Abstract:

This paper analyses, on the basis of the available archival documents, the early career of Edward A. Shils (1910-1995), especially in the period around 1950, as well as the changing expectations in the field of sociology in this period more generally. It starts with an overview of Shils' translations of German texts, especially of Karl Mannheim and Max Weber, and the way in which he benefited from the growing reputational standing of these authors. The focus next shifts to Shils' transatlantic presence, at both the University of Chicago and the London School of Economics, and the choices he made in this regard. Afterwards we look at his work with Talcott Parsons at Harvard University and the successful last-minute claim to the co-editorship of *Toward a General Theory of Action*. In the concluding section, it is emphasized that Shils was captivated by the perception of his own life and that of others in terms of a career trajectory – with its specific successes and failures.

Key words: Edward Shils, academic career, scholarly reputation, transatlantic scholar

Making a Career in Academia:
The Case of Edward Shils and Mid-Twentieth Century Sociology
by Raf Vanderstraeten

The concept of career, Erving Goffman once noted, "allows one to move back and forth between the personal and the public, between the self and its significant society, without having overly to rely for data upon what the person says he thinks he imagines himself to be" (1959, p. 123). For Goffman, it directs attention to the contingencies that influence how careers unfold over the life span (see also Hughes, 1958; Abbott, 1990). In general terms, it may be added that the idea of career-making gains importance, both in personal and social perspective, when more options become available and more choices can be made. The more possibilities become imaginable, the more individual trajectories can single themselves out, and the more individual courses through life can be perceived as careers. In a more specific, historical-sociological sense, it may also be asked which conditions define how careers can unfold and which structural changes create new career opportunities. Career pressures may now exist nearly everywhere, but a more detailed analysis of individual careers may also shed light on structural characteristics of the social world in which careers can be made.

There is little doubt that the academic world in general, and the field of the social sciences in particular, changed markedly in the mid-twentieth century. At the same time, not much attention has hitherto been given to these changes, both at the conceptual and the historical level (see Abbott & Sparrow, 2008; Rawls, 2018). It is, however, fruitful to use the concept of career to elucidate the changes that took place in the period around 1950 (which is also the period in which Goffman and some other scholars first put forward their reflections). In particular, this concept allows us to discuss how structural changes in the academic system, such as the growth of academic departments and of reputational differences between universities or new forms of collaboration and competition among colleagues in scientific work, have an effect on individual trajectories. And vice versa: this paper builds on the idea that a detailed, historical-sociological analysis of individual academic careers in the field of the social sciences should allow us to shed light on broader structural transitions in the social sciences and society.

This paper reflects, more particularly, on the early career of Edward A. Shils (1910-1995). This career was characterized by a somewhat difficult start during the Depression years. But in the years after

the Second World War, Shils became a 'broker' in a globalizing world of science, with appointments at both the London School of Economics and the University of Chicago. He claimed a central role in the transit of German sociological traditions (especially of the Weberian inheritance) to the Anglo-Saxon scholarly world, but was also expected or seen to 'carry' American sociology to other parts of the world. Not unimportantly, he collaborated with Talcott Parsons in Harvard on the articulation of a basic framework for an ambitious 'general' theory of action, became co-editor of *Toward a General Theory of Action* (Parsons & Shils, 1951) and co-author/editor of two successors, viz. the first and eventually only volume of *Working Papers in the Theory of Action* (Parsons, Bales, & Shils, 1953) and the two-volume textbook *Theories of Society* (Parsons et al., 1960). In this sense, Shils was a central actor in the developments that took place in sociology in the mid-twentieth century. As figure 1 shows, Shils' work was and still is frequently discussed in the scholarly literature.

Although Shils presented his thoughts in widely scattered publications and in various forms (some more or less analytical, others polemical, still others autobiographical), he never published a substantive monograph. Later in his career, however, he was sharply criticized for his role as gatekeeper of 'orthodox' or 'mainstream' American sociology (e.g., Burawoy, 2005). In several of his own writings, including his own (posthumously published) autobiography, Shils himself also looked back in a rather bitter way at his own relation with sociology (e.g., Shils, 2006). Others have depicted him as "a lost figure" (Turner, 1999, p. 126), an "outsider" (Adair-Toteff, 2019) or a "stranger" (Blum, 2021), as well as "a mercurial figure, even if he may still have a status as one of the minor personalities of late twentieth-century sociology" (Husbands, 2019, p. 175). Given these ambivalent assessments, a more detailed look at the contingencies in Shils' academic career may also shed light on broader transitions within academia. It may exemplify some of the structural conditions faced by academics in the period of the mid-twentieth century and afterwards. Altogether, Shils provides an instructive case to analyze career contingencies in the mid-twentieth century.

This paper is largely based on archival material, both in the US and the UK. I consulted, more particularly, Edward Shils' and Karl Mannheim's personal staff files at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE Archives), the papers of Talcott Parsons at the Harvard University Archives, and the University Archives at the University of Chicago. In the Special Collections in Chicago, I worked my way through the papers of Edward Shils and several other faculty members, viz. Frank Knight (1885-1972), Robert Redfield (1897-1958), Louis Wirth (1897-1952), Max Rheinstein (1899-1977) and John Nef (1899-1988). I also included in my search the institutional files of the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, of which Shils was a long-time member. The Shils papers in the University Archives in Chicago have remained inaccessible for quite

some time. They are stored in some 120 boxes (of different sizes, from standard-size archival boxes to large moving boxes), but they are hitherto neither inventoried nor organized. They are thus still really difficult to use.[1] It should be added that the surviving correspondence is incomplete, and that some years are virtually unrepresented. But the picture that emerges from all this archival material is, I believe, quite different from the one that Shils sketched himself in his (auto-)biographical portraits (esp. Shils, 2006), and from the picture that hitherto remains dominant in the literature on Shils and on the mid-twentieth-century history of sociology and the behavioral sciences.[2] On the whole, our approach makes it possible to clarify the choices made at the moment they were made and to elucidate the motives behind retrospective career accounts.

The core of this paper is made up of three sections, each of which primarily focuses on one important aspect of his early career. We start with an overview of Shils' translations of German texts, especially of Karl Mannheim and Max Weber, and the way in which he benefited from the growing reputational standing of these authors. We then review Shils' mid-twentieth century transatlantic presence, at both the University of Chicago and the London School of Economics, and the choices he made in this regard. Afterwards we turn to his work with Parsons at Harvard University and the last-minute claim to the co-editorship of *Toward a General Theory of Action*. We are thus able to cover a variety of developments that influenced the social sciences in this period of time. In the concluding section, a few additional findings and some more general reflections on the sociology of scholarly careers are

[1] As almost all of the Shils material in the LSE Archives is included in one staff file and as the voluminous Shils papers in Chicago still need to be inventoried, ordered and classified in a systematic way, it does not make much sense to refer to specific archival locations. Throughout the paper, I will therefore focus upon identifying the sender, the receiver(s) and the date of the different archived communications. I should add that I have edited the extant documents for spelling and typographical errors, but preserved all other characteristics, such as punctuation and underlining, in order to convey specific emphases in the communicated messages without distracting attention to the form in which they were expressed.

[2] Some renewed interest in Shils' writings can nowadays be observed across the social sciences (e.g., Schneider, 2016; Adair-Toteff & Turner, 2019). To my knowledge, however, only three studies on Shils have hitherto made use of the existing archival sources. Roy MacLeod (2016) relied on some Chicago documents (esp. related to the journal *Minerva*, which was very much Shils' journal); Chris Husbands (2019, pp. 174-184) used Shils' personal staff file at the LSE in his history of Sociology at the LSE; Stephen Turner (2019) used small parts of the Chicago archive for the introduction to an anthology dedicated to the memory of Shils. These studies are very informative, but also pursue other interests.

presented. Overall, it is clear that the growing importance of academic success in the mid-twentieth century had a strong impact on the ways in which Shils pursued his own academic career.

1. German sociological inheritance

Edward Shils was born in Springfield (Massachusetts) as the second of two sons of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. According to the CV, which he sent to the LSE in April 1946, he had been an undergraduate student of Romanic Languages, Literature and Social Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania from 1927 to 1931, and a graduate student majoring in Sociology at the University of Chicago from 1933 to 1937. In Chicago, he had also been hired by Louis Wirth and worked with him on the English translation of Karl Mannheim's *Ideologie und Utopie* (first published in 1929) and the 1931 encyclopedia entry on *Wissenssoziologie.* Building upon previous work of Paul Kecskemeti (Mannheim to Wirth, 26 July 1933), the translation was completed in a relatively short period of time – although some last-minute anxieties from the side of Mannheim delayed the publication process. But "translated from the German by Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (University of Chicago)", and with a preface by Wirth, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* was eventually published in 1936 by Harcourt, Brace & Co.[3] The translation of Mannheim's work was the first publication to which Shils contributed.

Shils saw more opportunities in this regard. At the end of 1934, but without Wirth, he contacted Mannheim to undertake the English translation of the German chapters of *Mensch und Gesellschaft im Zeitalter des Umbaus* as well. "The fact that I have been assisting Professor Louis Wirth in the translation of your 'Ideologie und Utopie' and 'Wissenssoziologie', and have followed your work with the greatest interest for the past few years, may offer some slight guarantee of my competence for the work. Needless to say, I would expect no remuneration other than for the small charges involved in typing, etc." (Shils to Mannheim, 31 Dec 1934). Having fled Hitler's Nazi regime and its anti-Semitic politics, Mannheim lived at that time already in Britain, where he had become lecturer at the London School of Economics and Political Science under a program to assist academic exiles. "Translated from the German by Edward Shils", but also "revised and considerably enlarged by the Author", Mannheim's *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* first appeared in 1940 in London. It was

[3] Later this version was also used for a new German edition of *Ideologie und Utopie*, which now also included the German translation of Wirth's preface to the English edition (Mannheim, 1952).

reprinted a few times during the Second World War, but, contrary to *Ideology and Utopia*, it would afterwards never gain much acclaim within the sociological community.

In this period of time, Shils also translated (in collaboration with Edith Lowenstein and Klaus Knorr) Ernst Fraenkel's *The Dual State: A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship* (1941).[4] More important for his own career, however, was the translation of three of Max Weber's essays on the methodology of the social sciences, which appeared in 1949 in the volume of that name.

A draft translation of these essays was already circulating before the war. Talcott Parsons, who had himself translated Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and who was planning to publish Weber's *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (which is a translation of Part 1 of Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*), approached Shils in May 1939 for permission to make use of this draft: "I wonder if you and Schelting will be willing to have me (with due acknowledgement of course) make use of your translation of the methodological section" (Parsons to Shils, 17 May 1939). The permission must have been granted by Alexander von Schelting and Edward Shils, as Parsons acknowledges the help derived from their draft translation in the preface to *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Weber, 1947, p. v-vi).[5]

The publication of these Weber translations was long delayed by difficulties created by the Second World War. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* first appeared in 1947; *Max Weber on the Methodology of the Social Sciences* was only published in 1949. The latter volume was translated and edited by Edward Shils and Henry Finch and published by The Free Press (of Glencoe), a newly-founded company, which had also published Weber's *The Theory of Economic and Social Organization* (translated by A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons).

In the foreword to these essays, Shils noted that "social science to-day is unrecognizably different from what it was in the years when these essays were written" (1949, p. vi), due to the development and use of new empirical research methods, especially in the United States and Britain. But he added that the main challenges for social science had not yet been sufficiently overcome: "The relationship

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[4] It might have been a way to pay for the rent. According to the US Census of 1940, Shils and his first wife, Ruth Almond, lived in with the Fraenkels in an apartment at Kimbark Avenue, Hyde Park, Chicago. Ernst Fraenkel, who was of German-Jewish origins, had immigrated with his wife to the US in 1939.

[5] For a discussion of Parsons' reading of von Schelting's interpretation of Weber's work, see Adair-Toteff (2022).

between concrete research … and general theory has become a problem more pressing than ever, even though awareness of it is much less than universal" (1949, p. vi-vii). It is a theme that would reappear in various other publications of Shils, including his 1948 essay titled *The Present State of American Sociology* (also published by The Free Press) and that would become part of the way Shils tried to position himself within the scientific community (see also Turner 1999).

In October 1944, Shils had also learned of a forthcoming volume of English Weber translations by Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills. No correspondence with Gerth or Mills has been preserved in the Shils Archive in Chicago, but, based on the letters and papers of Gerth and Mills, Guy Oakes and Arthur Vidich (1999, p. 21-37) provide a detailed account of the competition to introduce Weberian sociology to an Anglo-American readership between these scholars. Under the title of "The Shils affair", they describe Shils' allegations (intellectual theft)[6] and proposals (redistributing material among the two editions). Gerth and Mills did not give in, however, and published their collection of translated essays, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, in 1946. Afterwards, the animosity between these scholars would not disappear. The Shils affair would forever haunt the personal and professional relationship among the protagonists. In quite a number of publications, Shils would continue to comment negatively on both Gerth and Mills.

In these years, Shils also looked at preparing a new translation of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. He seemed careful to avoid a conflict with Parsons, however, although some struggle over reputation and control of Weber's inheritance must here also have taken place. On January 23, 1950, just before his Harvard appointment would officially come to an end, Shils hides himself in a letter to Parsons behind the broader teaching demands in Chicago and defuses the conflict: "My own situation in raising the issue of the book once again was largely forced by the Social Science Staff at The University of Chicago… They asked me if I were willing to issue the book for them. My answer was I couldn't until I had consulted with you. Their motives were purely economical and not at all critical of your translation … I am calling the University this afternoon and telling them that I cannot issue such a translation" (Shils to Parsons, 23 Jan. 1950). No reputational gains could probably be obtained by questioning the authority of Parsons as theorist and as Weber specialist.

In other contexts, however, Shils would continue to actively appropriate the Weberian legacy for Anglo-American audiences. He would publish two other translations of Weber's texts. He took on the

[6] Shils must in the late-1930s or early-1940s not only have shared his Weber translations with Parsons, but also with Gerth and some other scholars (see Oakes & Vidich, 1999, p. 162).

translation of the sections dealing with law in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, but the publication of this translation would encounter much delay. In January 1948, Max Rheinstein, a German-born American scholar from the University of Chicago Law School, with whom Shils collaborated for this translation, even turned to Shils' wife in Chicago: "In despair I am turning to you for help… Frankly, the members of the Committee of the Association of American Law Schools under the auspices of which the work is being done are grossly annoyed and have reached the limits of their patience. With your help, I hope that some satisfactory solution can still be found" (Rheinstein to Mrs. Shils, 26 Jan. 1948). He also sent a carbon copy of that letter plus another reminder to Shils in London (Rheinstein to Shils, 26 Jan. 1948). But it would take many more years before the translation could go into print. As volume 6 in a new series on legal philosophy by Harvard University Press, *Max Weber on Law in Economy and Society* would finally appear in 1954.[7] Rheinstein, who reworked and annotated the translated texts, noted in his introduction "extraordinary" translation difficulties: "The Max Weber volume was the first scheduled for publication in the 20th Century Legal Philosophy Series. Its completion turned out to present formidable difficulties and to require many years of work" (1954, p. xv).[8]

Two decades later, Shils would edit a number of texts and letters of Weber on 'university problems'. This translation first appeared in Shils' journal *Minerva* (1973) and was reprinted by The University of Chicago Press (1974). It included Shils' translation of "Science as a Vocation", one of the essays Shils had proposed to 'trade' with Gerth and Mills in 1944-45 (Oakes & Vidich, 1999, p. 161).

Shils' position as a leading interpreter of the German sociological tradition, and in particular of Max Weber's work, was acknowledged in 1964, when the American Sociological Association organized in Montréal a session commemorating the centenary of Max Weber's birth. The contributors to the session were Talcott Parsons (chair), Edward Shils, Paul Lazarsfeld and Reinhard Bendix; Hans Gerth was not on the program (and C. Wright Mills had died in 1962). Parsons, who had also spoken in April 1964 at the 15th Annual Meeting of the German Sociological Society in Heidelberg, underlined the liveliness of the Weber discussions in the US. He described the ceremonial sessions on Weber in

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[7] Apart from the sections on law and society, the translation also included some other sections, which were, according to Shils, necessary to understand the texts on law and society. This volume includes Shils' translation of Weber's *Soziologische Grundbegriffe*, which is the section made available to Parsons for the translation of *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, but Shils (again) adds that he did not want to rival with the translation of this text by Henderson and Parsons (Weber, 1947; Weber, 1954, p. 1).

[8] The series itself was planned in 1939-1940. The first volume of the series would become *General Theory of Law and State* by the Austrian philosopher Hans Kelsen; it was first published in 1945.

Heidelberg by contrast as "*langweilig*" (Parsons to Shils, Bendix & Lazarsfeld, 19 August 1964; see Parsons 1965). Shils reciprocated in a similar manner: "Max Weber has surely found a much better home in the United States than he ever had in Germany" (Shils to Parsons, 11 Sept. 1964).[9] Whether he meant this statement or not, Shils clearly credited himself for the accomplishment.

Already early in his career as 'translator' of the German sociological heritance, Shils rapidly emancipated himself in Chicago from Wirth (who was a German native) and was concerned about the credits he could gain for his work. It is especially the struggle over Weber's sociological inheritance that played a considerable role throughout Shils' academic career. Not only did the 'intellectual capital', which he had accumulated as translator of Weber's writings, go into the creation of his own work, but it also, and probably more importantly, molded his interaction with other leading sociologists and thereby affected his broader recognition and visibility within the scientific community. Shils was keen to capitalize on his intimate knowledge of this European inheritance; he presented himself as working 'after' Weber and cultivated the image of a 'global' scholar, who belonged in Europe and the US (and also in other parts of the world, such as India).But the pursuit of their academic career also led to an intense and at times venomous competition for academic authority and academic visibility between Shils and a number of other members of the academic community.

2. Chicago and London

According to his CV of 1946, Shils had been Instructor of Sociology in (the College of) the University of Chicago between 1938 and 1944, and become promoted to Assistant Professor afterwards. But he had been on leave from 1941 to 1944, serving for the American wartime government. In 1942 and 1944, he worked in London, among others for the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force. As he later mentioned, he was able to extend his personal network during this stay. He established, for example, personal connections with Karl Mannheim and with other faculty at the LSE during the Second World War .

[9] For an informative discussion of Parsons and the tradition of Weber, see Staubmann & Lidz (2022). It should be added that other perceptions (other than 'langweilig') exist of the Weber centenary, even with Parsons as the protagonist (see Gerhardt, 2011, p. 175-183).

After the Second World War, Shils submitted his application for a position as Reader in Sociology at the LSE (Shils to Henderson, 5 April 1946). The vacancy was probably occasioned by the departure of Karl Mannheim, who had been appointed to a full-time chair at the London Institute of Education in January 1946 (Husbands, 2019, p. 176). The Board of Advisors proposed to offer the position to Shils in May 1946 – although it was not an unanimous decision, as one external member, the psychologist Frederic Bartlett of the University of Cambridge, voted against him. The official letter of appointment was sent in early June (Claughton to Shils, 5 June 1946). But Shils did not immediately accept the job offer: "May I request your approval of my postponement of the formal notification of my acceptance of the post for several weeks when I shall have completed certain necessary arrangements" (Shils to Claughton, 21 June 1946). He did accept by mid-July, however (Shils to Claughton, 15 July 1946).

In the weeks in between, Shils tried to negotiate a better position at the University of Chicago. He received support of the senior staff of the interdisciplinary Committee on Social Thought, especially John Nef and Robert Redfield, as well as of Robert M. Hutchins, then Chancellor of the University of Chicago. After having been informed of the LSE proposal for appointment of Shils, Nef prepared a memorandum for his colleagues: "Mr. Edward Shils … has not yet accepted this readership [at the LSE]… [We favor] recommending to the Central Administration some appointment that would give Mr. Shils a full association with the Committee on Social Thought" (Nef, 29 June 1946). One week later, he sent a follow-up letter: "Having had no dissent to my memorandum of July 29, I recommend that Mr. Edward Shils be appointed to the staff of the Committee on Social Thought, on terms at least comparable in salary and tenure to those offered him by the University of London … I gather further that there is a need for rather quick action, because Shils will have to either accept or reject the readership … within a few days" (Nef to Redfield, 5 July 1946).[10]

But no "fair offer" (ibid.) could be made Shils on time. And, as we know, Shils decided to accept the offer he had in hand, namely the readership in London (Shils to Claughton, 15 July 1946). At the same time, the option of returning to Chicago was kept open. The negotiations in Chicago continued after Shils had signed in London. A proposal for appointment was made before the end of 1946. "I have long delayed in writing you – and much too long for friendship's reasonable expectations – because I did not want to write until what could be offered you here next year has become plain" (Redfield to Shils, 27 Nov. 1946). "I recommend that Mr. Shils be made associate professor in the Division of the

[10] The Committee on Social Thought was (and is) located in the Division of the Social Sciences. Robert Redfield served from 1934 to 1946 as Dean of the Division of the Social Sciences at the University of Chicago. He was an anthropologist, but, not unimportantly, he was also the son in law of the sociologist Robert Park.

Social Sciences at a salary of $5.500 per annum" (Nef to Tyler, 28 Dec. 1946).[11] Shils also informed Wirth: "The news that you are joining the Committee on Social Thought comes as a surprise to me, and I hope you will be happy in your new activities" (Wirth to Shils, 13 Jan. 1947).

However, Shils also hesitated and did not immediately accept the offer made by the University of Chicago. "I have thought very much about your magnificent proposal and I am quite persuaded to accept – but with a few qualifications which I pray you will not take amiss" (Shils to Nef, 25 Jan. 1947). He asked for the possibility to combine academic life in London and Chicago (or in Britain and the US more generally). "I would like to have your agreement that I should spend two quarters – Winter and Spring – here each year for the next few years, and that I teach Summer and Autumn at Chicago in the Committee, with the understanding that after a few years, if our affairs in Chicago prosper and I meet the requirements, I switch over to full time at Chicago" (ibid.).

What follows are almost endless negotiations between Shils, the LSE and the University of Chicago. Shils tried to persuade the LSE to agree on the dual appointment he had in mind, but with limited success. "The suggestion comes as rather a blow to me, but I don't myself feel that I could refuse to meet his wishes" (Ginsburg to Carr-Saunders, 19 March 1947).[12] In May 1947, Shils was granted leave of absence for part of 1948: "I have explained to Shils that we can give him leave of absence … for the summer term and summer vacation of 1948. He seemed to be satisfied with this suggestion" (Carr-Saunders to Ginsburg, 20 May 1947). But requests to formalize this dual appointment did not meet with approval – despite much pressure from the side of the University of Chicago.[13]

Shils himself did not make it easy to find a way out. Not only did he have difficulty choosing between London and Chicago, but he also looked for other options. In the spring of 1949, he had received an invitation to join a theory project funded by the Carnegie Cooperation at the newly-established Department of Social Relations of Harvard University (see below). In the early summer of 1949, he

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[11] Ralph W. Tyler succeeded Redfield as Dean of the Division of the Social Sciences in Chicago.

[12] Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders was the Director of the LSE, Morris Ginsburg was the senior Professor in the LSE Department of Sociology.

[13] Even its Chancellor intervened with a telegraph to his peer in London: "Most important to us that Shils should be here by May tenth should be deeply grateful for your cooperation" (Hutchins to Parry, 2 April 1949). But he received a polite rejection as well. "We never anticipated that the University of Chicago would press Dr. Shils to take up teaching duties in Chicago during the English academic year" (Carr-Saunders to Hutchins, 14 April 1949).

apparently also had the prospect of a readership in sociology at the University of Oxford. In quite a number of letters of that time, in which he tried to negotiate the terms of his position in London and Chicago, Shils referred to the (impending) offer from the University of Oxford.[14]

Shils also had doubts about Chicago. "Between us", Shils wrote to his Chicago colleague Herbert Goldhamer, "I find Chicago absolutely repulsive as a place in which to live, and I find the University very annoying" (Shils to Goldhamer, 25 Feb. 1948).[15] With some of his typical sarcasm, he added: "To this bitterness of disappointed hopes, I should add the general obnoxiousness of most of the people in the Social Sciences, who combine vacuity with venom. Indeed, I think that the most vacuous are the most venomous, perhaps venom does not take up any room" (ibid.).[16] And even in the summer of 1949, when his constant requests for leave of absence had turned almost everyone at the LSE against him, he still tried to persuade its Director, Alexander Carr-Saunders, of his intention to give up his position at the University of Chicago, provided that he would be given one other half-year period of leave of absence. "Since I am eager to continue to live and work in England …, I wish therefore to continue my Readership at the School on a full-time basis and to resign from the University of Chicago. However, I wish to ask for your permission to return to the school in January 1950 in order to settle my affairs in this country prior to moving to England … If the School agrees to

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[14] Some also thought that this third option could constitute a solution for the tensions which had been building up between the universities of London and Chicago. "In my own mind it is pretty clear that Shils is likely to get an offer from Oxford, and that if he does he will accept it. All things considered I think that this might be the happiest arrangement for all concerned" (Carr-Saunders to Nef, 13 July 1949).

[15] Goldhamer was a social psychologist, who worked at the University of Chicago from 1946 to 1950 (Abbott, 1999, p. 36). He had been a student of Mannheim at the LSE, and Mannheim had recommended him to Wirth (Mannheim to Wirth, 5 June 1934). A paper in the *American Journal of Sociology*, which Goldhamer and Shils had co-authored (Goldhamer & Shils, 1939), was included by Shils in his application for the readership at the LSE (Shils to Henderson, 5 April 1946).

[16] Such sarcasm can also be found in unexpected places. Michael Burawoy (2005) has nicely commented on a confidential letter of 'recommendation' that he once had written for him by Shils (then at the University of Cambridge) and that was, unbeknownst to Burawoy at the time, obviously designed to sabotage his career chances. The Shils Archive contains several similar letters of 'recommendation'. But it is mistaken, as, for example, Buraway (2005) and Calhoun & VanAntwerpen (2008) do, to interpret such underhanded tactics as a way to keep 'the left' or 'the heterodox views' out of academia. Shils used these tactics irrespective of the political outlook or the academic status of the individuals he wrote such letters for.

this suggestion, it would also enable me to accept the invitation from Harvard which the Department of Social Relations is still holding open" (Shils to Carr-Saunders, 20 July 1949).

It is difficult to grasp the personal reasons, which Shils might have had, for working in London or the UK. To legitimate the ways he pushed for leave of absence in 1949 Shils repeatedly referred to the financial debts he had in the USA. For example, a telegraph to then Chair of LSE's Court of Governors, Otto Niemeyer, read as follows: "Urgent financial personal matters here make extremely difficult assurance my October return … must regretfully ask you reopen consideration my request for autumn leave creditors pressing for repayment which impossible if I return London next month … Harvard remuneration would enable me pay these debts" (Shils to Niemeyer, 7 Sept. 1949).[17] Marital problems probably played a more important role. Shils had married Ruth Almond in Chicago in 1938, but there is, as Chris Husbands (2019, p. 183) rightly notes, no record that she ever lived with him in the UK.[18] For Shils, living and working in London was a way of living without his wife, without having to officially divorce from her. Everyone, she wrote him in a letter that has been preserved in the Shils Archive in Chicago, "is under the impression … that I am going to join you soon (because that's the way we decided to leave it as I recall – at least as far as the outsiders are concerned" (Ruth Shils to Edward Shils, 11 Nov. 1949). This kind of arrangement could probably have lasted longer, if Shils had not met Irene Coltman, a younger LSE student. That he had "to settle up his affairs in America" (Carr-

[17] Shils probably did not inform the LSE about his marriage problems. His argument that he had "to settle up his affairs" was qualified in the margins of the letter as "nonsense" (ibid.). Some financial concerns do become visible in the letters of Ruth Almond, although not to the degree implied in Shils' messages to LSE officials in August and September 1949. It may be added that Saul Bellow, the famous writer who spent much of his life in Chicago, molded some characters in his semi-autobiographical novels after individuals he knew, including Shils. If the character of Frazer in Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* is derived from Shils, then Shils might indeed have faced some financial problems in this period of time.

[18] Ruth A. Almond was the daughter of Russian-Jewish and Ukrainian-Jewish immigrants. She was a younger sister of Gabriel A. Almond, the political scientist, who started, like Shils, his career at the University of Chicago in the 1930s. Edward Shils and Gabriel Almond are in the scholarly literature at times seen to have shared the same ideological view on the modernization of society (e.g., Gilman, 2003).

Saunders to Niemeyer, undated [about August 1949]) probably meant that he had to divorce from his first wife in order to marry Irene Coltman. Shils married again at the end of 1951.[19]

Important were surely also structural transitions and the new opportunities to gain reputation which they created. During and after the Second World War, transatlantic connections became relevant in a new way. Shils was *not* an American who travelled to Europe to study (as, for example, Parsons had done in the interwar years), but rather an American who travelled to the old Continent to teach.[20] He was backed up by universities and a university system that had acquired a strong reputation in the world. And Shils was well aware of status and status differences. Tellingly, his letter of resignation to the LSE Director was written in long-hand on paper with the letterhead of Harvard's Department of Social Relations, which he had just joined (Shils to Carr-Saunders, Sept. 26, 1949).[21]

As much as his reputation in the US built on his familiarity with the European sociological heritage, Shils built on the growing status of the American university system to secure his career chances in Europe. He benefited in the UK from the strong institutional back-up from his perceived position in the US. Carr-Saunders' reply to Shils' letter of resignation referred to the bonds forged between the nations that assumed leadership in the 'free world' in general and the world of science in particular. "I am sorry that things should have turned out in this way … We did enjoy and benefit from your presence at the School, and hope that the connection which has been formed between American and English sociologists will continue" (Carr-Saunders to Shils, 30 Sept. 1949).

Shils is nowadays remembered as "the quintessential 'transatlantic man'" (Altbach, 2019, p. 202; see also Bulmer, 2019), but it is useful *not* to see this characteristic as a natural or personal one. Shils was sensitive to specific socio-historical conditions; he tried to navigate through the structural transitions that took place during and after the Second World War. He claimed a position in an emerging global social-scientific community, not just within a national community (whether in the US or the UK). His

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[19] This second marriage would end in a divorce as well. The Shils Archive in Chicago also contains love letters from the mid-1970s from Katherine Murphy. She was at that time not only his secretary in Chicago, but would also accompany him to Cambridge and the Netherlands (during his fellowship at NIAS) as his secretary (!).

[20] His expertise was seen to be in American sociology with its emphasis on empirical research. His expertise on German sociology was also acknowledged. "As to the work next session I would suggest that you give us a course on contemporary American Sociology and its research methods. This would be most valuable to us… Do you think you could give a short course on selected German Sociologists?" (Ginsburg to Shils, 31 July 1946).

[21] For a broader discussion of the evaluation of academic differences, see Karabel (2005) and Lamont (2009).

position depended on the inequalities which characterized this globalizing system, on the differences between the center and the periphery of the world of science. In his early career, in which he did not have to face much competition in this regard, he could easily acquire center-stage positions due to both his American and European connections.[22] Later in his career, as the correspondence in the Shils Archive shows, he was still frequently perceived as global gatekeeper, perhaps especially by scholars from the periphery who aimed at gaining access to the Anglo-American center.[23] But he then had also lost part of his status and reputation in the American university system, which had itself attained leadership in the world (of science), but which had also closed in on itself.

4. Harvard/Parsons

As already indicated, Shils had become acquainted with Talcott Parsons at a relatively early moment in his career. Louis Wirth had recommended him on several occasions, including for a job in Parsons' staff: "I need not repeat here that I think Shils is by all odds the most outstanding student that we have developed here in recent years. He expects to take his examinations this spring, and is well along in his thesis, which is a study of socio-economic stratification in Chicago" (Wirth to Parsons, 13 Nov. 1937). In 1939, they exchanged documents: Shils shared with Parsons his translation of Weber's methodological essays, while Parsons shared a few texts of his own. Shils particularly inquired about the status of Parsons' paper on social stratification – which would eventually appear in 1940 in the Chicago-based *American Journal of Sociology*. "I hope the Journal will decide to take it as I should very much like to have something appear there" (Parsons to Shils, 17 May 1939).[24]

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[22] A similar argument can be made for other sociologists with strong European and American connections, including Louis Wirth, who became the first President of the International Sociological Association in 1949 (but who died in 1952 during his presidency). For a broader discussion of the structures of internationalism in the social sciences and humanities and their journals, see Vanderstraeten & Eykens (2018).

[23] The Shils Archive contains many letters of non-native speaking English scholars, who requested his help with the publication of the results of their work in English journals or edited books.

[24] Shils later maintained that he had been a reviewer of this paper and claimed credit for its content: "I think that my best contribution of that period was hidden in Talcott Parsons' essay on social stratification that I read, ostensibly anonymously, for the *American Journal of Sociology* to which he had submitted it for publication. I wrote a very long report on this manuscript … [and Parsons] changed the paper very markedly in accordance

After the Second World War, Parsons became much more visible within the scientific community, both nationally and internationally. The setting, within which he had to operate, also changed. The National Science Foundation, founded in 1948, provided opportunities for funding sociology as 'science' and Parsons' memorandum, *Social Science: A Basic National Resource*, published in 1948, was clearly intended to lay claim to such kind of funding.[25] At Harvard, Parsons became chairman of the newly-established interdisciplinary Department of Social Relations and the Carnegie Corporation proved willing to sponsor his project devoted to assaying "the theoretical resources of the field of Social Relations" (Parsons, 1951, p. v).[26] This grant was also instrumental in intensifying the contact between Parsons and Shils, although it probably was another member of the Department, viz. the anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn, who brought Shils into the picture.[27] "Talcott Parsons and I have often spoken in recent months of how valuable it would be to all of us if arrangements could be made for you to pay us an official visit here" (Kluckhohn to Shils, 17 Nov. 1948).

A few months later, concrete steps were taken to arrange for such an official, paid visit. "I told you about the project for a theoretical synthesis in the general field of Social Relations… I am to take leave of absence for the fall term… At the same time, we very much want to have some outside help" (Parsons to Shils, 6 April 1949). The Berkeley psychologist Edward Tolman had already agreed to join the project in Harvard and Parsons extended an invitation to Shils: "I should like to inquire whether there is any chance that you might be free to get leave from your other obligations for that period and come and join us… For this half year, we are able to offer $4.500. I very much hope that there is a prospect of your coming. I may say all of our group enthusiastically join me in this hope, perhaps rather particularly Clyde Kluckhohn" (Parsons to Shils, 6 April 1949).[28]

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with my suggestions so that the paper that appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology* was a rather different paper from the paper as it was originally submitted" (Shils, 2006, p. 53-54).

[25] For an elaborate overview of Parsons' rise to influence in this period, see Gerhardt (2002).

[26] Parsons' role in the Harvard Department of Social Relations and its (inter-)disciplinary politics is itself well documented in the literature (see esp. Nichols, 1998, 2019; Isaac, 2012).

[27] Clyde Kluckhohn had himself studied in Europe (Oxford and Vienna) in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

[28] This was a high salary for a relatively young scholar, especially because he combined it with his income from the LSE and the University of Chicago. An overview of salary and tax withholdings provided by the University of Chicago shows that Shils received $1.833 for his new appointment in the Committee on Social Thought for the period from October 1949 to December 1949 (Lincicome to Shils, 26 Febr. 1951).

Shils did not accept the invitation immediately. But, as we have seen, the invitation played a role in the negotiations he conducted in Britain. Three months later, Shils had still not made a decision: "The new Oxford possibility is most interesting. It will be possible to keep the other thing open for a little longer" (Parsons to Shils, 6 July 1949). But two more months later, Parsons imposed a deadline: "I am afraid I must ask for definite word within a few days, should we say, September 8, 1949" (Parsons to Shils, 30 Aug 1949). Shils probably hesitated until the last possible moment. "I understand you are going to Oxford as reader in sociology" (Kluckhohn to Shils, 9 Sept. [1949]). In a telegram, however, Parsons wrote a few days later: "delighted you can come on second thought" (Parsons to Shils, 14 Sept. 1949). Remarkably, the Harvard appointment – as Visiting Lecturer and Research Associate – was then retroactively made effective as of September 1, 1949.[29]

As part of the Carnegie project, Parsons organized a series of weekly seminars within the Department of Social Relations from October 1949 to January 1950. *Toward a General Theory of Social Action* was presented as outcome of the discussions within these seminars.[30] It clearly intended to contribute to the unification of the social sciences, and especially of the disciplines combined in the Department of Social Relations, namely, social and clinical psychology, cultural anthropology, and sociology. Shils co-authored the second part, which looked at the contribution of sociology to the proposed theory of action, and which discussed in more detail the paradigm of 'double contingency' in interaction. For Shils, too, the book intended to provide a basic and unified framework for interdisciplinary research. Alluding to classic predecessors, he referred to "our Principia" (Shils to Parsons, 26 May 1950).

Throughout 1950 and the first part of 1951, Parsons worked concomitantly on two book publications. *The Social System*, of which he was the sole author, was published by The Free Press in August 1951. Harvard University Press, which was to publish *Toward a General Theory of Social Action*, acted a bit slower. This volume first appeared in October 1951. Parsons had collaborated intensively with the other contributors to this volume, but it was long also evident that he would be the sole editor. Some

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[29] But, as we have seen, Shils would only resign from his full-time position at the LSE on September 30, 1949. His letter of resignation was dated September 26, 1949.

[30] Two seminar groups were actually formed (see Parsons, 1951, p. v), one with the external staff of the Carnegie project and the 'inner circle' group in the Department, which was mainly composed of senior members of the faculty sympathetic to its program, and one with the 'outsiders group' (to which all members of the Department not included in the insiders group were invited). For detailed discussions of the way in which Parsons maintained the pretense of inclusiveness within the Department of Social Relations, see Nichols (1998, 2019).

last-minute 'politics of authorship' took place, however. After some friction about the ways in which the contribution of James Olds to the second part had to be acknowledged,[31] Shils asked Parsons to upgrade his role to that of co-editor of the volume as a whole. Parsons did not object to the Shils' demand: "I think I understand how you feel about receiving adequate formal credit and I have taken the liberty of passing on the recommendation of joint editorship to the Press" (Parsons to Shils, 13 Aug. 1951). At that time, the whole manuscript had already been sent to the publisher. The Parsons Archives contain two different title pages from this final stage of the production process in which Parsons is still listed as the sole editor of *Toward a General Theory of Social Action*.

The last part of *Toward a General Theory of Social Action*, which consisted of contributions by the 'insider group' in the Harvard Department of Social Relations, was devoted to "applications" of the theory of action. Parsons had more ambitions – and planned for a number of follow-up publications in which the theoretical framework would be put to use. Shils would contribute to the final chapter of the first and eventually only volume of *Working Papers in the Theory of Action* (Parsons, Bales, & Shils, 1953). His work on this volume was supported by a second short-term appointment in Harvard (June-July 1952). But Shils did not accept proposals for another short-term appointment.

One other joint publication, namely *Theories of Society* (Parsons, Shils, Naegele, & Pitts, 1961), would follow. It was also planned for in the early 1950s, but was much longer in the making. Parsons clearly was the driving force behind this project, who kept Shils on board, probably for earlier commitments. "I have not written you for a long time because I had been hoping to be able to reply to a letter from you. … Isn't there some chance that you would be willing to sit down and at least let me know something about your plans?" (Parsons to Shils, 29 April 1953). "I am altogether surprised not to have heard from you again" (Parsons to Shils, 3 Aug. 1953). In his own writings, too, Shils now kept more distance from Parsons. In an 1957 article in the *British Journal of Sociology*, for example, he criticized the 'omissions' and 'gaps' in the theoretical framework presented in *Toward a General Theory of Social Action* (Shils, 1957, p. 138-140). But Parsons kept on sending letters: "Is it too much to hope that I might have a word from you?" (Parsons to Shils, 18 Oct. 1957). However, when Shils finally had submitted his chapter for *Theories of Society*, titled "The Calling of Sociology", Parsons

[31] Parsons was fond of the way in which the psychologist James Olds (a PhD student in the Department of Social Relations) had rewritten the second part: "He really did a Gargantuan job on the personality chapter, and I think improved it immensely" (Parsons to Shils, 8 March 1951). Parsons therefore communicated to Shils that it would be just to change the authorship of the second part to "by you and myself and with the assistance of James Olds rather than simply acknowledging in the Preface that he has done an editorial job" (ibid.).

also communicated in his typical way some disappointment: “In general, I think it is a fine piece of work, and extremely interesting. I am inclined to think that had you taken more care over it, it could have been more succinctly stated, and avoided a certain amount of repetitiousness” (Parsons to Shils, 20 April 1961). For Shils, focusing on the vocation or calling of sociology obviously was a way of placing himself (again) in a ‘serious’, historically-oriented Weberian tradition and of distancing himself from the collection’s overall focus on the categories of the theory of action.[32]

Later in their careers, Parsons and Shils did not again collaborate, although Parsons would contribute to Shils’ Festschrift (Parsons, 1977).[33] Shils also did *not* look back at his collaboration with Parsons as determinative of his own later research interests: “Parsons’s way was not a way that I could follow … I have not tried to do it, except for that relatively brief period of about three years split equally each side of the middle of the century” (Shils, 2006, p. 86; see also Schneider, 2016, p. 199-221). Following the strong resentment towards Parsons that began to be built up in the course of the 1950s and 1960s (Owens, 2010), Shils later also blamed Parsons and their joint publications for the perceived lack of personal recognition within the American sociological community (Shils, 2006).

5. Concluding remarks

Careers may be described as sequences of accomplishments and changes; ‘regular’ careers provide a framework for evaluating oneself and others. They regulate the ways in which life courses are being perceived – both by “the self and its significant society” (Goffman, 1959, p. 123). They structure perceptions of ourselves and of others in increasingly individualized social systems.

Although careers, including academic careers, are characterized by uncertainty, they also typically have an orderly structure. Surprising events happen; things can always work out differently than

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[32] The epilogue would become one of Shils’ best-known essays in the later phase of his career. It is also the title piece of the third volume of his collected essays (Shils, 1980).

[33] But there is no evidence which indicates that Parsons considered engaging Shils as a collaborator in his project on *The American Academic System* (despite Shils’ work on universities). The main outcome of this project, the monograph titled *The American University*, was co-authored by Parsons and Gerald M. Platt (1973). Whereas Neil J. Smelser had been approached as co-author, he would finally contribute a separate epilogue to the monograph, which is fairly critical of the analyses presented by Parsons and Platt (see Vanderstraeten 2015).

expected. But, at the same time, careers build upon themselves; they often have a cumulative structure. What has been reached at a particular moment in time does affect the range of new opportunities that may or may not become available at a later moment in time. It is this condition, which may motivate individuals to invest in their career in a variety of ways. The early career of Edward Shils may be difficult to make sociological sense of. In his account of Shils' passage at the LSE, Chris Husbands focuses particularly on the transient nature of Shils' career choices: "One has the impression that, in this as in other matters relating to his career at the time, Shils was fickle, his inclinations often changed, and sometimes he saw himself merely 'treading water' in the UK… His vacillation may have made him his own worst enemy" (2019, p. 182). But it is also possible to identify some decisive elements and some basic structural characteristics of his career.

Shils' academic career did have a somewhat atypical start. He was later proud of the fact that he had never earned a PhD. In his autobiography, written in 1991 and 1992, for example, one reads: "I might have become a more respectable academic with a Ph.D.; but since I have done pretty well without, it might not have made much difference" (Shils, 2006, p. 109). In his early career at the LSE, however, he made many believe that he had earned the PhD title. His application for the LSE readership was accompanied by statements of two non-academic referees, who had worked with him during his war research (on the social values held by German prisoners and soldiers), and both refer to him as "Dr. Shils".[34] The Board of Advisors, which reviewed the applications for the LSE readership and which recommended to appoint Shils, reported that Shils had "graduated at the University of Chicago (1933-1937) in Sociology, politics and economic history" (Henderson to Carr-Saunders, 15 May 1946). And on his personal-details form, which was probably completed by Shils on first joining the LSE (see Husbands, 2019, p. 177), there is an curious addition in pencil made and initialed by LSE's then Assistant Secretary and dated 14 October 1946, saying "Degrees B.A. Ph.D. – He wishes this not to be disclosed". Shils was at that time of course not the only scholar who tried to make an academic career without PhD degree. But the cumulative structure of (academic) careers puts pressure on the starting phase. To make the most out of one's career, or to ensure future options, one is expected to achieve particular goals at an early point in one's career. Shils' transatlantic move in 1946 seemingly made it possible *not* to disclose the absence of a PhD degree, but the academic status he gained by

[34] A third statement, included in his application package itself, was by Louis Wirth. Shils also mentioned two other academic referees, namely Hans Speier and Harold Lasswell, but his personal file at the LSE does not include their statements. They might not have submitted their statements (on time).

his appointment in London also made him more attractive in the US. There is little doubt that such strategic concerns played from the beginning a role in the paths he pursued.

In London, Shils was perceived as a sociologist. Not only was he appointed in the LSE Department of Sociology, but his whole career was constructed in terms of "his contributions … to the advancement of Sociology" (Henderson to Carr-Saunders, 15 May 1946). At about the same time, his reputation in the US was quite different. His appointments in the US (Harvard and Chicago) at the end of the 1940s were not in sociology. When Shils negotiated his full-time return to the University of Chicago, a joint appointment in the Department of Sociology was not an option. Shils and Nef rather explored the option of an appointment in the Department of Economics, but without success. "The appointment of Mr. Shils … would not meet the requirements of the Department… Mr. Shils' competence and scholarly interest are not, in the judgment of the Department, in American Economic History" (Schultz to Nef, 20 Nov. 1946).[35] In Chicago, Shils thus did not obtain an appointment in a 'classic' department linked with a 'classic' discipline (see Abbott, 1999, p. 38), but had to make a career in the newly-established interdisciplinary Committee on Social Thought, with the promises and insecurities of an interdisciplinary project (Jacobs, 2014; Graff, 2015, p. 91-123). It is only in 1957 that he is again listed as a member of the Department of Sociology of the University of Chicago (Hauser to Nef, 18 Jan. 1957).[36] Such tensions also shed light on Shils' ambivalent relationship with American sociology. In his later self-portraits he frequently defined himself in opposition to dominant currents in sociology, and tried to make a hallmark of his 'special' status.[37] He did not hesitate to present himself as a total outsider, as someone who was hardly interested in ongoing sociological work or who had

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[35] Theodore W. Schultz served as chair of the Department of Economics of the University of Chicago from 1946 to 1961. Shils and Nef (who was himself an economic historian) had probably counted on the support of Frank H. Knight, an influential member of the Department of Economics, who had been involved in the establishment of the Committee on Social Thought. Knight was familiar with the work of Max Weber – to the extent that he corresponded with Marianne Weber about the translation of (parts of) *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Weber to Knight, 13 March 1937).

[36] Philip M. Hauser served as chairman of the Department of Sociology from 1956 to 1965.

[37] This self-presentation is often repeated in the literature on Shils. To quote an example: "If anyone rose above the usual deficiencies of American sociological theory—its monolingualism, limited general literacy, ignorance of history and philosophy, obsession with local disciplinary status hierarchies, faddishness, political naivete, intellectual subservience to European thinkers, reductive thinking in terms of brand-name "perspectives," and its self-abasing craving for respect from quantitative sociologists—it was Shils" (Turner, 1999, p. 127). But, rather than repeating this image, one should ask why Shils time and again presented himself in such terms.

never taken any sociology course at all (e.g., Shils, 1982, p. viii).[38] But there is, I believe, little doubt that these retrospective reconstructions do not correspond with earlier choices and earlier presentations of self.[39]

As Shils' early career illustrates, academic careers do not only have an uncertain future, in the sense that new events (appointments, publications, grants, invitations, distinctions, etc.) do not always come as planned or expected. Careers also have an uncertain past. What is recollected of the past and what kind of relevance is attributed to selected past events is subject to change. The present may continuously be reshaping the past in line with its concerns. And Shils clearly did not hesitate to reshape the past. The archival documents frequently tell a story that is different from the (shifting) accounts that Shils later provided in his (auto-)biographical reflections. While it is difficult to assess the broader impact of his self-generated (mis-)representation of his own trajectory, both the archival documents and several of his publications make clear that Shils was captivated by the perception of his own life course and that of others in terms of a career – with its specific successes, failures and disappointments. He might be described as indecisive or fickle in many matters, but he was at the same time very much concerned about his own career and the perception thereof.

The academic world changed markedly in the middle of the twentieth century as a consequence of the expansion of universities and departments, the growing reputational differences between these institutions, the consolidation of disciplinary identities and disciplinary boundaries, the strengthening of international partnerships and the intensification of global mobility, and so on. These structural transitions led to new and different opportunities and directed more attention to the choices made (or not made) by academics. Ensuing career pressures worked themselves out on other expectations: on the academic job market, but also on the relationship of teacher and student (Wirth and Shils), the competition for credit for academic work (even if only as translator of other's work), the forms of

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[38] The latter story is repeated on several websites with biographical information about Shils, e.g. https://biography.yourdictionary.com/edward-albert-shils. But in his own autobiographical fragment (Shils, 2006, p. 40), he lists a few sociology courses in which he took part.

[39] This is not to say that Shils did not identify himself with the interdisciplinary Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, quite to the contrary. Although the Shils Archive contains evidence of conflicts with several colleagues, Shils generally regarded the 'interstitial academy' of the Committee as a (potentially) very productive environment for scientific work (see Isaac, 2012; Nichols, 2019). He was also quite active in bringing people of diverse and 'complex' (i.e. multi-disciplinary) intellectual background to the University of Chicago. In this regard, he could build on the reputation he had already established in his early career.

collaboration and conflict with other researchers, and so on. The Shils' archives are voluminous and their lack of organization presents problems of appraisal, but the archival documents do highlight the importance of the career frame for the avenues he pursued and the ways he presented himself to others. More generally, the concept of career provides a good framework to make sense of the world with which scholars are confronted since at least the mid-twentieth century.

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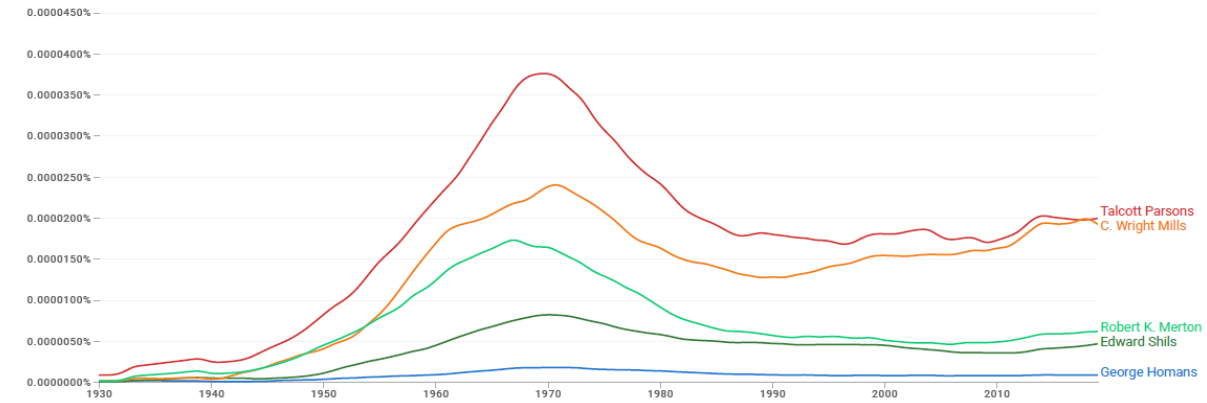

Figure 1: The n-gram shows the frequency with which the names of Edward Shils, Talcott Parsons, C. Wright Mills, Robert K. Merton, and George Homans appear between 1930 and 2019 in Google's text corpora.

Declarations

-Funding (information that explains whether and by whom the research was supported): no funding

-Conflicts of interest/Competing interests (include appropriate disclosures): no conflict of interest

-Availability of data and material (data transparency): copies of all archival documents are available upon request.

-Code availability (software application or custom code): not applicable

-Ethics approval (include appropriate approvals or waivers): not applicable

-Consent to participate (include appropriate statements): not applicable

-Consent for publication (include appropriate statements): consent provided