transfer implies that also social, economic or political structures can be transferred. See Paulmann, "Internationaler Vergleich," 677 f.

<sup>43</sup> The frequently used term "history of historiography" is too limited, as history of history does not only encompass historiography but also research and teaching as well as the institutions where these activities occurred. For this reason, the term "history of history" is to be preferred as label for this field of research.

emphasize one's own aspirations, and serves to receive attention for one's own projects by pointing to the backwardness of society, and to encourage reforms. The positive reference to another society always puts doubt onto one's own environment, states problems and shows alternative concepts, while at the same time presenting the critic as someone who has the capability of solving these problems. Negative reference to another society, on the contrary, can legitimize the conditions at home. In this case, rejection and refusal of foreign approaches also serves the construction of one's own identity. "Importing" aspects, structures or elements of another society leads to a new contextualization, adaptations and acculturations, redefinitions, and new functional attributions. Thus it is about processes of creative acquisition. The ways in which this happens depend on the cultural patterns of the receiving society. The influence of the receiving society upon the elements to be acculturated oftentimes proves to be stronger while the changes to the receiving society tend to be rather insignificant.

It is here that the limits of inter-societal transfer become tangible: it is rather descriptive than explanatory since transfer research is not a method but a thematically oriented research program. A particular small aspect of reality is examined and grey zones, the overlapping and the reciprocal interaction shown. It is perfectly suited for "thick description," for differentiation and contextualization as well as historic relativization of categories thought as absolute such as "nation" and "ethnicity." It shows humans as acting and influential subjects of history and allows for the exploration of the limits and opportunities of individual agency in history. In addition, it allows for an analysis of the forms of circulation of cultural patterns. But if one wants to explain the described, one also has to compare the role and significance of the transferred elements in the sending and the receiving environment, the social agents of the particular structure in both societies, the broader structural conditions in which the element was embedded in both societies. Only by systematic comparison, one can attempt to localize scale and form of the object's acculturation. Otherwise, it remains a multiplication of detailed and fragmented factual knowledge, which does not have any potential to go beyond the propositions stated above, due to the missing possibility to form concepts and models.

This is where comparison proves to be the broader scope, as it is a method and not only a research agenda that is primarily defined as thematic. Comparison has even several advantages. First of all, it gives room for causal explanations or at least for control, to check possible explanations. Furthermore, it provides the possibility of establishing relations between the object under study and the more general societal conditions. Since the objects are seen as exemplary cases of more general phenomena, comparison *tends to* be more useful for macro than for micro studies, or for the connection between the two levels of analysis. Another advantage consists of its easier combination with explicitly formulated theoretical problems, which also gives space for interdisciplinary approaches, as models or theories developed by neighboring disciplines can be made useful for historical research. Moreover, comparison provides the grounds for the development of one's own models or theories. In addition, it is a tool for the identification of research objects and gaps. Only by contrasting an object with another one, currently neglected and potential research topics can be identified as such. Altogether, it is thus possible to point out numerous advantages of the comparative method on a heuristic level.

Certainly, one cannot deny that also a number of disadvantages are linked to the application of the comparative method. Some of them are rather of a practical nature. On the one hand, the state of primary sources often differs greatly, resulting from different archival structures and publication practices. While the available material for a certain range of topics can be abundant for one side, it might be fragmentary or completely missing for the other side. Considerable



differences between the scientific landscapes often lead to partly significantly “tilted positions” concerning the secondary literature as well, as it does not provide the necessary information for both sides. The additional effort in time, work and cost linked to the comparative method also needs to be mentioned here. A reduction in effort is possible only by a limitation to a closely defined *tertium comparationis* (which decreases the relevance of the research). The language barrier and issues of translation and linguistic equivalence concerning central terms belong to the disadvantages of the comparative method, as well as the frequent impossibility to homogenize statistical data. Also noteworthy is the narrative deficit of comparisons and the considerable theoretical effort that must be accomplished. Generally, the danger of a tautological proceeding is there, since in one’s empirical work, one only looks for and encounters what one has constructed as ideal beforehand. The comparative method’s dependence on the use of clearly defined terms and idealized models holds the danger to not question these constructs during the empirical work and as such –often with anachronistical consequences – to ontologize them. By no means is comparison the best way possible; but by no means should the “bumps in the road” be ignored or underestimated.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, the claim to leadership of the comparative method vis-à-vis intercultural transfer is not completely unwarranted.

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<sup>44</sup> Marc Bloch already pointed to the limits of comparative history, see Marc Bloch, “Für eine vergleichende Geschichtsbetrachtung der europäischen Gesellschaften (1927),” in *Alles Gewordene hat Geschichte. Die Schule der Annales in ihren Texten 1929-1992*, eds. Matthias Middell and Steffen Sammler (Leipzig: Reclam, 1994), 121-167. See also Thomas Welskopp, “Stolpersteine auf dem Königsweg. Methodenkritische Anmerkungen zum internationalen Vergleich in der Gesellschaftsgeschichte,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 35 (1995), 339-367.