A Case Study of a Case Study

Strategies of Generalization and Specification in the Study of Israel as a Single Case

Lars Mjøset
University of Oslo

abstract: Debates on 'case studies and generalization' have been too strongly committed to dualisms (general/specific, explanation/understanding) that polarize social science into natural-science-inspired and humanities-inspired camps. One should be aware of a third option, a *pragmatist (participationist) attitude*. Rather than relying on parallels with external academic fields, this attitude thinks about research with reference to the conduct of social science only. This article discusses these three attitudes with reference to a single case study of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (asking why that conflict became one of the deepest and most persistent conflicts in recent history). The three attitudes imply different strategies of generalization and specification. The single case study of the Middle East conflict relies on a pragmatist strategy of generalization, and the rest of the methodological discussion shows how this strategy transcends the general/specific or explanation/understanding dichotomies.

keywords: comparative studies ✦ generalization ✦ Israeli–Palestinian conflict ✦ philosophy of the social sciences ✦ single case study

Three Attitudes in Social Research

In the vast methodological literature on case studies, the study of single cases is mostly seen as contrary to social research that aims at generalization. This literature reproduces the explanation/understanding dichotomy.

Those who promote explanation by causal regularities conceive of theory as hypothesized, unobservable generative causal structures. Explanation implies high-level theories representing law-like causal factors whose influence is modelled in some kind of pattern. Let us call this the *standard* attitude or style of reasoning. There are nuances as to how theory looks in this tradition; common varieties are as a covering law inference,

International Sociology ✦ September 2006 ✦ Vol 21(5): 735–766

SAGE (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi)
DOI: 10.1177/0268580906067838

a regression equation or a neoclassical set of simultaneous equations. The first two fit the law-oriented notion of theory; the third fits the idealizing notion of theory (Mjøset, 2001). Researchers in this tradition work in similar ways as researchers in the natural sciences. This does not mean that they want to reduce social science to natural science, only a not very influential minority pursues such a programme.

Alternatively, the *understanding* of a case is regarded as a holistic impression of the total situation studied: theory in that case may be understood as transcendental, basic notions of structure and action. Theory looks like a set of transcendental categories, explored in lengthy books discussing selected classics – or the deconstruction of those categories. Theory thus understood may in turn be employed to define what is distinct to 'our' historical period, usually called modernity (or some subperiod of that), but historically delimited in quite arbitrary ways. Let us call this the *social-philosophical attitude*. Researchers in this tradition work in similar ways as researchers in the humanities.

Since both views imply a notion of general or high-level theory, they may also be related to the general/specific dichotomy. Most surveys and textbook discussions are based on the standard view. They differ as to how they value the study of single cases. The traditional view was to see it as an inferior type of analysis, an emergency solution in situations where data from any more units are unavailable. More moderate versions accept the role of single-case analysis in inspiring hypotheses, which can later be tested on large-scale data sets. The most generous interpretations have emphasized that even the study of single cases may be valuable, since specific cases chosen with reference to a specified theory can serve as critical cases, corroborating or falsifying the theory in question.

As for the social-philosophers, textbooks rarely focus on methodological considerations – they are mostly catalogues of personalized, high-level theories establishing the foundations of social science, of theories of modernity, or of both. But social-philosophers are generally enthusiastic about studies of single cases. This is partly because their general notion of theory is a transcendental one. Theory is a clarification of concepts that make empirical studies possible. Furthermore, when they approach the empirical question of modernity from their high-level vantage point, modernity is often treated as a 'knowledge regime' (a cognitive structure), which can be traced in single cases. Finally, since theorists of modernity consider themselves secular philosophers of history, they have, like historians generally, no problems with case specificity. A specific group among the social-philosophers denies the commitment to transcendental theory. They signal great scepticism towards any philosophy of history, but approach cases (to the extent they leave philosophy for empirical analysis) as highly specific. I return to this deconstructionist perspective

in the conclusion and in this context also briefly discuss historians' strategies of specification.

One broad current in the literature on case studies escapes the two dichotomies! This is the sociological Chicago School tradition, further developed into the notion of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The present article joins the line of contributions that favour the revival of this tradition, not just as an approach limited to qualitative, micro-sociological studies, but as an overall approach to social science (Abbott, 2001; Ragin, 2000). I have earlier argued that these 'grounded' traditions reflect a third approach or attitude in social science, distinctly different from both the standard and the social-philosophical attitudes (Mjøset, 2005). Its philosophical roots can be traced both in US pragmatism (well known as the main inspiration of the Chicago School) and in European critical (standpoint) theories. Let us call this the *participationist* or *pragmatist* attitude.

Much too often, this perspective is not treated as a third one. Scholars instead integrate it into either the standard or the social-philosophical perspective. From the standard vantage point, one would simply see the pragmatist style of argument as a version of the old Mertonian notion of middle-range theories. The social-philosophers, for their part, like to include 'neo-pragmatism' as yet another branch to reconstruct in order to specify a transcendental theory of structure and action.

Both these efforts at integration assume that the pragmatist line of argument would relate to the explanation/understanding and general/specific dichotomies in similar ways to the two other attitudes. This article challenges such attempts to deny the third alternative. At least in social science, middle- and lower-level theories seem better able to accumulate knowledge than high-level notions of theory (Mjøset, 2005). In this article, I support this claim by looking at one specific study of a single case. I treat the three attitudes as distinctly different: two different high-level, general, 'top-down' notions of theory against the pragmatist commitment to grounded, middle-level, 'bottom-up' notions of theory.

My aim is to bring more nuance into the discussion of 'case studies and generalization', and to make it more difficult for future discussion on this and related topics to rely on simplified applications of the two dichotomies general/specific and explanation/understanding. I also examine how the slogan that 'observation presupposes theory' – invoked, it seems, by anyone who pursues a programme of high-level theory – takes on very different meanings depending on what the researcher means by the term theory.

But I do not do this by means of crude, small examples or programmatic postulates. My discussion of these topics in the philosophy of the social sciences is grounded in a thorough and detailed discussion of one

piece of research into a single case. This is in line with recent sociology of science, which increasingly relies on case studies of what researchers do when they conduct empirical research. Since I study my own case study, the following subsections represent an exercise in self-reflection, not a philosophical one; rather, a reflection on how I proceeded when I carried out this particular research project.

Analysing the Case of Israel

In 2004, I carried out a brief project on the origins and development of the state of Israel (Mjøset, 2004). The main objective was to write a small and relatively popular account that would clarify why the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has become so deep and persistent. The project was strictly driven by a specified research problem. I am not an 'area specialist', so the example here is not really a piece of research that breaks new ground. Still, it is more than just a compilation of research findings. It can be considered an example of how reasonably skilled social scientists proceed in order to analyse a new case.

Given the focus on theory and observation, let me start by noting that the analysis related to at least 22 theories! This already shows that the usual formula that social research is about testing 'a theory of' something, is misleading, at least when we study a single case. Unless one wants to claim that the study of a single case is not a task for social science, there is no way of analysing a single case without drawing on a number of theories.

Table 1 presents three different aspects of the 22 theories. The first column states them as high-level, general theories. The second column lists aspects that are covered by the theory: that is, middle-level knowledge relevant to the project's explanatory tasks. The third column sketches a number of possible comparative specifications of such knowledge. Among these, some were made *basic* (and indicated in italic type in the table) to the explanatory efforts. Many of them, however, remained potential comparisons that could not be specified within the time frame of the project. How potential comparisons can be turned into saturated ones is discussed in the conclusion. Surveying my various comparisons, I also distinguish between comparisons that are internal to the case (mostly delimited as the conflicting parties) and external comparisons, in the conventional sense of being between different cases.

In the following, I provide a highly synthetic summary of the project. Corresponding to each of the 10 sections of the original 16-page paper (Mjøset, 2004), I provide a 'skeleton-like' impression of how the interplay between theory and observation yielded an explanatory argument in several stages. The role of comparisons is particularly emphasized. The

Table 1 *General Theories, Grounded Theories, Basic and Potential Comparisons*

Subsection		High-level, general theory	Middle-level knowledge	Potential comparisons/Basic comparisons (*in italics*)	
1	S1	State formation/ nation-building	Patterns of European state formation	C1	*B1 – Organic vs liberal*
2	I2	International ethnic migration	Strength of international networks (diaspora)	C2	– relation to mother country – reasons for choice of destination
	S3	Colonialism	European settler colonies	C1–3	*B2 – old/new world* *– colonization/decolonization*
3	I4	Hegemony/war	Great power concessions during world wars	C4–5	Balfour Declaration compared to other similar diplomatic promises
	I5	Great powers in international relations – relations to regions with raw materials and strategic passages	Great power conflict on establishment of regional state systems after First World War	C5–6	e.g. comparison of Middle East with regions in Asia and Africa
	R6	Regional state systems			
	S7	Labour market theory/ class	Labour market polarization	C7	Settlers/natives in various colonial situations
	CS8	Theory of elites	Elite formation in settler colonies	C8	Cases in the old and the new world
4	I9	International organizations/ international law	Postwar international organization/international law	C9	Cases of states formed in strong opposition to neighbouring states
	R10	Regional wars	War-making/state-making	C10–11–3	Israel/the Arab states
	CP11	Stateless people			
	S/CI12	Migration policies	State-building and 'transfer'	C12	Other cases of explicit political efforts to secure immigration from a distinct ethnic group

Table 1 *Continued*

Subsection		High-level, general theory	Middle-level knowledge	Potential comparisons/Basic comparisons (*in italics*)	
5	CIP13	Legitimation in international politics	Strength of cultural-religious capital (CRC)	C13–14	*B3 – Internal comparison of Israel and Palestine:* i. Stronger ICRC after WW2 ii. After 1948: Israel refers to ICRC iii. Compare Israeli Jews and diaspora iv. Conception of 'Arab threat' before and after 1967 v. Jewish interwar proto-state compared to PLO after 1964 vi. ICRC compared to PCRC
	S14	Threat perceptions			
6	S15	States/economic development	Varieties of small corporatist social-democratic states well-connected to the West	C5–15–16	*B4 – Israel compared to the Nordic countries*
	CI16	Militarism	Civil militarism	C16	Different depths of militarism
7	S17	Civil society	Occupation of territories largely inhabited by natives earlier expelled	C17	Other stateless people exiled close to their homelands
	S18	State expansion and contraction	Palestinian social movement	C18	Internal: pre- and post-1967 i. New world situation for Israel ii. Palestinians in Israel and elsewhere iv. Compare intifadas 1987/2000
	CIP19	Legitimation in domestic politics	Secularization/ desecularization of politics	C19 C3–14	iii. Desecularization of Zionism

Table 1 *Continued*

Subsection		High-level, general theory	Middle-level knowledge	Potential comparisons/Basic comparisons (*in italics*)	
8	I4–5 & R10	Hegemony/raw materials	The exercise of hegemony in a resource-rich region	C4/5–C10	US relations to other oil-producing regions
	S20	Economic policy adjustment of the political economy	Neoliberal restructuring	C20	Varieties of capitalism
9	CI21	Social movements	Process of decolonization	C9–21–22	Recent processes of decolonization in the old world (South Africa)
	S15	States/economic development	Developmental vs predatory states	C15–17–18	Internal: i. Israeli developmental vs Palestinian predatory ii. Elite/civil society tensions iii. Demographic differences
10	S22	International negotiations	Two polarized scenarios	C18–21–22	Experience of partial conflict reduction in earlier deep/persistent conflicts (e.g. Northern Ireland) Scenarios of more 'transfer' International constellations before and after 9/11.

Notes: Notation indicates the thematic groups of theories: S indicates *state*, I indicates *international relations*, R indicates *region*, C with either P (Palestine) and/or I (Israel) indicates *civil society*. Other abbreviations: C indicates comparisons, B indicates basic comparisons.

reader may relate to Table 1 for more information on the theoretical perspectives involved.

1. Liberal vs Ethnic States

The first comparison (C1) establishes a simple typology of liberal vs ethnic states. Following Mann (2005), the liberal conception of the state is based on acceptance of class conflicts and interest groups, while the organic conception relies on ethnic divisions, but alleged unity of interests and ethnic solidarity across class divisions. This comparison is a basic one for two reasons: Eastern European organic states stepped up the exclusion of their Jewish population in the late 19th century. Thereby, they triggered the westwards migration of Jews and inspired the Zionist programme of establishing a Jewish state.

2. The Specificity of Israel as an Organic Settler State

There are indications in the literature that the Jewish settlers were unique in two respects. As migrants they were not linked to a European mother country, but they had a link to the European and western great powers through various Jewish networks, later to become the diaspora of Israel (Anderson, 2001). Furthermore, their motivation as settlers was cultural-religious, not economic (Kimmerling, 2001). But since no extensive comparative mapping exists, this comparison (C2) is not much more than a potential one. The next comparison (C1–3) is the second basic one: the notion of organic settler colonies is specified with reference to the research literature on European settler colonies. Table 2 defines the specificity of Israel's organic settler state as compared to two 'normal' development patterns of such states. In the old world – defined by abundant supplies of native labour – these states decolonized and lost most traits of a settler state. In the new world, settler states lost their organic nature, as labour supply depended on immigration from many ethnic groups. The Zionist settlement project started as an attempt to build an organic settler state (Shafir, 1996, 1999) and Israel today remains perhaps the last case of such a state. The formula of Zionist state-building is: *a process of colonization in the old world in which the colonizers behave as if they were in the new world* (Table 2: the 'imaginary' case)! Here lie the roots of the vicious spiral of ethnopolitical conflict already mentioned.

3. Polarization between Settlers and Natives during the Interwar Period

International and regional conditions resulted in the development of a Jewish proto-state within the English-led mandate of Palestine 1920–48. Table 1 indicates four potential comparisons, but given the project's time constraints, they could not be explored. The following statements therefore

Table 2 *Decolonization of Organic Settler States*

	Decolonization	Colonialism maintained
Old world (large native population): Euro-Asia/Africa	*The 'normal' old world case* Popular mobilization against the organic settler state. Natives take over, settlers move out or join the new postcolonial regime. A new organic state may develop, but it will no longer be a settler state.	*The Israeli case* In order to retain organic ethnic ties between state and civil society, economic development must rely on immigration from the diaspora. The large native population must be more or less fully excluded from employment, at most be employed in marginal positions. As polarization between natives and immigrants becomes imminent, decolonization is resisted, and the organic settler state strives to retain domination, using all capabilities at its disposal.
New world (native population vulnerable): Americas, Pacific	*The 'normal' new world case* Extermination, diseases, etc. reduce native populations to a marginal position. The settler state loses its organic features as all kinds of immigrants are accepted as labour supply.	*(The 'imaginary' Israeli case)*

rely either on historical monographs or social science research on Israel only. The British Balfour Declaration (1917) promised a Jewish homeland in Palestine (C4–5) and these powers constituted an Arab state system to secure strategic passages and raw materials (oil) (C5–6). C7 traces the labour–market interaction patterns between the two conflicting parties: an alliance was forged between immigrant labour and the Zionist movement, an 'alliance between a workers' movement without work and a settlement movement without settlers' (Shalev, 1992: 183ff.), one which increasingly excluded native Arab workers (cheaper and better skilled, non-unionized labour) from employment in the plantation economy, which grew into a structure of self-reliance-oriented kibbutzes. C8 notes the interwar emergence of a new elite drawn from the *sabra,* Jews born in

Palestine, the children of the two first settlement waves. Their generational experiences were dominated by increasing tensions between the two ethnic groups. These four patterns of social interaction at various levels influenced the Zionist project of establishing an organic settler community. They allow us to define the *basic geopolitical maxim* of Zionist state-building: only by relating to the Arabs (the Palestinians particularly) from a position of (military, political, economic) strength, can the Jewish community survive (Schlaim, 2000).

4. Israel, the Great Powers and the Arab State System

A conjuncture of four factors (respectively international, regional, state and civil society) seems to explain the formation of the Israeli state in 1948, a crucial turning point that dramatically altered the terms of the conflict. As in the preceding subsection, the account relies on single-case material; the comparisons mentioned in Table 1 remain potential ones. At the international level, Britain's departure as international hegemon, leaving the Palestinian mandate to the UN, led – via great power influence – to Israel's insertion as a new unit into the emerging system of formally independent, postcolonial Arab states. If C9 had been carried out, one could have discovered whether there are any parallel cases of such a very different unit being inserted into a regional state system. The insertion led to regional wars. The intimate relationship between war-making and state-making is brought out for most of the members of the Arab state system (C10 would be an internal comparison if the case was seen to include Israel and the Arab state system). Dramatic processes ensued affecting the Arab parts of the Palestinian mandate's civil society. During the 1948 war with the Arab League states, the Jewish state-builders expelled 700,000 Palestinians, destroying 400 out of 500 Palestinian villages during and after the war. The process even involved ethnic cleansing (Morris, 2004). As a comparison *internal* to the case, note that this compares (C12) with the fate that the Jews themselves had suffered earlier. Having made the territory into a 'new world', Israeli state-builders proceeded to consolidate the new asymmetry between the conflicting parties through immigration policies (C12): Jews were invited to populate the new state ('the law of return'), while Palestinians were not allowed to resettle their properties. The *basic geopolitical maxim* was institutionalized in a territorial state, and Israel defended its territory against various Arab states in wars (R10) in 1956 (Suez), 1967 and 1973. Largely because of these wars, the Middle East became one of the world's most militarized regions.

5. Cultural-Religious Capital

This subsection deals with ideology and legitimation. Through the period of expulsions and pogroms, ending with the Nazi Holocaust, the Jewish

people accumulated a cultural-religious capital, based on its history of suffering in Europe. The experience of the Jewish settlement project in Israel added a whole new 'Arab' dimension to their history of suffering. This third basic comparison can be turned into a string of *internal* comparisons. First, comparing the situation before and after the Second World War, I note that the Nazi atrocities against the Jews had strengthened their cultural-religious capital. Second, I compare the situation before and after 1948: the novel feature is the emergence of the state of Israel, whose pursuit of the basic geopolitical maxim is legitimated with reference to this cultural-religious capital. That capital is converted to military and economic assistance from great western powers. It is also crucial in securing financial and moral support not just from the diaspora, but also from many Christian groups in western civil societies (viz. the Biblical attribution of the Holy Land to the Jews). Third, I compare the experience of Israel's Jewish citizens (with a new Arab component in their perception of threat) and that of the Jewish diaspora in the West, which now tends to be understood as Israel's diaspora. Fourth, I compare the different incarnations of the 'Arab threat' before (fear of the Arab states) and after 1967 (fear of the Palestinian political-military mobilization). Fifth, I note that the Jewish proto-state (before 1948) and the PLO (since 1964) are 'cases of the same': people without a state struggling to establish that state in a designated area. The difference is plain to see: Israel's state-builders succeeded first, triumphed in regional wars and had better relations to great western powers and civil societies. This leads to the sixth comparison: the Jewish organic state had done to the Palestinians what the East European organic states had done to them: expulsion, even ethnic cleansing, and thereafter, denied return. The Palestinians also possessed a cultural-religious capital, but compared to the Jewish one, it was less composite, and had fewer ties to the West. As the conflict developed, both parties strove in different ways to convert their cultural capital into political and material support. The Palestinian organizations were chronically less well-endowed than the Israeli state. The Palestinians had some backing in the UN, but mostly only from non-western, that is Arab and Communist, states. Palestinian civil society was concentrated in refugee camps in different Arab countries. The PLO wavered between UN-based reformism and desperate strategies of international terrorism. All these six comparisons are internal to the case: the first, second and fourth are diachronic, the third and sixth are synchronic, while the fourth compares 'cases of the same' in different historical periods.

6. The Israeli Security State

In order to specify the kind of state emerging in the Israeli state-building project, Israel is compared (fourth *basic* comparison) with the postwar

Nordic social-democratic states. Like these, Israel was a developmental state (Evans, 1995; Senghaas, 1985; Mjøset, 1992), dominated by a corporatist Labour party/union complex (Shalev, 1992). Comparison brings out two major differences: Israel became imbued (C16) with what has been called 'civil militarism' (Kimmerling, 1993), organized with reference to the *basic geopolitical maxim.* Civilian and military elites were completely in tune (Horowitz, 1982), the basic common denominator being the '*sabra-kibbutznick* fighter-settler'. Besides North Korea, Israel is the state that demands most of its citizens in terms of conscription (Rödiger, 1994): this potential comparison can be developed into a mature one by drawing on the local research frontiers surveyed in Mjøset and van Holde (2002). Second (C5–15–16), unlike the Nordic countries, the ethnic-organic aspects of the state created graded citizenship: all Jews had full rights and duties (military service, landownership, education, labour market access, union membership), while the others, the remaining Palestinian minority, were clearly treated as second-rate citizens in terms of rights and duties (Shafir and Peled, 2002). They were treated as potential national traitors, kept under emergency legislation for a long time, mostly channelled into the least attractive slots of the labour market, and often coopted as voters for the Israeli Labour party.

7. Relations between the Israeli State and the Palestinians

The remaining parts of the analysis focus on the development of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict since 1967. Table 3 contains a periodization in three dimensions. The first row (I) shows how the Israeli settler project moved its frontier successively until the recognition of the Palestinian state-building project in 1993–5 (Oslo process), and also beyond this. The second row (P) shows how the Palestinians were affected by the moving frontier of Israeli settlements. The third row (C) shows how the conflict has changed from a bilateral labour market conflict, via a regional conflict into a new bilateral conflict with international repercussions. Table 3 facilitates a series of internal comparisons. I explore three of them (C18), all comparing the situation before and after 1967. First, in the 1967 war, Israeli forces occupied territories (Gaza, West Bank, East Jerusalem) densely populated by the Palestinians expelled in 1949 and their descendants (nearly 1 million, two-thirds of them on the West Bank). While in the period 1948–67, the Israeli state had created a 'new world', the 1967 extension created a situation more similar to that before 1948: an 'old world' situation with a large native labour supply. Second, I compare the Israeli Palestinians with the Palestinians in the occupied areas: the former are second-rate Israeli citizens, while the latter have next to no rights, being employed as extremely cheap guest labourers in the Israeli economy (Table 3, 2nd row). Third, since the areas occupied in 1967 were core

Table 3 *Stages of the Conflict*

	Interwar period	1948–67	1967–93/5	1993/5–
I	Proto-state (Yishuv)	Organic settler state securing its 'new world' within the 1948 borders.	Military occupation of new territories; recreation of the 'old world' situation. Lock-in due to popular religious enthusiasm.	The organic settler state for the first time acknowledges Palestinian state-building.
P	State-building for a majority state	Stateless people, majority of population refugees in other Arab states.	Stateless people, but majority now reoccupied by the settler state that expelled them in 1948. First intifada by Palestinian grassroots.	A Palestinian proto-state. Second intifada by the grassroots.
C	*Labour market conflict*	*Regional conflict*	*Bilateral and international conflict*	*International/bilateral interaction leads to decolonization?*
	Escalating towards civil war proportions.	Other Arab states trying to fight the cause of the Palestinian people, but are successively defeated by Israel.	Neighbouring states negotiating peace settlements with Israel. PLO and other Palestinian organizations wavering between terrorism and reformism (UN link). *1973*: More severe international repercussions via the oil market.	Several dilemmas: – IDF vs Palestinian civil society. – Israeli state vs PLO vs the US (and the great power group). – Palestinian paramilitaries vs Israeli civil society. – Israel's religiously motivated settlers vs the Israeli state.

Biblical areas, a 'messianic wave' emerged in Israeli politics, and Zionism was desecularized (Kimmerling, 2001), reversing earlier secular trends (iii, belonging to C19). Among the several potential comparisons to carry out here, the most tempting (C17) is to consider the Palestinians as a case of 'people forced into exile', and then ask whether there are any other cases where an exiled people are reoccupied less than 20 years after their expulsion, being held under long-term military occupation, with next to no civilian rights. However, within the time frame of the project, this could not be investigated further. A fourth internal comparison relates (C18/iv) to this major asymmetry. The longer-term effect of the 1967 occupation was the eruption of new Palestinian revolts (there had been earlier ones in the interwar period): the intifadas of 1987 and 2000. These revolts,

including since the 1990s the practice of suicide bombing, spread shock waves of fear among Israeli citizens, adding to the composite threat perception of the Jews. This sustained popular support in Israeli civil society for the IDF's (Israeli Defence Forces) harsh practices (Graham, 2003) in the occupied areas.

8. The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict as a Component in Regional and International Relations

In 1967, the conflict became bilateral again. But soon its international repercussions became much more marked than earlier. Due to changes in the international oil regime, the swift Israeli victory in the 1973 war fed back into western economic stability. The 1973 oil crisis showed how Israel's pursuit of its basic geopolitical maxim now led the Arab oil-producers, whose control of the oil resources had been strengthened, to exert economic pressure against the western industrialized world: OPEC's oil embargo triggered the famous First Oil Shock of the western world economy. I focus here on connections between the US, the hegemonic power with a basic interest in securing the stability of the western world economy, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the Arab oil-producing states. Combining notions coined in earlier subsections with a comparison of the pre- and post-1973 international oil regime, I propose the simple model drawn in Figure 1 (grounded in C4–5 and C10). Economists can, and surely have, devised more formalized models, but for my purposes, this qualitative account is sufficient. (A slightly more complex version might include the UN and additional western great powers.) I only specify here the most crucial link: due to its heavy support of Israel, the US has massive leverage. As the hegemonic power, the US would like to restrain Israel's policing of the Palestinian population in the occupied territories in order to secure Arab-dominated OPEC's cooperation in stabilizing the oil price. Still, the US-led peace process progresses only slowly, and there are setbacks, due to the dynamics recounted earlier: Israeli leaders refer to Jewish cultural-religious capital as a legitimation of the pushing of

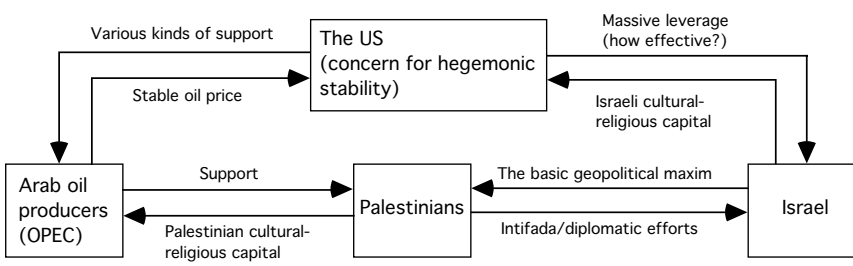

Figure 1 *International Repercussions of the Conflict*

'facts on the ground' in favour of the Israeli state. Additional comparisons largely had to remain potential ones: Israel's corporatist model of economic organization was changed by neoliberal economic restructuring – here further comparison to the Nordic states would be relevant (C20). However, the internal comparison of the two intifadas (C18/iv) shows that the more dramatic threat perceptions of the second intifada led to renewed distrust between the conflicting parties. As the US gets more eager to further the peace process, the more the settlers plead their cause in Israeli civil society: they are not only the settlers on the frontier closest to the Palestinian masses, a large fraction of them also defend their cause in religious terms, as a recovery of the promised land (see C19).

9. Decolonization?

International processes around the end of the Cold War altered some of the terms of the conflict, leading to mutual recognition in 1993–5. Following this turning point, there are now two states (the Palestinian proto-state, as weak as Israel is strong), run by political elites who interact with their respective civil societies. The analysis of an old world case of decolonization (see subsection 3) can be used as a stylized 'normal' case. As Kimmerling (2001) has emphasized, there are specific reasons as to why some sort of cost/benefit consideration will not dominate Israel's decision to maintain colonial rule in the occupied territories: Israel's settler colonialism is a case of religious, not primarily economically motivated colonialism. Connecting to my broader analysis, I ask whether it is possible that Israel will accept that it cannot simply continue to create its new world. Can the present-day Israeli elites realize that Israel is bound to exist in the old world? Is decolonization possible? The potential comparison is to other processes of decolonization, requiring careful assessment of the various factors in this conjuncture: C9–21–22. Withdrawal (the Gaza Strip, autumn 2005) has led to turbulence in Israeli politics. But the basic geopolitical maxim still seems operative in that Israeli authorities want to retain extensive control over the areas administered by the PNA (Palestinian Authority). The analogy with the South African apartheid regime and its bantustans has been suggested (C17). The ANC's victory in South Africa is an external comparison that turns out to be very crucial for the contextualization of the present stage of the conflict (Anderson, 2001: fn. 18; Younis, 2000). Thus, it is perhaps the first among our many potential comparisons that should be turned into a saturated one! In addition, a number of internal comparisons were worked out (C15–17–18): since the conflict is now between two states, it is not hard to depict the enormous gap in capabilities between the Israeli developmental state and the weak PNA, which has several features of what Evans (1995) calls a predatory state. The two elites facing one another both strive to manage complex

tensions in their respective civil societies. A systematic account of these may constitute yet another set of potential comparisons (see also Table 3). Only one of these comparisons could easily be carried out, and surely forms a basic feature of the contemporary situation. The demographic dynamics of the two societies differ dramatically (C15–17–18/iii). The Palestinian population growth is one of the world's highest, while the Israeli one is at the other end of the spectrum. With the intifadas, the supply of poor guest labourers has dried up, and IDF control of occupied areas makes it very hard for Arab workers to commute (Kimmerling, 2003). With the record population growth in the occupied areas, the 'old world dynamics' of abundant labour supplies becomes more and more visible, while their chance of employment is hampered by the stalemate situation between two highly asymmetric parties.

10. Locked-in Colonialism with Great Power Privileges

The conflict is one of the most bitter in contemporary world politics. From an interpretation of its present state, it is important to see whether the notions, patterns and grounded models I have devised enable us to think about the future of the conflict. Two potential comparisons (C18–21–22) should be developed: one of them searches for a glimpse of hope, the other transforms grounded theory into critical theory. First, one can compare the situation with other deep-rooted and persistent conflicts (e.g. Northern Ireland, see Lustick, 1993) that have – however slowly – become less tense. Second, one can turn back to Mann's study of the 'dark side' of democracy, in which he has developed a set of early warning indicators (based on his analysis of 20th-century cases of 'murderous cleansing'), and relate the discourse in Israeli politics on 'transfer' (Morris, 2004: Ch. 2; Kimmerling, 2004) to that line of analysis. Furthermore, if we return to the international repercussions, a new set of internal comparisons can be developed with reference to the model in subsection 8. To end my analysis, I sketched one such comparison, relating it to the start of the US/western 'war on terror' on 11 September 2001. As soon as the US pushes the peace process only a little in favour of the Palestinians, Israel's government gets increasingly worried whether their cultural-religious capital still yields the returns they are used to. In this situation, Israeli elites have reflected on whether the events of 9/11 could lead to higher returns. Could the composite Israeli threat perception be generalized? Could the Israeli position of retaining colonial rule emerge in a more favourable light by being cast as a case similar to Muslim–western conflicts in the western world? Once more, our grounded theory becomes critical theory. In subsection 6, I supported Kimmerling's analysis that a pervasive security imperative had infused Israeli civil society with a *civil militarism* that has few precedents in western democracies. But there are

social movements opposing this militarism, and western public spheres – facing local Muslim–western tensions due to flows of labour migrants – should rather learn from the example of the Israeli peace activists who strive to create trust at the local level: Jewish medical doctors treating poor Palestinians; Jewish activists supervising IDF behaviour at control posts or the activities of settlers; Jewish legal activists helping native Palestinians to buy land and housing within Israel (Davis, 2004); and the Jewish conscientious objectors and fighter pilots who – at the risk of considerable penalties in terms of pensions and other social services – refuse to serve in the occupied areas.

Strategies of Generalization and Strategies of Specification

The study of Israel reported here was not conducted in order to make theoretical or methodological points. I have reported the actual procedures that I had to go through in order to present an answer to the research question – why that conflict became so deep-seated, so persistent. The idea of using the case study to illustrate a number of points concerning accumulation of knowledge and level of theory in social science came later.

Let us consider our three researcher attitudes in light of Table 1. Like the social-philosophical attitude, the transcendental notion and its deconstructionist counterpart are non-empirical, and although one can write volumes-long accounts of how contested knowledge is in Middle East studies, there was no way that such notions of theory seemed necessary in my case study. I comment briefly on the deconstructionist challenge later.

The main empirically oriented social-philosophical notion is the theory of modernity, but the study of a single case – at least one such as Israel – really resists broad, only vaguely contextualized statements about modernity. Given the many regional and international repercussions of the case, the lesson from my analysis should rather be that quite 'unlikely' conjunctures can work themselves out as long-term sequences – starting with the Jewish exodus from the Holy Land – and actually prove to be formative forces in the present state of 'modernity'.

The standard notions of theory reflect empirical ambitions, so let us specify the *strategies of generalization* that lead to the forms of knowledge represented by these notions of theory.

The law-oriented notion of theory implies a *segmenting* strategy of generalization: the aim is to extract general relations within a specified field of research where large data sets are available. These data sets are special-purpose ones: in the OECD, there are data sets available to the econometrician, sociology has its data sets on social mobility, political science has its electoral surveys, and so on. The strategy of generalization

is to establish general knowledge related to the narrow segment from which the data on a large number of cases are gathered: the theory of economic growth, the theory of social mobility in late industrial countries, the theory of voting behaviour and so on. The large number of cases contained in the data sets allows the use of statistical methods of generalization, but the security of this method comes at the cost of segmentation, and findings based on patterns of correlation are not easy to translate back into a world that is seldom structured in ways that allow researchers to trace natural experiments.

Consider an example from my study. I wanted to know about voting (CIP19), migration (S/CI12), the social mobility of various Israeli and Arab groups and about booms and slumps in the Israeli economy (CI21), but to get at this, I integrated descriptive statistics with qualitative comparisons. This allowed me to gain an understanding of the processes whereby economic slump, neoreligious mobilization in elections, continued migration of settlers to the frontier and the social fate of Israel's underclass (with Arabs at the bottom) have changed Israeli society in the recent past. The segmenting strategy of generalization did not help the analysis a bit!

The idealizing notion of theory implies an *insulating* strategy of generalization. Rational choice theory claims relevance for all segments. It is based on a general theory of interaction, practised as thought experiments. The theory offers high-level integration across many theory segments in Table 1. However, it still has its various disciplinary incarnations. In the field of international relations it is called *neorealism,* a high-level theory of interstate relations (Table 1: theories marked I and R). It yields thought experiments based on the assumptions that states are rational actors in an international anarchy.

This may be contrasted with our notion of Israel's basic geopolitical maxim. That notion is based on a set of comparisons that specify the type of the organic state, and the relations between Jewish migrants, Israeli state-builders and citizens. The abstractions of neorealist theory are simply irrelevant for our explanatory task. Neorealist theory is fatally insulated from empirical substance. Neorealism's only notion of context is the parameters fixed by the analyst. Within that framework, one may compare various models and simulations, discussing which model best fits selected cases, but the craftwork of contextualization by means of comparative typologies plays no important role.

The general/high-level column of Table 1 can be stated in terms of either law-oriented or idealizing notions. But I tested no such high-level theories! Even the conception that single cases could be chosen strategically to test certain high-level theories was of no avail. Instead, I drew middle-range elements from the research literature, developed contextualizing typologies, specified models and sensitizing notions.

Scholars who are orthodox on behalf of the standard attitude would not recognize much theory in the 10 subsections reported earlier! They would conclude that my case analysis was *descriptive* or *inductive,* since the sections showed no trace of their preferred strategies of generalization. My invocations of 'grounding', 'substance', etc. would be seen as indicative of such a descriptive approach. This criticism rules out any strategy of generalization different from the standard ones.

My self-reflection is different! Aiming to answer my research question, I found no way to employ high-level knowledge produced by the standard strategies of generalization. I relied rather on a distinctly pragmatist strategy of generalization. To the extent works committed to standard notions of theory were relied on, they had to be purged of their high-level aspirations: whatever material they actually contained of relevance to the comparative specification of the Israeli case had to be *regrounded.* Often, there was much to rely on, since even adherents of standard notions of theory actually practise a pragmatist strategy of generalization in their research craftwork. We should pay attention to what researchers actually do, since this may differ from what they *say* they do! This is an interesting dissonance, but one which cannot be discussed further here.

Before I specify the pragmatist strategy of generalization, I discuss a strategy of specification, the *exceptionalist* strategy, frequently found among historians. The reason is that besides standard-based social science work, my case study also drew on parts of the large and impressive literature of historical monographs on Israel and the conflict.

Often, one can see that historians refuse to follow the social scientists' call for theory, possibly because they identify this call with the standard strategies of generalization just surveyed! Like followers of the standard strategy, they are unaware of any pragmatist strategy of generalization. Since the pragmatist view is seldom identified as a third position in contemporary social science, historians retreat to the ingrained dichotomies mentioned at the outset. This prevents them from identifying that part of social science with which they could really develop a productive interdisciplinary interaction.

Historians tend to claim exceptional status for their single case (which is quite often the nation-state) without analysing how it is specific through explicit comparisons along several dimensions. Such an exceptionalist strategy of specification prevents accumulation of case knowledge into what I later define as local research frontiers. But since pure description devoid of any selection criteria is impossible, historians (often unconsciously) imply such criteria. Since there is little attention to such preconditions in the profession, nation-specific historical research frontiers remain homogeneous through periods: they believe these are no 'cases of

the same', and thus avoid the comparison that would have allowed them to see their cases in different lights. The perspective changes only when the 'spirit of the time' shifts. At that point, revisionist interpretations crop up, only to be challenged at a later point by post-revisionists. Each period's historians, so the saying goes, writes the national history anew.

Take the example of Israeli history: surely many historical (and social scientific) studies have unconsciously implied the analogy with the settlement of North America's sparsely populated virgin lands, the frontier of the new world (see Table 2's 'imaginary alternative')! When the post-Zionist historians and sociologists in the 1980s and 1990s launched the revisionist view of Israel as a settler colonialist, much turbulence followed (Shalev, 1996).

Some contemporary historians would be inclined to agree with the deconstructionist branch of social-philosophy. Both groups of scholars are socialized into a style of research typical of the humanities: their focus on archives and written sources leads to a non-comparative focus on the single case. Applied to history, the deconstructionist position would claim that the sequence of revisionisms and post-revisionisms shows that there can be no research frontiers. I return briefly to this generalized scepticism later.

My case study of Israel owes a lot (Table 1, middle-level and comparative columns) to good historical craftwork, particularly by the post-Zionist school. Historians have a sensitivity towards cases that suits the grounded theorist. In my summary, however, non-comparative statements about development sequences are presented as *potential comparisons*. Had more time been available, I would have worked to *saturate* these comparisons: historical accounts of development sequences would be *regeneralized*, i.e. specified through comparisons with cases of the same, cured of their 'overgrounded' reliance on one case only, becoming *grounded* in the pragmatist sense.

In sum, for the strategies of empirical generalization and specification I have surveyed so far, I find that in my project, I had to reground what high-level theories had ungrounded, and regeneralize what historical narratives had overgrounded. The conclusion is that for this study, I relied on a pragmatic strategy of generalization implied by the pragmatist notion of theory. After a closer specification of that notion, I discuss the most common format pragmatist theories come in (local research frontiers). Finally, I specify the pragmatist strategies of generalization.

The Pragmatist Notion of Theory

In the pragmatist view, theory does not look like covering laws or simultaneous equation systems. It looks like contextualizing typologies (e.g. organic/liberal state, types of settler state, predatory/developmental

states), sensitizing concepts (e.g. the basic geopolitical maxim, Jewish and Palestinian cultural-religious capital) and stylized accounts of social interaction patterns related to specified contexts (the model of subsection 8). Since context and interaction patterns are mutually specified, I claim that this knowledge exists at the middle level: it reaches beyond single cases, but is indifferent to high-level ideas about, for example, structure and action. The pragmatist notion of theory entirely avoids the high level (Mjøset, 2005). This absence of high theory is not seen as a sign of immaturity (which was Merton's view of middle-range theory), nor as a proof that more theoretical work is needed (as a social philosopher might claim), but as a sign that accumulation of knowledge takes place at the middle level!

In the standard view, the theories in the middle column of Table 1 would be derived from the left-hand, high-level column. In the pragmatist view, these theories are instead grounded in the right-hand, comparative column. Middle-level knowledge emerges in conjunction with explanatory efforts, I thus claim that it is explanation-based. Explanations do not follow from theory (as a byproduct of testing), rather, theory emerges at the interface of case explanations and the knowledge contained in local research frontiers (as defined later). The criterion of an adequate account is not the confirmation of some law-like regularity, but the provision of explanations that are accepted at the relevant local research frontiers.

We are back to the dichotomies presented at the outset: pragmatist researchers find ways of accumulating knowledge that transcend the engrained dichotomies explanation/understanding, generalization/specification. This throws doubt on accusations that the pragmatist programme is a descriptive or inductive one. While it is true that this programme belongs to the tradition of philosophical empiricism, the charge is beside the point. 'Descriptivism' must mean that observations are selected with no connection to theory. But as we have seen – there are several notions of theory. Orthodox defenders of the standard view claim that no other than standard notions of theory are relevant for empirical social research. In contrast, I argue here that there is a distinct pragmatist notion of theory, and I show that it implies distinct strategies of generalization.

Since theories are developed with reference to problems that flow from social development, theory is not converging at a high level. Here the pragmatist view is in line with the many criticisms of an enlightenment illusion. But deconstructionists drive this criticism too far, claiming that since the contemporary regime of knowledge defines our understanding of truth, objectivity and the real, the basic attitude towards any claims by the collective of researchers should be a deconstructionist one.

As recent sociology of science brings out, it is always worthwhile to reflect on the social preconditions of scientific knowledge. But while

deconstructionists tend to generalize such scepticism, pragmatists claim that human society may under certain conditions develop quite well-founded knowledge in certain bounded areas of interest. Thus, a researcher with a pragmatist attitude will seek the grounded knowledge necessary to answer her or his research questions in the relevant *local research frontiers.* And when, for my own project, I respecified relevant material from ungrounded theory and regeneralized material from overgrounded explanations, I recovered knowledge that would fit into local research frontiers. That notion forms an alternative to the far-reaching scepticism voiced by deconstructionists. Let me specify this pragmatist notion!

Local Research Frontiers

Pragmatist philosophy always criticized the 'spectator theory of knowledge', focusing instead on the participation of knowledge in social development, on intervening rather than representing (Hacking, 1983). Fusing this philosophical position with a historically sensitive sociology of knowledge, I argue that *theory* in the pragmatist perspective is particularly well developed within *local research frontiers*.[1] Social science knowledge mainly grows in such frontiers.

In our rich western societies, problems and challenges that arise in the course of social development attract the attention of several actors and institutions: research communities, research councils, organized private actors, public bureaucracies, public spheres, social movements, student populations and so on. Constellations of such actors bring a stream of topics onto the agenda of the social sciences. They define clusters of research problems that may be researched by social scientists. If a large enough number of such scientists secure sufficient funding over appropriate time periods, local research frontiers will emerge.

Research into the welfare state is a good example. In our part of the world, many interests converge to sustain a local research frontier on this topic. The collective of social researchers by now have at their disposal a literature addressing the same cluster of questions by means of carefully maintained and updated databases, frequently used typologies, stylized facts, sensitizing concepts, models of explanation and converging discussions on historical backgrounds. Whatever a researcher may hold in terms of high theory, she or he will have to rely on this complex of middle-level knowledge. Being related to a cluster of research problems, it is based on the best explanations so far provided. A local research frontier thus depends on earlier grounded theory.

Certainly there is contested knowledge, but the scholarly debates that unfold all accept that we possess relatively certain knowledge in this specific field. Unlike in social philosophy, this knowledge is not the work

of single scholars. Accumulation of knowledge implies standing on the shoulders of others, but these are not those of social-philosophical giants, but the shoulders of a large collective of researchers who contribute to this local research frontier. Such a frontier provides enough both in terms of systematic contextual knowledge and formal models of social interaction patterns that explanations can really be tested, i.e. judgements can be made on what currently is the best explanation.

Rather than believing that we 'observe' in the light of some vaguely stated (high-level) theory, we must realize that as empirical researchers, we observe with reference to several theories embedded in a smaller set of local research frontiers. My project relied on several more or less well-formulated local research frontiers that mediate between theories and observation. Although I did a single-case analysis, it relied on observations also from many other cases, observations that were synthesized in local, problem-related research frontiers that connect several 'literatures'. Given her or his scepticism of high-level theory, the pragmatist scholar does not think in terms of 'basic' theory (solving general problems) being 'applied' to local problems. Rather, he or she sees all problems as specific and local, emphasizing how social science theory is embedded in local research frontiers.

An explanation-based theory can be judged according to its ability to interpret the present (see subsection 10). This interpretation is not a prediction, but an educated conclusion that relates the present state of the case(s) in question to earlier cases of the same (see the example of South Africa [C22] in subsection 10). The pragmatist scholar knows full well that the more controversial her or his (contemporary) case is, the more the knowledge presented may be invoked by actors operating in the actual case situation.

If such a notion of local research frontiers sounds unfamiliar, maybe part of the reason is that many such frontiers are not made explicit. Researchers tend to think of theory with reference only to the standard/social-philosophy dichotomy. Social science tends to get trapped in the trenches dug during polarized debates on general problems (whether on basic scientific or on existential questions) quite different from the specific problems that constitute local research frontiers. The notion of 'literatures' is interesting in that many scholars with a standard attitude use it to indicate problem-related knowledge that consists of more than just one theory. The term should be read as a hidden reference to the importance of local research frontiers.

The most clear-cut local research frontiers concern social problems that are mostly tackled by public bureaucracies that consult with relatively autonomous academic research collectives and well-endowed statistical offices. Others, however, may result from programmes with a stronger

academic base, e.g. the expanding comparative historical literature on state formation, the Rokkan (1999)/Tilly (1990) tradition, which is another one relied on earlier in the article. Rokkan's (1999) typological maps of nation-building and state formation in Western Europe remain so far the most synthetic account of that local research frontier (Mjøset, 2000).

Local research frontiers transcend the disciplinary divisions typical of academic institutions.[2] Addressing the future challenges to the welfare state requires the cooperation between economists, demographers, political scientists, social policy analysts, sociologists, experts in hospital organization and pension systems, etc. My account of Israel's development has relied on the published work of all sorts of social scientists and historians.

Given their links to specific problems, local research frontiers can overlap: to some extent the literature on state formation analyses the historical background of contemporary welfare states, but it also has relevance for a broader field, for knowledge about states as such. I have drawn on such a broader literature in the parts of my study where I relied on typologies of developmental and predatory states. While this research frontier relates to many of the dimensions marked S in Table 1 (but also involves the factor R10), a third local research frontier that I relied on concerns hegemony in international relations, mainly connecting dimensions marked I and R in Table 1.

An important local research frontier in the study concerns deep and persistent contemporary conflicts. It is certainly not as easy to discern as the welfare state research frontier. But it is at least a latent one (Mann [2005] should be considered a major contribution in this respect). Knowledge accumulation in this field is sustained by academic and other institutions, e.g. peace researchers, non-governmental organizations and other international organizations, that strive to strengthen the international civil society. This frontier is more controversial than the others I have discussed. Given the severity and the international repercussions of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, that peculiar case is in itself extremely controversial. Anyone who has just the slightest familiarity with the controversies around interpretations of Israeli developments knows that the whole account herein – the colonization terminology first of all – will be eagerly contested, by some even denounced as a highly partisan account.

Historical monographs may be important inputs to local research frontiers. But as long as historians pursue the exceptionalist strategy of specification, they are left with no local research frontiers to relate to. They are close, however, when it comes to crucial historical events, such as the Holocaust, the outbreak of world wars, etc. Furthermore, when we think of the close links between the historians' profession and the development of the nation-state, we see that historical literatures were – at least until

quite recently – strongly connected to national public spheres and educational institutions. Thus, historians may claim to have research frontiers linked to each country with a national consciousness.

Given the exceptionalist strategy of specification, such research frontiers would rely *only* on what we know from earlier research on that particular case. In contrast, the pragmatist style is to analyse a single case by relating it – through comparison – to substantive material from a number of other cases. In this way, material drawn from historical monographs is regeneralized and included in local research frontiers

Thus, local research frontiers should not be confused with claims about exceptionalism. There is *not* a local research frontier on Israel. Local research frontiers are on problem-related topics such as state formation, deep and persistent conflicts, economic development, etc. I analysed the case of Israel by means of local research frontiers related to the specific problems addressed. Even if the analysis (as mine did) stops with an interpretation of the present, it has a link to what Glaser and Strauss (1967) called substantive grounded theory: its basic comparisons are grounded in a network of contrasts and similarities to other cases of the same along several dimensions. This is why it can be fed back into one or more local research frontier. Let me specify this.

The Pragmatist Strategies of Generalization

It would be quite misplaced to dub a case study like mine as descriptive. Description must mean that there is no explicit (but probably a hidden) frame of reference. My study was explicitly framed with reference to various theories organized in local research frontiers. Had it been descriptive, it could not have yielded knowledge that feeds back to existing local research frontiers.

This link back to the local research frontiers is an aspect of the pragmatist strategy of generalization. The strategy is to generalize without cutting off *grounding* in specified contexts. Generalization is desired, but not at the cost of the grounding in specific contexts. Specification and generalization are not opposites. Specification is only possible through more general knowledge: for instance, the exact features of Israel's organic settler state are assessed with comparative reference to other cases of the same. Since specifications are made in this way, the results also feed back into more general knowledge: denser and broader typologies, concepts and models of contextualized social interaction patterns. We are beyond the explanation/understanding dichotomy: comparative specification yields a conjunctural explanation involving several factors and the explanation immediately yields an understanding of important features of the development of the case.

Comparison is a main means of specifying context. Typologies develop in interaction with comparisons. They are syntheses of available knowledge, in a form that allows further comparison with reference to a set of research questions. They are revised as knowledge grows. Typologies are maintained and improved by the updating of cases and addition of new cases. They should not be turned into *essential* features of reality – typologies may have to be changed if we turn to a new set of research questions. This was clear already in Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft.* His enormous web of typologies – organized according to dimensions such as religion, economy, bureaucracy – was devised, as he wrote, in order to 'create conceptual points of orientation for particular purposes'. There was no intention of completeness, no intention of 'forcing historical reality into schemes' (Weber, 1922: 154).

This strategy of generalization leads to theory that is grounded, that is available only at the middle level. It is not a contradiction to talk about general theory in the pragmatist framework, but then it must be distinguished from high-level theory. In the pragmatist view, we can have more or less general theories within the middle range.[3] But theory must always be grounded in context. It cannot be moved up to the high level, which is ungrounded. It can be formed at quite a low level, but not 'overgrounded' as in the case of the exceptionalist strategy of specification.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) distinguished substantive and formal grounded theory. The latter recognizes similarities between patterns of social interaction in many fields of study. Such formal theory is derived from substantive studies, but not indexed to specific contexts. As such, it reminds one of what have been termed *mechanisms,* at least as interpreted by Jon Elster (2000). But neither mechanisms nor formal grounded theory explain anything before they are inserted into a context. It does not relieve the scholar of doing the comparative craftwork that is needed in order to specify the context. (For a further discussion of formal and substantive grounded theory, see Mjøset, 2005.)

With substantive grounded theory, we are beyond the general/specific dichotomy. In the pragmatist view, specificity is a condition of generalization that retains grounding in context. Thus, the role of the single-case study is not judged in the same way as in the standard and social-philosophical views. By analysing the long-term development patterns of Israel and the conflict between that state and the Palestinians, relying on knowledge already accumulated in local research frontiers, my study, like several other case studies, has also made (however modest) contributions to these frontiers. The specification of new cases adds to the generality of the knowledge.

A single-case study may contribute to more than one local research frontier. Besides adding to the local research frontier on state formation,

the results of my study may also be fed back into a research frontier on deep and persistent conflicts in the contemporary world, making that frontier more manifest. Who knows, within this skeleton of categories, we might be able to deal with Northern Ireland, Algeria, Chechnya and other contemporary deep-rooted, persistent conflicts. Here, systematic explanatory accounts of the case of Israel lead to another set of generalizations than those in the state formation literature.

This illustrates a very important point: general theory in the pragmatist sense is *not* converging. There may be several general theories and one must – as a researcher – learn to manoeuvre and know how various frontiers emerge as relevant depending on the research question asked.

The Relation between Grounded and Critical Theory

Mostly, grounded theory is fed into local research frontiers. It participates in social development to the extent bureaucracies and/or actors in civil society relate to the researchers and their publications, but there are notable exceptions to this calm existence that most western social scientists find themselves in.

Unlike research on welfare states, research on deep-rooted and persistent conflicts is not always related back to life outside the academic sphere only through calm reports circulating among decision-makers. The researcher's situation – if a picture is allowed – is more like that of a third party out on the streets of some West Bank village, caught in between militant Palestinian youngsters and IDF forces . . . The researcher may not feel like an academic at all, but more like a human being forced to take a stance and participate outside the secluded relative autonomy that most western research collectives enjoy.

In such situations, grounded theory often leads out of local research frontiers and on to critical theory, which in the extreme case means that the researcher enters one of the frontiers of civil society, participating – to some small extent – as part of a social movement that legitimately struggles for social change.[4] Such a researcher no longer aims to establish certain contextual regularities, but to turn the regularities of this critical case into a thing of the past, into *history,* that is (see the discussion of decolonization in subsections 9 and 10). The point then is to establish a new context with more legitimate regularities. Having moved beyond the research collective, such a researcher is beyond strategies of generalization and specification. In an indirect sense, we may claim that the critical way of generalizing is to help end the rule of certain contextual regularities (e.g. the apartheid system in South Africa), thus partaking in social change that leads to more legitimate regularities.

Thick Comparison – Growth of Knowledge in Local Research Frontiers

Reflecting on the actual conduct of a single-case study, I have distinguished potential from saturated comparisons, and external from internal comparisons. I have also used the term basic comparisons. Some additional remarks on these notions lead me towards a final conclusion.

Researchers drawn to the analysis of single cases should be aware of the many options that even a single case has for *internal* comparisons. The specific feature that Israel is constituted as a state in dramatic clashes with the Palestinians, creating a conflict with international repercussions, opened up a particularly large set of such comparisons. But even analysing less composite cases, comparative techniques such as periodization and distinction of analytic dimensions allow internal comparisons.

The distinction between potential and saturated comparisons is even more important. The project reported here on Israel was a short one. Thus, I could in no way realize all the potential comparisons indicated in Table 1. Whenever it was impossible to provide more depth, the comparisons were left as potential, and I drew observations directly from what I judged as state-of-the-art historical accounts and/or from non-comparative social science works on Israel and the conflict only. I made statements such as that connected to C9 in subsection 4, and that related to C17 in subsection 7.

Admittedly, there is an element of description! But this kind of empiricism is temporary. To the extent the local research frontiers continue to thrive, researchers shuttle between case work and typologies, knowledge improves and it becomes easier to saturate comparisons. At the end of such a process of saturating as many relevant comparisons as possible (both external and internal ones), lie what I propose to dub *thick comparisons.* The strategies discussed earlier – regrounding what high-level theories have ungrounded and regeneralizing what historical narratives have overgrounded – can be seen as ways to work towards thick comparisons.

Here is a pragmatist notion of growth of knowledge: as more potential comparisons are turned into saturated ones, research frontiers become increasingly mature. This should not be conceived as ever more 'correct' representations of basic features of reality, but rather as a growing consensus within a broad social science research collective concerning social structures and processes in local, problem-related research frontiers. Even if some degree of maturity has been reached, it may not last forever, since underlying problems may change. The knowledge may grow further, be transformed in the light of new problems, or wither away. Social science

today possesses knowledge in several such local research frontiers, but this knowledge is *not* converging into higher-level knowledge.

The best single-case studies, then, are those which rely on reasonably saturated (thick) sets of comparisons, that is, on quite mature local research frontiers for the problem addressed in the case study. The explanations provided in such single-case studies then contribute to contextual generalization.

My plea for thick comparisons is based on the conviction that the traditions of US pragmatism and European critical theory provide a philosophy of social science legitimation of a third, *participationist* position in contemporary sociology and social science. It is also based on the experience of studying the single case of Israel, a macro-comparative study with a historical scope. But is it unfair to generalize this experience?

The pragmatist strategies of generalization that I have discussed can certainly be characterized as substantive generalization. At the macro-level of states, regions and international relations, the number of cases is limited. This makes the drawing of detailed comparative typologies easier than in the study of more cases. Is the pragmatist strategy of generalization only relevant for low-*N*, qualitative comparative studies? Let me close with two remarks on this.

First, the macro-level of states, regions and international relations forms the 'end point' of context. Thus, substantive generalizations at this level – as in the study of varieties of capitalism – provide us with contextual knowledge that will prove important in a number of subfrontiers of research. In this sense, the pragmatist strategy of generalization yields contextual knowledge that may be important for several local research frontiers.

Second, while substantive generalizations become more difficult as the number of units increase, there is another pragmatist strategy of generalization: formal grounded theory (see Mjøset, 2005). There is no space to spell out in detail how this notion converges with the notion of causal mechanisms (or stylized patterns of social interaction, the label used earlier). But clearly, the more we study large numbers of cases, or selected cases at the micro-level, the more important such formal grounded theories – serving as modules of explanation – will be.

The pragmatist strategy of generalization is thus more than just a projection of a limited set of experiences from macro-comparative studies. But whatever its relation to other areas of research, at the very least, I hope to have shown that it is a strategy of generalization in its own right, not to be reduced either to standard or social-philosophical strategies.

Notes

I am grateful to Charles Tilly for comments, and to Ann Nilsen for cooperation on a working paper, presented at the Vital Matters conference at the University of Bergen, February 2004, during the early phase of the project reported here.

1. Grounded theorists are often accused of promoting a 'tabula rasa' approach in which all theories are bracketed. Such a rule makes sense as long as we think of the many ungrounded theories around: these fail to accumulate knowledge and often lure researchers to enter into endless high-level debates. But as was specified by Strauss in the debates following the publication of the 1967 book, grounded theory could rely on *earlier grounded studies* (see also Mjøset, 2006). The notion of *local research frontiers* is an attempt to specify the relation between earlier grounded theory and the discovery of further grounded theory. My arguments here are related to the idea just outlined about regrounding ungrounded theories. Since much research based on standard notions is problem related, it will often be possible to reground its empirical results, thus making them available for specific local research frontiers.
2. Research on climate change (global warming) is another example of a local research frontier, one which obviously requires interdisciplinary efforts even across the gap between the social and the natural sciences.
3. One of the most 'general' local research frontiers today should be the one studying *varieties of capitalism.* This knowledge is relevant for a number of 'lower-level' subfrontiers, e.g. on labour relations, systems of innovation, financial systems and so on.
4. As for the ethics of research in such a constellation, the contribution of social philosopher Jürgen Habermas is highly relevant.

References

Abbott, A. (2001) *Time Matters.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Anderson, P. (2001) 'Scurrying towards Bethlehem', *New Left Review* 10: 5–30.

Davis, U. (2004) *Apartheid Israel.* London: Zed Books.

Elster, J. (2000) *Alchemies of the Mind.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Evans, P. (1995) *Embedded Autonomy.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Glaser, B. G. and Strauss, A. L. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Graham, S. (2003) 'Lessons in Urbicide', *New Left Review* 19: 63–78.

Hacking, I. (1983) *Representing and Intervening.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Horowitz, D. (1982) 'The Israeli Defense Forces: A Civilianized Military in a Partially Militarized Society', in Roman Kolkowicz and Andrzej Korbonski (eds) *Soldiers, Peasants, and Bureaucrats*, pp. 77–107. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Kimmerling, B. (1993) 'Patterns of Militarism in Israel', *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 34(2): 196–223.

Kimmerling, B. (2001) *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kimmerling, B. (2003) *Politicide.* London: Verso.
Kimmerling, B. (2004) 'Benny Morris' Shocking Interview', 27 January. www.alternativenews.org
Lustick, I. (1993) *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
Mann, M. (2005) *The Dark Side of Democracy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Mjøset, L. (1992) 'Comparative Typologies of Development Patterns: The Menzel/Senghaas Framework', in L. Mjøset (ed.) *Contributions to the Comparative Study of Development*, Report 92: 2, pp. 96–162. Oslo: Institute for Social Research.
Mjøset, L. (2000) 'Stein Rokkan's Thick Comparisons', *Acta Sociologica* 43(4): 381–98.
Mjøset, L. (2001) 'Theory: Conceptions in the Social Sciences', in N. J. Smelser and P. B. Bates (eds) *The International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, pp. 15641–7. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
Mjøset, L. (2004) 'Israels organiske nybyggerstat', *Vardøger* 29: 76–92.
Mjøset, L. (2005) 'Can Grounded Theory Solve the Problems of its Critics?', *Sosiologisk tidsskrift* 13(4): 379–408.
Mjøset, L. (2006) 'No fear of comparisons or context: on the foundations of historical sociology', *Comparative Education* 42(3): 1–26.
Mjøset, L. and van Holde, S. (2002) 'Killing for the State, Dying for the Nation: An Introductory Essay on the Life Cycle of Conscription into Europe's Armed Forces', *Comparative Social Research* 20: 3–94.
Morris, B. (2004) *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Orig. pub. 1988.)
Ragin, C. C. (2000) *Fuzzy-Set Social Science.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Rödiger, F. S. (1994) 'Wehrstruktur und Rekrutierungssysteme – weltweit', in E. Opitz and F. S. Rödiger (eds) *Allgemeine Wehrpflicht*, pp. 215–27. Bremen: Edition Temmen.
Rokkan, S. (1999) *State Formation, Nation-Building and Mass Politics in Europe.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Schlaim, A. (2000) *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World.* London: Penguin.
Senghaas, D. (1985) *The European Experience.* Leamington Spa: Berg.
Shafir, G. (1996) *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict, 1882–1914.* Berkeley: University of California Press.(Orig. pub. 1989.)
Shafir, G. (1999) 'Zionism and Colonialism – A Comparative Approach', in Ilan Pappé (ed.) *The Israel/Palestine Question,* pp. 81–96. London: Routledge.
Shafir, G. and Peled, Y. (2002) *Being Israeli.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Shalev, M. (1989) 'Jewish Organized Labor and the Palestinians: A Study of State/Society Relations in Israel', in B. Kimmerling (ed.) *The Israeli State and Society*, pp. 93–133. Albany: State University of New York Press.
Shalev, M. (1992) *Labour and the Political Economy in Israel.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Shalev, M. (1996) 'Time for Theory: Critical Notes on Lissak and Sternhell', *Israel Studies* 1(2): 170–88.
Tilly, C. (1990) *Coercion, Capital and European States.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Weber, M. (1922) *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft.* Tübingen: Mohr.
Younis, M. (2000) *Liberation and Democratization: The South African and Palestinian National Movements,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Biographical Note: Lars Mjøset is Professor of Sociology at the University of Oslo, Norway, and director of the Oslo Summer School of Comparative Social Science Studies at the Social Science Faculty, University of Oslo. His main areas of research are comparative political economy and historical sociology. His work on small, Western European countries was summarized in *The Irish Economy in a Comparative Institutional Perspective* (Dublin: NESC, 1992). Recently, he has also written and lectured on the philosophy of the social sciences. He is presently finishing a book manuscript on these matters, to be published in 2007.
Address: Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo, PO Box 1096, Blindern, 0317 Oslo, Norway. [email: lars.mjoset@sosiologi.uio.no]