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Methodological nationalism
and the study of migration *

I M M I G R A N T S appear as natural enemies of a political world divided into culturally homogenous and territorially bounded nations each represented by a sovereign state. This perception has influenced social science theory and methodology and, more specifically, its discourse on immigration and integration, where immigrants were often portrayed as politically unreliable, culturally different, socially marginal and biographically abnormal. The social science study of migration thus provides a case study for the effects of methodological nationalism—the assumption that the nation state society is the natural social and political form of the modern world (1).

(1) We owe the term to Herminio Martins (1974: 276f.), who mentioned it *en passant* in an article on social theory. He uses the term in a similar way as we do in this article. Anthony Smith (1983: 26) mentions the concept a decade later, referring to the fact that statistics and also social science research based upon them make national societies the natural unit of analysis.

The term is certainly inspired by the notion of methodological individualism, which was introduced by Schumpeter and popularised by Friedrich von Hayek and later Karl Popper. Methodological individualism—usually attributed to the sociological programme of Max Weber—means analysing a society as the effect of aggregated decisions and actions of individuals, which are the basic units of social science analysis. In the words of von Hayek, methodological individualism stands for the conviction that 'the concepts and views held by individuals... form the elements from which we must build up, as it were, the more complex phenomena' (1943: 38).

Our use of the term methodological nationalism is somewhat broader compared to methodological individualism. We include not only positive and explicit affirmations that nations are the basic units of analysis, but also works that 1) follow this principle without being explicit or even knowledgable about it and/or; 2) neglect and overlook the importance of nationalist doctrine for the modern world. Overlooking and ignoring represent modes of methodological nationalism that find no parallel in classic discussions of methodological individualism.

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Methodological nationalism represents, in our view, one of the most important forms of 'groupist thinking' in the social sciences, and shows all the epistemological and empirical shortcomings analysed by Rogers Brubaker in this issue of the *Archives*. Only now that nation states have lost some of their power to transnational corporations and supranational organizations has a systematic reflection on these methodological limitations begun. They have been discussed in history (Bender 2001; Rodgers 1998), geography (Taylor 1996), sociology (Beck 2000) and anthropology (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Wimmer 1996a). Perhaps it was more difficult to see the world in three dimensions when the sun stood at its zenith. In the evening, shadows grow and allow us to perceive the environment in clearer contours.

What we discover in this twilight, is how transnational the modern world has always been, even in the high days when the nation state bounded and bundled most social processes. Rather than a recent offspring of globalisation, transnationalism appears as a constant of modern life, hidden from a view that was captured by methodological nationalism. The field of migration studies again is a case in point. The recent boom in research on transnational communities did not discover 'something new', but was the result of a shift of perspective away from methodological nationalism. The 'discovery' was a consequence of an epistemic move of the observer, not of the appearance of new objects of observation.

The paper is organised into four sections. The first discusses three modes of methodological nationalism and shows their importance in social science thinking. We then demonstrate how the study of transnational migration was influenced and limited by these methodological constraints. The third section describes the recent waves of research on globalisation and transnational migration and discusses how far this new paradigm overcomes or remains tied to a nationalist perspective. We conclude with an appeal to develop better terminological tools not coloured by methodological nationalism and at the same time to set aside the celebration of fluidity of contemporary social theory.

1. *Three modes of methodological nationalism*

Our argument focuses on what we perceive as the major, dominant trends in social science thinking of the past century. We do not discuss coterminous currents that contradicted the hegemonic strands. Es-

pecially in times of inte ified global interconnections, theories reflec-
ting these developments ppeared and provided tools for analysis not
coloured by methodolo al nationalism. The most obvious of these
currents was political ec omy in the Marxian tradition, always devo-
ting attention to capitali as a global system rather than to its specific
national manifestations, nd especially the studies of imperialism by
Rosa Luxemburg and o ers before World War I, when transnational
movements of commod es, capital and labour reached a first peak.
Wallerstein's world syst n theory belongs to a second wave of theo-
rizing developing in the venties, when transnational connections again
were intensifying and m tiplying. A second and equally important line
of development not inc ded in our discussion is methodological *indi-*
vidualism in its various f ms where the analysis does not rely on explicit
reference to larger socia ntities (such as the school of marginal utility
and rational choice in e omics and political science or interactionism
in sociology).

These views remain heterodox, however, and did not shape the
social science programr in the same way as the currents discussed in
this article did. The e temic structures and programmes of main-
stream social sciences h e been closely attached to, and shaped by the
experience of modern ation state formation. The global forces of
transnational capitalism nd colonialism, that reached their apogee pre-
cisely in the period wh social sciences formed as independent disci-
plines, left only few tr es in the basic paradigmatic assumptions of
these disciplines and we hardly systematically reflected upon.

Our starting point the classical social theory that has marked
especially the sociologi tradition. As a host of scholars have argued
repeatedly, the classic eory of modernity has a blind spot when it
comes to understanding ne rise of nation states as well as of nationalism
and ethnicity (A. Smi 1983; Esser 1988; Guiberneau 1997; Imhof
1997; Thompson and vre 2001). In the eyes of Marx, Durkheim,
Weber and Parsons, t growing differentiation, rationalisation and
modernisation of socie gradually reduced the importance of ethnic
and national sentiment Most classic grand theory was constructed as a
series of socio-structu types: from feudalism through capitalism to
communism, from Ger inschaft to Gesellschaft, organic to mechanical
solidarity, and tradition to modern society. Nationalism was attributed
to earlier stages in the ntinuum of social evolution. As a traditional,
communitarian, ascrip ve, bourgeois or pre-rational phenomenon,
nationalism was thoug to be a transitory phenomenon on the way to
the modern, rationali and individualised class society based on

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achievement. Nationalism and patriotism were soon to be wiped out by proletarian internationalism (Marx and Engels) or by a post-patriotic *idéal humain* (Durkheim) (see Smith 1983; Guiberneau 1997; on Max Weber's rather more differentiated later view Smith 1983: 31-33).

These schemes were shielded from the overwhelming and obvious fact that nationalist politics and conflicts have shaped the history of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Grand theory was immunized thanks to a hierarchical division of labour between academic disciplines. The study of the rise of nationalism and the nation-state, of ethno-national wars of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe was delegated to history—with few exceptions, such as a small essay of Durkheim. Communal identities and nation building processes outside of Europe and the United States were made the domains of anthropology and later of political science. The much deplored failure of social theory until the 1980s to address the significance and sources of nationalism in the modern world can in part be attributed to this disciplinary division of labour that was established in the beginning of the twentieth century (Wimmer 1999).

It is particularly marked in the social sciences of France (Taguieff 1991: 46) and Germany where the sociologist Otto Hondrich (1992) felt moved to deliver a public *nostra culpa* for having neglected nationalism as an object of social theory (see Radtke 1996). In the anglo-saxon world, the early works on nationalism by Deutsch, Kedouril, Gellner, Smith and others developed, from the 1980s onwards, into a well established research tradition especially in the field of historical sociology (*cf.* Thompson and Fevre 2001), without, apparently, having much influence on mainstream social theory.

More fundamentally, however, this silence about the continuing importance of national principles stemmed from a methodological problem, as Anthony Smith suggested two decades ago (Smith 1983: 26). That nationalist forms of inclusion and exclusion bind our societies together served as an invisible background even to the most sophisticated theorising about the modern condition. The social sciences were captured by the apparent naturalness and givenness of a world divided into societies along the lines of nation states (Berlin 1998). What Billig (1995) has shown for everyday discourse and practice holds true for grand theory encounters with reality social as well: because the world was structured according to nation-state principles, these became so routinely assumed and 'banal', that they vanish from sight altogether.

Methodological nationalism has thus inhibited a true understanding of the nature and limits of the modern project. It has produced a sys-

tematic blindness towards the paradox that modernisation has led to the creation of national communities amidst modern society supposed to be dominated by the principles of achievement. Whether Parsons and Merton or Bourdieu, Habermas and Luhmann: none of these authors discusses in any systematic fashion the national framing of states and societies in the modern age. Interestingly enough, such nation-blind theories of modernity were formulated in an environment of rapidly nationalising societies and states, sometimes, as was the case with Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, in the eve or aftermath of major nationalist wars.

Ignoring the national framing of modernity, however, is just one form of methodological nationalism. A second variant, typical of more empirically oriented social science practices, is taking national discourses, agendas, loyalties and histories for granted, without problematising them or making them the object of an analysis in its own right. Instead, nationally bounded societies are taken to be the naturally given entities to study. Here are some illustrative examples of the naturalisation of the nation-state from different disciplinary traditions.

International relations assume that nation states are the adequate entities for studying the inter-national world. While the anarchical nature of this inter-state system and the changing dynamics of hegemony and polycentrism have been discussed at length, almost no research was done on why this international system has become an international one (one exception is Mayall 1990). Similarly, post World War II scholarship on the newly independent states thought of nation building as a necessary, although somewhat messy aspect of the decolonisation process (see e.g. Wallerstein 1961). The task of building a viable national culture was seen as an evident corollary to the other tasks of modernization, projecting as a model a vision of Western nation-state building. Nation building and state formation made natural bedfellows in the works of modernisation theorists such as Lerner or Rostow, since the nation state model represented the only thinkable way of organising politics.

Economics studied the economy of nationally bounded entities or their relations to each other through trade, capital flows and the like. Since the publication of Adam Smith's 'An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations' (Smith 1983/1789) and, on the continent, of Friedrich List's masterpiece, 'Das nationale System der politischen Ökonomie' (List 1974/1856), the distinction between internal economy and external relations has become a guiding principle for the evolution of the discipline. Tellingly enough, List called the economic processes bounded by a national state a 'Volkswirtschaft', literally the

economy of the people. Smith made clear in the introduction to his three volume *magnum opus*, that he was about to explain the employment of labour and capital in different, more or less civilized nations. Maynard Keynes and other major political economists of the twentieth century remained faithful to this perspective and took the distinction between national, domestic economy and international, external economy for granted.

Methodological nationalism even characterized later attempts at overcoming these limitations of perspective and to describe larger, cross-national economic systems. While dependency theory was supposed to overcome the one nation focus of US modernisation theory, it replaced it with a model of exploitation and dominance between nation states, thus implicitly reproducing the national state as a basic unit of analysis (*cf.* Luton 1976).

Modern history was largely written, up to the 1990s, and with notable exceptions such as Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974) or Eric Wolf's (1982) work, as a history of particular nation states or of their relations to each other—mostly no longer with the obviously nationalist aim of legitimising a particular nation building project, as has been the case up to World War II, but still deeply influenced by the methodological assumption that it is a particular nation that would provide the constant unit of observation through all historical transformations, the 'thing' whose change history was supposed to describe. This continues to be the dominant perspective in the newly revived historiography, art history and archaeology of many Eastern European academics (Niculescu, 2002), including Greece (*cf.* Karakasidou 1994).

In anthropology, methodological nationalism had less obvious but important effects especially since the discipline had abandoned diffusionism and turned towards functionalism as its leading paradigm. Anthropologist now often assumed that the cultures to be studied were unitary and organically related to and fixed within territories, thus reproducing the image of the social world divided into bounded, culturally specific units typical of nationalist thinking (Wimmer 1996a). Moreover, early anthropologists defined their field of inquiry by negatively extrapolating from the nation-state building experiences of the West: tribes without modern states and ethnic groups before nations became their privileged objects, systematically 'overlooking' the influence of the colonial regime or of nation building agendas on the subject peoples that they studied.

When anthropologists worked in complex societies, including industrialised Western countries, methodological nationalism again

shaped what they saw. The anthropology of ethnic groups within modernising or industrial nation-states tended to describe these as culturally different from the 'majority' population because of their varying historical origin, including their history of migration, rather than to see these differences as a consequence of the politicisation of ethnicity in the context of nation-state building itself. Yet it was a central part of the nation-state project to define all those populations not thought to represent the 'national culture' as racially and culturally different, producing an alterity which contributed to efforts to build unity and identity (Williams 1989; Glick Schiller 1999a, b, c; Wimmer 2002a).

Thus, we can find naturalisation of the nation-state in different disciplines and many intellectual variations. Naturalisation owes its force to the compartmentalisation of the social science project into different 'national' academic fields, a process strongly influenced not only by nationalist thinking itself, but also by the institutions of the nation-state organising and channelling social science practice in universities, research institutions and government think tanks. It is telling that funding for cross-country comparative research is extremely difficult to mobilise even nowadays, as a recent report has shown for the field of migration studies (Henke 2001). The major research programmes of funding bodies are directed to contribute towards the solution of national problems in economics, politics and the social services. In most states, universities are linked to national ministries of education that favour research and teaching on issues of 'national relevance'. Academies are—with exceptions such as in Germany—usually 'national ones' and sometimes play important roles, most prominently in France, in maintaining the cultural treasures of the nation. Add to this the fact that almost all statistics and other systematic information are produced by government departments of nation-states and thus take the national population, economy and polity as their given entity of observation (cf. Favell, forthcoming), and it becomes obvious why naturalising the nation-state is the most prominent form of methodological nationalism in the post-war social sciences.

Another variant of naturalising the nation-state consists in downplaying nationalism's role in modern state building by analytically separating the rise of nationalism from that of the modern state and of democracy. In this way, the national framing of the modern state building experience and of democratisation become almost invisible. State and nation are treated as two separate objects of inquiry. Most scholars of nationalism discussed the nation as a domain of identity. The nation is defined as a people who share common origins and history as indicated

by their shared culture, language and identity (*cf.* Calhoun 1997; McCrone 1998; Smith 1998). In contrast, the 'state' is generally understood to be a sovereign system of government within a particular territory. In political science, this has allowed a mainstream theory to emerge, which sees the state as a neutral playing ground for different interest groups—thus excluding from the picture the fact that the modern state itself has entered into a symbiotic relationship with the nationalist political project. This even holds true for sophisticated accounts of state modernisation such as Giddens' *Nation State and Violence* (1995).

Where this segregation was overcome and the relations between nation building and modernising states were systematically examined, many authors fell into other modes of naturalising the nation state. Thus, for Ernest Gellner, the rise of the national state is a necessary and evolutionary sound corollary to the industrialisation of society, providing for the culturally homogenous and communicatively integrated space that a dynamised economy 'needs' (Gellner 1983). For Anthony Smith (1995), only nations and national states are apt to provide the feelings of security, identity and cultural comfort that we need in a rapidly changing and globalising world. It is only during the last decade that these blinders of methodological nationalism have been overcome by going beyond the dichotomy between state and nation without falling into the trap of naturalisation of the nation-state (see Breuilly 1993; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Mann 1993; Wimmer 1996b and 2002a).

Methodological nationalism also segregates democracy from nationalism. The historic and systematic logic tying both together has become eradicated from our historical memories. Most current theories and histories of democracy, especially the treatises of political philosophers, neglect this link. They look at the inner dynamics of the evolving democratic polities and lose sight of the nationalist principles that historically defined its boundaries—with few exceptions such as Synder's (2000) recent book or an essay by the Georgian philosopher Ghia Nodia (1992).

As an effect of this double segregation, nationalism appears as a force foreign to the history of Western state building. Instead, it is projected to others, to blood thirsty Balkan leaders or African tribesmen turned nationalists. Western state building was re-imagined as a non-national, civil, republican and liberal experience, especially in the writings of political philosophers such as Rawls (*cf.* Senn 1999). Segregation thus may lead to dislocation, if Freudian vocabulary is permitted here: the

ethno-nationalist wars and violence suppressed from the history of one's own state reappear in the contemporary scenery of far-away places. However, what we nowadays call ethnic cleansing or ethnocide, and observe with disgust in the 'ever troublesome Balkans' or in 'tribalistic Africa', have been constants of the European history of nation building and state formation, from the expulsion of Gypsies under Henry VIII or of Muslims and Jews under Fernando and Isabella to Ptolemy's night in France or the 'people's exchange', as it was called euphemistically, after the treaty of Lausanne between Turkey and Greece. Many of these histories have disappeared from popular consciousness—and maybe have to be forgotten, if nation building is to be successful, as Ernest Renan (1947 [1882]) suggested some hundred years ago.

Let us now address a third and last variant of methodological nationalism: the territorialisation of social science imaginary and the reduction of the analytical focus to the boundaries of the nation state. The social sciences have become obsessed with describing processes within nation state boundaries as contrasted with those outside, and correspondingly lost sight of the connections between such nationally defined territories. To cast this in an image borrowed from Giddens (1995), the web of social life was spun within the container of the national society, and everything extending over its borders was cut off analytically. The container society encompasses a culture, a polity, an economy and a bounded social group (*cf.* Taylor 1996). Major theoretical debates evolved around the relative weight of each of these dimensions in structuring the entire social fabric—Parsonians voting for culture while Marxists favouring economy—and whether this society determined individual actions or rather the other way round, social structures emerged from individual agency. Almost no thought was given as to why the boundaries of the container society are drawn as they are and what consequences flow from this limitation of the analytical horizon—thus removing trans-border connections and processes from the picture.

Ignoring, naturalisation and territorial limitation are thus the three variants of methodological nationalism that we have discerned in our *tour d'horizon* across disciplines and times. The three modes intersect and mutually reinforce each other, forming a coherent epistemic structure, a self-reinforcing way of looking at and describing the social world. The three variants are more or less prominent in different fields of inquiry. Ignorance is the dominant modus of methodological nationalism in grand theory; naturalisation of 'normal' empirical science; and territorial limitation of the study of nationalism and state building.

We now turn to one specific object of social science research in order to show in more detail how the different modes of methodological nationalism interact in producing a certain picture of the social world. Migration studies are an obvious candidate for such an exercise, since the object of analysis is constituted by a movement over a border that is considered to be a crucial dividing line in the social word. The next section shows how methodological nationalism influenced the post-war definition of this dividing line. In section three we will see how far the actual wave of research on the transnational character of immigrant communities overcomes methodological nationalism and how far it reproduces its basic assumptions in new ways.

2. *Defining the object of migration studies*

In order to understand how methodological nationalism has influenced the study of migration, we will first describe in more detail the relation between nationalist thinking and the container model of society that had come to dominate post-war social sciences. From this, it will be easy to see why migration has become an important object of inquiry for the social sciences.

Modern nationalism fuses four different notions of peoplehood that had developed separately in early modern Europe. The people as a sovereign entity, which exercises political power by means of some sort of democratic procedure; the people as citizens of a state holding equal rights before the law; the people as a group of obligatory solidarity, an extended family knit together by obligations of mutual support; and the people as an ethnic community undifferentiated by distinctions of honour and prestige, but united through common destiny and shared culture. These four notions of peoplehood were fused into one single people writ large. Democracy, citizenship, social security and national self-determination are the vertexes of the world order of nation states as it had come to maturity after World War II (*cf.* Wimmer 2002a, ch. 3).

Once this order is established, the nationalist imaginary can be projected on the surface of the earth and become territorially inscribed. For the isomorphisms between citizenry, sovereign, solidary group and nation entail that all corresponding territorial borders become coincident. This border congruence implies a much stricter definition of what pertains to the realm, and of what falls outside it. The shift to territorially fixed boundaries, to be sure, concurs with the establishment of

centralised kingdoms, thus preceding the nationalisation of modern states (*cf.* Guenée 1986). However, the establishment of frontier posts, the physical demarcation of frontiers and the sacralisation of the national territory are all linked to the emergence of nation states (Nordman 1996). This is because the national territory at the same time traces the frontiers of the sovereign population, delineates the homeland of the citizenry, defines the borderline between social order and disorder, and distinguishes between the national home and the wilderness of the foreign. Nationalists thus make a fetish of national territory, a sanctuary that deserves to be defended with the blood of the people.

It is easy to see the parallels with the container model of society that had developed in the social sciences and became dominant after the Second War. The translation is almost one to one: the citizenry is mirrored in the concept of a national legal system, the sovereign in the political system, the nation in the cultural system and the solidary group in the social system, all boundaries being congruent and together defining the skin holding together the body of society. Both borrowing from the image of the stability of the body, the idea of functional integration, so prominent in standard social science thinking up to the 1980s, paralleled the nationalist fusion of four notions of peoplehood into one national corpus. We may go as far as saying that the nationalist's People equals the Society of a post-war social scientist. Both share a set of basic assumptions about how the human world is constituted.

It should by now be clear why, both for nation builders as for post-war social scientists, migrants constitute an object of special attention. In nationalist doctrine as well as according to the container model of society, immigrants must appear as antinomies to an orderly working of state and society, even in societies where past immigration constitutes the foundation myth of the nation. We see four reasons why migrants become a special object of policy making as well as of a specializing body of research.

First, they destroy the isomorphism between people, sovereign and citizenry. Immigrants are perceived as foreigners to the community of shared loyalty towards the state and shared rights guaranteed by that state. Transnational migrants presumably remain, as long as they are not absorbed into the national body through assimilation and naturalisation, loyal to another state whose citizens they are and to whose sovereign they belong. In recent years, and with a renewed intensity that is likely to increase after September 11, 2001, social science research has been interested in the political activity and loyalty of immigrants, a theme which parallels the nation state's interest in the supervision, limitation and control of the immigrant population.

Second, immigrants destroy the isomorphism between people and nation. They appear as spots on the pure colours of the national fabric, reminding nationalist state builders and social scientists alike of the ethnic minorities that have been 'absorbed' into the national body through a politics of forced assimilation or benevolent integration. Immigrants thus represent a renewed challenge to the nation building project and point to the fragility of its achievements—especially in places where the nation had never been imagined as plural and itself constituted of former immigrants.

Even in classic countries of immigration such as the US, however, the major pre-occupation of post-World War II migration studies was to measure and scrutinise the cultural differences between immigrants and nationals and to describe pathways of assimilation into the national group, in short, to deliver a description of the mechanics of a successful nation making process (cf. Favell 2001). The taken for granted assumptions of methodological nationalism preclude problematising or researching whether immigrants de facto reduce rather than increase cultural heterogeneity, because the reference group of the national community may be heterogenous in class and culture and thus contain greater diversity compared to a migrant population (cf. Waldinger 2000).

The different post-war theories of immigrant integration—from the Chicago School's assimilationism to multi-culturalism to racialisation and ethnicisation theory—all pre-suppose that the relevant entities to be related are: a nation state society (not necessarily a homogenous one) on the one hand, and immigrants coming from outside this nation state society on the other. This conception of the basic problem owes its strength not only to functionalist tradition—defining integration as a major problem to be researched—but also to methodological nationalism: integration is always thought of as being established, less problematical, and less fragile among those belonging to the national people.

Third, immigrants destroy the isomorphism between people and group of solidarity. They are not meant to be part of the system of social security that the national community has developed in New Deals and Beveridge Plans, because they come 'from outside' into the national space of solidarity. On the other hand, they cannot be completely excluded from the emerging welfare systems, because these are historically and institutionally tied to the work process for which immigrants were recruited (cf. Bommes and Halfmann 1994). Due to this tension, immigrants' integration into the welfare systems had a touch of illegitimacy and abuse. A whole branch of post-war immigration studies, especially in Europe, has studied the implications of immigration for

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national welfare systems, analysed immigrant unemployment, traced the dynamics of slum development and ghettoisation, and tried to understand the culture of poverty in which immigrants were thought of being trapped. Not being member of the national family, the immigrant was seen as prone to becoming a marginal man exposed to the risks of loneliness and starvation. In quantitative studies, following the logic of methodological nationalism, immigrants have usually been compared to 'national means' of income, of children per family, of percentages of unemployment and welfare dependence, taking for granted that this would be the adequate unit of comparison (cf. Vertovec's [1999] review of studies on 'social cohesion'). They are rarely compared to sectors of a national population which they resemble in terms of income or education. However, when such comparisons are made, immigrants often do better than the non-immigrant population (cf. Rumbaut and Cornelius 1995 for the US, Bolzmann et al. 2000 for Switzerland).

Fourth, in the eyes of nation state builders and social scientists alike, every move across national frontiers becomes an exception to the rule of sedentariness within the boundaries of the nation state. The exceptionality of cross-border settlement is, evidently enough, linked to the territorialisation of the nationalist imaginary and the parallel emergence of the container model of society discussed above. A major branch of post-war migration studies and a whole series of specialised research institutes have developed, analysing such cross-border movements, the push-and-pull mechanisms driving them, the networks of chain-migration sustaining them, and the role of social and cultural capital in limiting and directing them.

Only the migration of non-citizens is in the focus of this body of literature, not the 'return' migration of co-nationals such as the *Aussiedler* (usually translated as 'ethnic Germans') in Germany. Until 1989, the *Aussiedler* were studied by folklorists and historians—not by migration specialists who focused exclusively on the immigration of *Ausländer* (foreigners). And only cross-national migration is the object of migration studies. 'Internal' migration of citizens from one city to another, or from desindustrialising areas to a booming metropolis, is not considered a problem deserving special attention and either goes completely unnoticed or is seen as a part of the study of urbanisation processes and thus dealt with in academic fields separated from migration studies (2). Cross-border migration, by contrast, appear as an anomaly, a

(2) It is interesting to note that this holds true only for later periods in the history of the social sciences when the nation building pro- jects had largely been achieved. At earlier epochs, mirroring the lack of barriers to migration and the open citizenship regimes,

problematic exception to the rule of people staying where they 'belong', that is, to 'their' nation state. Post-war migration studies thus naturalised this belonging, moving it into the background of social science reasoning and transforming it into one of its non-questionable axioms.

These four points make it clear how much migration studies are a child of the post-war era, when nation states had reached their zenith of power to direct, limit and influence both migratory movements and social science thinking about these movements. Describing immigrants as potential security risks, as culturally others, as socially marginal and as an exception to the rule of territorial confinement, post-war social sciences mirrored and to a certain degree also legitimised the project of nation state building aiming at establishing a sovereign citizenry, a homogenous nation, a community of solidarity, and a territorially bounded state.

3. Beyond methodological nationalism?
The 'discovery' of transnational communities

The contemporary period has transformed migration studies with the emergence of a transnational paradigm. When the Cold War ended, some of the barriers of methodological nationalism were lifted. Scholars in a number of fields, together with political leaders and journalists, began to announce that the world was becoming qualitatively different and applied the term globalisation to what they were observing, fascinated by new flows of people, ideas, objects and capital across the dividing lines of previous decades.

Working independently of each other on the East Coast and West Coast of the US, anthropologists and ethnographically inclined sociologists began to posit that a new form of migration was to be observed, demanding new conceptual tools such as transnationalism (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc 1992: 1; see also Glick Schiller and

researchers did not yet systematically distinguish between internal and international migration. E. G. Ravenstein (1889), in the first systematic analysis of migration, treated all movements of people across the terrain as part of a single phenomenon, largely determined by the distribution of economic opportunities over physical space. He found that international migration followed the same 'laws' as international migration. More precisely, he maintained that in all cases migration consisted of movements from country to town and from poorer to richer areas (*ibid.* 1889: 286*ff.*). The fact that in international migration migrants crossed a national boundary caused inconvenience for the researcher compiling statistics but did *not* produce different social dynamics.

Fouron 1991; Kearney 1991; Rouse 1992; Goldring 1996; Guarnizo 1997; Levitt 1997). Later, mainstream sociology joined the trend and forcefully contributed to its formulation and expansion (cf. Portes et al. 1999). Even before the first statements about transnational migration had been formulated, new data describing the transnational ties among recent migrants was presented, but methodological nationalism kept scholars from fully appreciating and theorizing what they were seeing (Chaney 1979; Gonzalez 1988).

This first wave of transnational studies produced a set of problematic assumptions. First of all, scholars tended to see communications technology—computers, telephones, televisions, communication satellites and other electronic innovations—as the motor of change. The power of the new technology combined with the post-modern insistence on the stability of the past and the fluidity of the present led to a rather crude technological determinism strangely contrasting with the otherwise constructivist impetus of much of this literature. This impeded discussion of the broader social and economic forces past and present, which had shaped the transnational ties that linked the globe together. In addition, the impact of past technologies, which facilitated previous leaps in global integration—including the steamship, the telegraph, telephone and radio—were dismissed.

Second, the first wave of transnational studies tended to speak of globalisation in terms of an epochal turn, characterizing the previous historical period as one in which our units of analysis were bounded and people lived within these bounded units of tribe, ethnic group and state. Many scholars asserted that the increase in transborder activity signalled the demise of the nation-state as both a centre of power and as a potent source of identity politics (Kearney 1991). The past was static, the present was fluid; the past contained homogenous cultures while we now lived in a world of hybridity and complexity.

A second wave of global studies has appeared that addresses some of the misconceptions of the first years. First, it is now generally acknowledged that globalisation is not in itself a new phenomenon (Wimmer 2001a; Went 2000). While there are significant changes in the world since the end of the Cold War, we are at the same time also experiencing a paradigm shift. We have been able to begin to analyse and discuss transnational migration because we have changed the lens through which we perceive and analyse the world, putting aside some of the preconceptions of methodological nationalism.

Raising questions about how new globalisation and transnationalism really are, this more sophisticated scholarship is disentangling long term

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trends, periodic recurrences, and novel occurrences in the historical development of global migration (Glick Schiller 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Panitch 1997, 2000; Smith 1997). Some scholars began to argue that the world was actually more globally integrated in the 19th century than it is now or that we are just now returning to the kind of integration, including the levels of migration movements, the world experienced before the Great War (see Jessop 1999 for a summary of this debate). Similarly, after the initial celebrations of the novelty of diasporic identities, more careful scholarship on the historical depth of diasporic experiences started to emerge (Cohen 1997; Morawska, forthcoming; Foner 1997, 2001). It allows us to evaluate the transnational practices out of which cultures such as those in the Caribbean and post-colonial societies from India to Samoa emerged.

Second, much more attention is now being paid to the continuing role of the nation state in transnational processes. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the nation-state has been rather more successful in weathering the storms of post-socialism, post-colonialism and globalisation than was assumed in the early days of globalisation research (Panitch 2000; Sassen 1996, 2001). Scholars also began to look at the past and contemporary role of nation-states in fostering continuing ties with populations settled abroad, thus relativising earlier statements about the 'decline of the nation state' (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Guarnizo 1997, 1998; Guarnizo and Diaz 1999; Smith 1998; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Mahler 1998; Glick Schiller 1999a, 1999b, 1999c).

Thus, a number of issues about transnational migration not addressed during previous periods are now at the centre of research and theory. However, this does not mean that migration research has broken free from the influence of methodological nationalism. We conclude this section with some areas where methodological nationalism is still visible.

Diaspora studies often trace dispersed populations no matter where they have settled, focusing on the dynamics of interconnection, nostalgia and memory relating a particular population to a particular homeland. No longer confined to a territorially limited entity, the nation is extending across different terrains and places but nevertheless imagined as an organic, integrated whole. In this genre, nation-state building processes that impinge upon diasporic populations in its various locations are usually overlooked. If the relationship between the diaspora and nation-state building is examined, it is uniquely and exclusively in terms of the diaspora's own homeland and its politics. Thus, the image and analytical techniques associated with describing a bounded national container society are reproduced, albeit in a different form.

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Similar points could be made with regard to the study of 'transnational communities'. Here many of the critiques of the past errors of community studies or, on a more general level, of 'groupist thinking' (Rogers Brubaker) apply. The very insistence on the term community to describe sets of possibly overlapping but not necessarily concomitant networks prior to investigating whether they are bounded by ethnicity and represented by a collective memory reflects the preference for closure and boundedness. Much of transnational studies overstates the internal homogeneity and boundedness of transnational communities (Wimmer 2002b), overestimates the importance for immigrants, economic life (Portes et al. 2001), overlooks the importance of cross-community interactions as well as the internal divisions of class, gender, region and politics, and is conceptually blind for those cases where no transnational communities form among migrants or where existing ones cease to be. Finally, the different meanings of a particular transnational identity are usually precluded, meanings which take actors in very different political directions and alliances. In short, approaching migrant transnational social fields and networks as communities tends to reify and essentialise these communities in a similar way that previous approaches reified national communities or the Redfield school essentialised peasant communities.

Strangely enough, the neo-communitarianism of transnationalism studies also reproduces the standard image of a world divided into nations and thus naturalises this vision of the world in new forms. Trans-national semantically refers us to the non-trans-national or simply to the national as the entity that is crossed or superseded. Migrants are no longer uprooted or climbing up the assimilative ladder to the national middle classes, but they are still the others, foreign and alien to the nationally bounded society.

The remains of methodological nationalism that still mark the research on 'transnational communities' has precluded, as was the case with classical assimilation theory, the examination of simultaneity, i.e. the ability of migrants to incorporate simultaneously in more than one social context. Studies that examine the simultaneous incorporation of migrants into multiple social fields, that may include but are not delimited to the localities where they settle and from which they came, could carry us beyond a reified and essentialised concept of community and into the study of migrants and non-migrants within open social fields of differential power (see Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc 1992; Nyiri 1999; Ong 1999).

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Building from the possibility—albeit not universality—of simultaneous incorporation, a reformulation, of our concept of society may be envisaged. In this reformulation, nation states remain significant as repositories of political power but are not coterminous with the domain of social relations that may extend transnationally. From this view, concepts such as 'transnational social spaces' (Faist 2000) or 'transnational social formations' (Guranizo 1997; Landolt 2001) may prove to be more adequate in describing simultaneous incorporation than the notion of a transnational community.

Perhaps even more importantly, we should keep in mind what the 'new' assimilation theory has forcefully reminded us: that simultaneous incorporation is just one of the possible outcomes of immigrants' strategies of survival, while complete assimilation as well as the formation of ethnic enclaves with no home ties are two other variants (Brubaker 2002; Wimmer 2002b; Zhou 1997). It is one of the major tasks of future research to determine the conditions under which these different social forms will develop and transform.

4. *Between Scylla and Charybdis: identifying a route for future research*

Going beyond methodological nationalism in the study of contemporary migration may thus require more than a focus on transnational communities instead of the nation and its immigrants. In order to escape the magnetism of established methodologies, ways of defining the object of analysis and algorhythms for solving empirical problems, we may have to develop (or re-discover?) analytical tools and concepts not coloured by the self-evidence of a world ordered into nation states. This is what we perceive, together with many other current observers of the social sciences, as the major task lying ahead of us. We are certainly not able to offer such a set of analytical tools here.

Rather, it was one aim of this paper to describe with more precision the obstacles to be overcome on this road. Knowing more about how our perceptions of migration, including some of the recent work on transnationalism, have been shaped by the nation-state building project of the modern world is an important step. It may prevent us from running, enthusiastically searching for newness, along the most promising looking road, without knowing exactly how we got to the crossroad where we actually find ourselves. Looking back may help us to identify the paths that will bring us right back to where we now stand.

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We described three modes of methodological nationalism that have shaped the social science programme: ignoring, naturalisation and territorial limitation, and we have identified the ways in which these have influenced mainstream migration studies. Describing immigrants as political security risks, as culturally others, as socially marginal and as an exception to the rule of territorial confinement, migration studies have faithfully mirrored the nationalist image of normal life.

Having called for new conceptual tools for understanding the social world, a word of caution may well be needed here. It would certainly be naive to think that we will ever develop a theoretical language not profoundly influenced by the social and political forces around us—most of us have given up the dream of reaching an Archimedean point of objectivity. Equally naive would be to maintain that methodological nationalism was inhibiting a 'true' understanding of the world now to be discovered. The days when such a mirror concept of reality and scientific description still hold are also gone.

While we are still striving for an adequate understanding of what is happening nowadays, we can already predict that the new concepts eventually emerging will necessarily again limit and shape our perspective, and again force us to overlook some developments and overemphasise others. To understand means to reduce complexity. Going beyond this truism, however, the task is to determine what reductions of complexity will make best sense of the contemporary world and which ones are leaving out too many tones and voices, transforming them into 'noise'. While we have devoted the body of this paper to a description of the Charybdis of methodological nationalism, we should like to end it with a hint to the Scylla of methodological fluidism.

This is where much contemporary theory currently seems headed. Where there were fixed boundaries, everything is now equally and immediately interconnected. Structures are replaced with fluidity. Sedentariness is replaced with movement. While the immigrant used to be portrayed as the marginal exception to the rule of staying in one's national home, the transnational life of migrants constantly on the move is now the prototype of human condition. Territorial boundedness of analysis has been overcome by a spiralling rhetoric of deterritorialiation and delocalisation. Contemporary social theory, such as the works of Urry (2000) or Papastergiadis (2000) trenchantly criticised by Favell (2001), seems to be breathlessly hunting after the signifiers shooting around the globe, driven by new techniques of communication and globalised markets.

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They tend to forget that production for these markets is embedded in concrete geographical locations and takes place within bounded, not necessarily territorially limited social environments (Sassen 2001). Stuart Hall's (1989) dramatic statement that 'we are all migrants now' is no more true in 2002 than it was in 1989 when he issued his challenge to think beyond the opposition of citizens with stable national cultures and migrants with their contested identities. Not only does it remain true that the overwhelming majority of the people of the world have not migrated across national boundaries but it is also true that despite global media and rapid flows of information, national identities remain salient in many localities around the world.

Nor can we blithely take up the perspective of cosmopolitanism, either as a description of the post-national stage of identity or as a political goal to be reached (cf. Beck 2000). Such a stance may be helpful for a deconstruction of nationalism, taking a very different tack than previous discussions of the invention or imagination of community. But it does not acknowledge that nationalism is a powerful signifier that continues to make sense for different actors with different purposes and political implications (Friedman 1996; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001a, 2001b). Having hinted at the Scylla of fluidism and of the rhetorics of cosmopolitanism, the challenge remains to develop a set of concepts that opens up new horizons for our understanding of past and contemporary migration.

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