

Toward a New Critical Theory with a Cosmopolitan Intent

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In this article I want to outline an argument for a New Critical Theory with a cosmopolitan intent. Its main purpose is to undermine one of the most powerful beliefs of our time concerning society and politics. This belief is the notion that “modern society” and “modern politics” are to be understood as society and politics organized around the nation-state, equating society with the national imagination of society. There are two aspects to this body of beliefs: what I call the “national perspective” (or “national gaze”) of social actors, and the “methodological nationalism” of scientific observers. The distinction between these two perspectives is important because there is *no* logical co-implication between them, only an interconnected genesis and history.

1. Methodological Nationalism and its Critique

Methodological nationalism takes the following premises for granted: it equates societies with nation-state societies, and sees states and their governments as the cornerstones of social-scientific analysis. It assumes that humanity is naturally divided into a limited number of nations, which internally organize themselves as nation-states and externally set boundaries to distinguish themselves from other nation-states. And it goes further: this outer delimitation as well as the competition between nation-states represent the most fundamental categories of political organization.

Much social science assumes the coincidence of social boundaries with state boundaries, believing that social action occurs primarily within, and only secondarily across, these divisions:

[Like] stamp collecting . . . social scientists collected distinctive national social forms. Japanese industrial relations, German national character, the American constitution, the British class system – not to mention the more exotic institutions of tribal societies – were the currency of social research. The core disciplines of the social sciences, whose intellectual traditions are reference points for each other and for other fields, were therefore *domesticated* – in the sense of being preoccupied not with Western and world civilization as wholes but with the ‘domestic’ forms of particular national societies.¹

Of course, from a sociological perspective the cosmopolitan question is not primarily the normative question of what a “cosmopolitan society,” “cosmopolitan

democracy,” “cosmopolitan state,” or regime *ought* to be. The question is: Is there a clear sociological alternative to the national mystification of societies and political order? Is there an *actually existing* cosmopolitanism, a reality of (re)attachment, multiple belongings, or belonging-at-a-distance? To belong or not to belong – *that* is the cosmopolitan question.

A sharp distinction should be made between *methodological* nationalism on the one hand and *normative* nationalism on the other. The former is linked to the social-scientific observer perspective, whereas the latter refers to the negotiation perspectives of political actors. In a normative sense, nationalism means that every nation has the right to self-determination within the frame of its cultural distinctiveness. Methodological nationalism assumes this normative claim as a socio-ontological given and simultaneously links it to the most important conflict and organization orientations of society and politics. These basic tenets have become the main perceptual grid of social science. Indeed, the social-scientific stance is rooted in the concept of nation-state. A nation-state outlook on society and politics, law, justice, and history governs the sociological imagination. To some extent, much of social science is a prisoner of the nation-state.

These premises also structure empirical research, for example, in the choice of statistical indicators, which are almost always exclusively national. A refutation of methodological nationalism from a strictly empirical viewpoint is therefore difficult, well nigh impossible, because so many statistical categories and research procedures are based on it.

The comparative analyses of societies, international relations, political theory, and a significant part of history and jurisprudence all essentially function on the basis of methodological nationalism. This is valid to the extent that the majority of positions in the contemporary social and political science debate over globalization can be systematically interpreted as transdisciplinary reflexes linked to methodological nationalism. It is therefore of historical importance for the future development of social science that this methodological nationalism, as well as the connected categories of perception and disciplinary organization, be theoretically, empirically, and organizationally reassessed.

What body of belief am I talking about? Methodological nationalism includes the following principles: (a) The *subordination* of society to state, which implies (b) that there is no singular, but only the *plural* of societies,² and (c) a *territorial* notion of societies with state-constructed *boundaries*, i.e., the territorial state as container of society. (d) There is a *circular determination* between state and society: the territorial nation-state is both the creator and guarantor of the individual citizenship rights and citizens organize themselves to influence and legitimate state actions. (e) Both states and societies are imagined and located within the *dichotomy of national and international*, which so far has been the foundation of the dominant ontology of politics and political theory. (f) The state as the guarantor of the social order provides the instruments and units for the collection of *statistics* about social and economic processes required by empirical social science. The

categories of the state census are the main operational categories of empirical social science. This is even true for most “global” data, which presuppose nation-state statistics and exclude transnational “networks,” “flows,” and “scapes.” (g) In membership and statistical representation, methodological nationalism operates on the either-or principle, excluding the possibility of both-and. But these oppositions – either “us” or “them,” either “in” or “out” – do not capture the reality of blurring boundaries between political, moral, and social communities and thus fail the ongoing experiment to create post-Westphalian transnational public spaces and citizens. Global transformations represent a meta-change that makes us displace *zombie-categories* with concepts of “inner globalization” or “cosmopolitization from within.” Zombie concepts are those that were appropriate to the period of methodological nationalism. They are not appropriate to the age of global ecological, economic, and terrorist threats. There is coming into being a new system in which everyday practices involve an exceptional level of cosmopolitan interdependences. Thus, forced cosmopolitanism represents no longer just an idea of reason (*Vernunft*) but has invaded, however misformed, politics, society and everyday practices.

Before one can engage in a critique of methodological nationalism, there is an epistemologically prior step: recognizing what Max Weber called *kulturelle Wertbeziehungen*, cultural value relationships. Weber argued that these are not “value judgments”; they are in fact necessary (there is no social science without cultural value relationships built into its point of view, questions, and frames of reference) cultural as well as scientific precommitments which fundamentally structure social and social-scientific perceptions of reality. So the critique of methodological nationalism is about the rights and wrongs of a historically specific *national* value relationship which the classics build into the sociological imagination. How can we recognize, criticize, and possibly replace it with an alternative “post-national imagination”?

There is, however, a problem with the word “methodological nationalism.” It can be thought of as a sort of prejudice, a “belief” or “attitude,” and therefore something that can be eliminated from modern enlightened thought in the same way we eliminate other attitudes such as racism, sexism, or religious bigotry. But the crucial point about methodological nationalism does not concern values and prejudices, but rather science, scholarship, and expert opinion. Methodological nationalism refers to a set of beliefs about empirical reality: statements mainstream social scientists, using highly sophisticated empirical research methods, accept as true, as propositions supported by “the facts.” Methodological nationalism is therefore a very complex thing. We have to ask, on what ground do we reflect upon and criticize methodological nationalism? And is there an alternative?

Of course, the critique of methodological nationalism should not be mistaken for the thesis of the end of the nation-state. Just as when criticizing methodological individualism one does not necessarily promote the end of the individual, nation-states (as all investigations have shown) will continue to thrive or will be transformed into transnational states. What, then, is the main point of the critique of

methodological nationalism? The decisive point is that *national organization as a structuring principle of societal and political action can no longer serve as a premise for the social-scientific observer perspective*. In order even to understand the trend toward renationalization or re-ethnification in the USA, western, or eastern Europe, one needs a cosmopolitan perspective. But the dissolution of the national *Wertbeziehung* of the social sciences is not only an analytical and empirical challenge; it is at the same time a normative and political issue as well. In this sense, social science can only respond to the challenge of a global civil society if it manages to overcome methodological nationalism, to raise empirically and theoretically fundamental questions within specialized fields of research, and thus to elaborate the foundations of a *cosmopolitan* social and political science.

Cosmopolitan social science entails the systematic breaking up of the process through which the national perspective of politics and society as well as the methodological nationalism of political science, sociology, history, and law confirm and strengthen each other in their definitions of reality. It thus also tackles (what had previously been *analytically* excluded as a sort of silent cartel of divided fundamental convictions) the various developmental versions of debounded politics and society, corresponding research questions and programs, the strategic expansions of the national and international political field, as well as basic transformations in the domain of state, politics, and society.

This paradigmatic reconstruction and redefinition of social science from a national to a cosmopolitan perspective can be understood as a “positive problem shift,”³ a broadening of horizons for social science research:

When politics and society are de-bounded, the consequence is that the labels ‘national’ and ‘international’ can no longer be separated. Considering the fact that to an increasing extent governance ‘takes place in debounded spaces,’ the increasingly problematic distinction – but which is typical of the field – between ‘domestic’ and ‘foreign’ politics, as ‘national governmental politics’ and ‘international relations,’ becomes definitely obsolete. Thus it is not only a matter of integrating national explanation factors in the analysis of international political processes, or of re-evaluating the international determinants of national political processes, as was pursued in numerous approaches over the past years. Rather, it is a matter of questioning the very separation between ‘inside’ and ‘outside.’⁴

In sum, traditional conceptualizations of terms and the construction of borders between the “national” and the “international,” domestic and foreign politics, or society and the state are less and less appropriate to tackling the challenges linked to the global age.

Let me point to one implication of this: the understanding of sovereignty in the national and cosmopolitan perspectives. From a national perspective, we find it easiest to think about globalization as a simple alternative to or negation of the modern state or system of states. This framing is often articulated as an opposition between *political realism* as an affirmation of the necessity of state interests

and *political idealism*, which celebrates the potential of some kind of universality, some global or human community.

The cosmopolitan perspective does not, like the national perspective, focus on the fall (or rise) of the nation-state in the global age. Instead, it is a new perspective on the whole global power game, redefining the state as one actor among others in a broader meta-game over the rules of world domestic politics (*Weltinnenpolitik*). The cosmopolitan perspective dismisses the either-or principle of realism: either the state exists, albeit only as an essential core, or it does not exist at all; either there is national sovereignty – a zero-sum game between national and international competence – or there is no sovereignty at all. From a cosmopolitan perspective, “realism” is a kind of political *irrealism* because it neglects the possibility and reality of a second “Great Transformation” of the global power game. We need to develop a concept of *cosmopolitan Realpolitik* to understand the positive-sum game of pooled sovereignties. In an era of global crises, national problems can only be solved through transnational/national cooperation and state networks.⁵

Thus, it becomes necessary to systematically raise the question of a paradigm shift characterized by the conceptual opposition of methodological nationalism and methodological cosmopolitanism.⁶ The horizon opened up by this distinction reveals a new global configuration. Previously, the national cosmos could be decomposed into a clear distinction between inside and outside. Between the two, the nation-state governed and order was established. In the internal experiential space, work, politics, law, social inequality, justice, and cultural identity were negotiated against the background of the nation, which was the guarantor of unitary collective action. In the external experiential field, the international realm, the corresponding concepts of “cultural pluralism” or “intercultural dialogue” developed. Cultural pluralism, by means of delimitation from and exclusion of the foreign, mirrored and crystallized national self-image. The national/international distinction

TABLE 1 *Paradigmatic Change from a National Perspective to a Cosmopolitan Social Science*

		Political action	
		National perspective	Cosmopolitan perspective
Political science	<i>Methodological nationalism</i>	Nation-state centered understanding of society and politics both in the political practice and science.	Globalization from within; under which conditions do actors change from a national to a cosmopolitan perspective?; actually existing cosmopolitanism.
	<i>Methodological cosmopolitanism</i>	Opening up of the nation-state centered society and politics, sociology and political science: New Critical Theory with a cosmopolitan intent; redefinition of the basic notions, frames of references from a cosmopolitan perspective.	The cosmopolitan society and its enemies: what do a cosmopolitan society, state and regime mean?

always represented more than a distinction, it actually functioned as a permanent self-fulfilling prophecy.

Against the background of cosmopolitan social science, it becomes suddenly obvious that it is neither possible to clearly distinguish between the national and the international, nor, in a similar way, to convincingly contrast homogeneous units. National spaces have become denationalized, so that the national is no longer national, just as the international is no longer international. This entails that the power stays of the nation-state are collapsing both from the inside and the outside, and that new realities are arising: a new mapping of space and time, new coordinates for the social and the political, which have to be theoretically and empirically researched and elaborated.⁷

However, the paradigmatic opposition between (inter)nationalism and cosmopolitanism does not establish a logical or temporal exclusivity, but an ambivalent transitional co-existence, a new concurrence of non-concurrents.

Social science must be re-established as a transnational science of the reality of denationalization, transnationalization, and “re-ethnification” in a global age – and this on the levels of concepts, theories, and methodologies as well as organizationally. This entails a re-examination of the fundamental concepts of “modern society.” *Household, family, class, social inequality, democracy, power, state, commerce, public, community, justice, law, history, and politics* must be released from the fetters of methodological nationalism, reconceptualized, and empirically established within the framework of a new cosmopolitan social and political science. So it would be hard to understate the scope of their task. But nevertheless it has to be taken up if the social sciences want to avoid becoming a museum of antiquated ideas.⁸

2. New Critical Theory of Social Inequalities from a Cosmopolitan Perspective

I would now like to address a theme, as well as a research area, which is central but has until now received little attention from the cosmopolitan perspective, in order to both test and illustrate the relevance of the New Critical Theory and its empirical claims by using a concrete example: the sociology of social inequalities. The report on the financial situation of developing countries published in March 2002 by the World Bank can be read as an official accusation of “Terre des Hommes” against the ignorance of wealthy countries. The falling prices of raw materials on the world market, commercial protectionism and the economic slump in industrialized states, and above all the decline of worldwide tourism after September 11 have all dramatically increased the destitution of the world’s poorest regions. The world has become a dangerously unequal place – even for the rich in western metropolises. For debt repayment alone, 200 billion dollars per year move from the South to the North. In parallel, the private capital investment flows to the South have shrunk for the fifth year in a row, settling below 1997

levels. While 1.2 billion people, almost a fifth of the world population, must make do with less than a dollar per day, state development aid has decreased 20 percent since 1990. How can one explain the contradiction between the growing poverty of ever increasing sections of the population and the growing ignorance about this problem?

In Germany, many members of the *Bundestag* (parliament) belong to the generation which 20 to 30 years ago pledged a form of “international solidarity”; they were active in Third World initiatives or fought against poverty and for the needs of “One World.” Now it appears that the policies of this generation have transformed Germany into one of the slowcoaches of development politics. Can this be explained by the inconsistency of politicians? Or is the neglect of global injustices structurally conditioned? Is there a principle that can account for how global inequalities grow while, from a sociological point of view, they are legitimized?

There are at least two possible answers to the question of what legitimates social inequality: the merit system and the nation-state principle. The first answer has been carefully elaborated and criticized; it derives from the self-understanding of the national perspective and is related to internal, intra-state inequalities. The second answer can be drawn from the frame of reference of the cosmopolitan perspective and is related to the “legitimization” of much greater inequalities between states. Thus, the bigger blind spots – and sources of error – of methodological nationalism linked to research on inequality will only be recognizable by means of a systematic switch from the national to the cosmopolitan perspective. It is only within the framework of such a new critical theory of social inequality that the *fundamental asymmetry of inequality perception – as embedded in the national viewpoint as well as in the social-science perspective – can be unraveled*. This is to stress that the “legitimatory system” of the nation-state rests on the fact that attention is exclusively focused on the inside, thereby banning global inequalities from the field of vision of the (relatively) privileged.

It makes sense to distinguish between *large* inequalities (which can further be divided into transnational, supranational, international, and global inequalities) and *small* inequalities. The “small” inequalities are those found within the nation-state. They appear large to the people or groups concerned for obvious reasons, but from a cosmopolitan perspective they are small. The merit system both points

TABLE 2 *Sociology of Social Inequalities in the Tension between the National and the Cosmopolitan Perspectives*

Matrix of social positions		
Legitimization	<i>large (global) inequalities</i>	<i>small (nation-state level) inequalities</i>
<i>national perspective</i>	irrelevant, non-existent	merit system
<i>cosmopolitan perspective</i>	nation-state principle: exclusion of the excluded	nation-state principles, which make global inequalities invisible

to intra-state inequalities and legitimizes them. The appropriate paradigm to describe this phenomenon is the written examination: people enter as equals but come out unequal (with differentiated positions in the hierarchy of credits). With the help of the merit system, for example, incomes can be both unequal and legitimate. In contrast, when we speak of the nation-state principle as a “legitimization” of social inequalities, we point out that the nation-state perspective, engrossed in national inequalities, effaces global inequalities – a form of legitimization through neglect. Large inequalities are thus invisible from the national perspective; they can both grow and be “legitimized” via a form of institutionalized irrelevance and unreality. How is this possible? Because the national perspective functions like a microscope. By focusing on small internal inequalities, the bigger global ones are left out. Thus, in this case, the thematization of small national inequalities legitimizes large inequalities.

The differentiation between “large” and “small” also refers to spaces of perception and population figures. The law of the nation-state exclusion of global inequalities is obviously also a case in point. The particularism of the nation-state does not necessarily exclude universal principles and perceptions. Nevertheless, it does appear that the nation-state perspective provides a “liberation” from the misery of the world. It functions according to the model of *double exclusion*: it excludes the excluded. It is surprising that the large inequalities suffered by humanity can be continuously legitimized through a silent complicity between state authority and the state-obsessed social sciences, by means of a form of organized non-perception. Global inequalities have grown – from 1960 to 2000, the 70 percent of the global income possessed by the richest 20 percent of the world population increased to 90 percent, whereas the 2.3 percent of the poorest decreased to approximately 1 percent. In the meantime, the unchanging nation-state viewpoint is confirmed behind its perceptual wall of predetermined irrelevance and unreality.

While the merit system enables a *positive* legitimization of small inequalities, the nation-state principle produces a *negative* “legitimization” of large inequalities. “Positive” legitimization means that the merit system validates a reflexive and reciprocal legitimization: social inequalities can in principle be tolerated by the underprivileged. In contrast, “negative” represents the legitimization of the nation-state principle: it is characterized by *non-reflexivity* and *non-reciprocity*, entailing that it cannot be tolerated by the underprivileged and the excluded. The nation-state principle searches for the justification of global inequalities in the dark. It is based on non-reflection, not on reflection, as in the case of the merit system. Thus, negative legitimization through institutionalized silence or averted looks cannot be legitimized; it precludes the acceptance of those whose acceptance is most needed: the poor, the humiliated, and the excluded. The nation-state does *not* legitimate global inequalities. Rather, the *non-legitimized* global inequalities are banned from the field of vision and *thereby* stabilized. Historically, this means that the European nation-state represents the institutionalized forgetting of

colonialism and imperialism, both of which fostered its development. What then does this negative “legitimization” through silence bring when faced with the growing permeability of boundaries? One can distinguish between four types of nation-state unreality construction:

First, I would like to mention the nation-state’s fragmentation of accountability for global inequalities: as long as there is no global jurisdiction and reporting institution to survey global inequalities, these will remain disintegrated into a motley pattern of nation-state inequalities. Because there are approximately 200 states, there are approximately 200 different frames for small social inequalities. But the sum of these recorded infra-state inequalities does not correspond to the larger global inequalities. In particular, national self-ascription and the endogenous causal suppositions linked to it contradict the cosmopolitan viewpoint, which stresses the fact that transnational interdependences, power relations and their “side-effects,” decision-making authorities, and causalities also contribute to the explanation of inequalities within nation-states.

The *South Commission Report* (1990) argues that “if humanity were a single nation-state, the current North-South split would transform it into a politically explosive, semi-feudal unit, the stability of which is threatened by internal conflicts.”⁹ This is both right and wrong: it points to the scale of global inequalities, but does not recognize that the nation-state world order structurally ignores, and therefore “legitimizes,” them.

The nation-state principle is the analytical key to understanding why the connection between globalization and poverty has been so seldom researched in the social sciences. As long as the national perspective reigns in political action as well as in social science analysis, poverty and wealth will continue to be localized in the national context as a matter of course. Even the possibility that the problematic consequences of globalization materialize in various historical contexts – in the shape of growing inequalities, declining incomes, overexploitation of natural resources, and eroding democracies – remains *analytically* excluded. Thus, as far as social science inequality research is concerned, the principle of nation-state fragmentation is linked to a major source of error: the danger of a *misguided “nation-state-oriented” conclusion*. Global or transnational interdependences, processes, power relations, and causalities simply fade away or are misinterpreted within the closed circle of a national perspective. The crucial point is that this mistake can be neither unraveled nor avoided using a national perspective; only a cosmopolitan outlook, only a cosmopolitan sociology which overcomes the national-universal imagination of mainstream sociology, can provide a way out of the deadlock.

The second principle is that *the perception of social inequalities presupposes equality norms*. Within the nation-state perspective, stability rests on the validity of national equality norms, be they culturally, ethnically, legally, or politically defined. The objectivity of global social inequalities is politically irrelevant as long as these inequalities remain in the shadow of institutionalized equality norms, like citizenship.¹⁰ Therefore, to the extent that national equality norms are

replaced by transnational or cosmopolitan ones, the urgency of politically legitimizing large existing inequalities increases. Within the national paradigm, what does this equality rest on in western welfare states? It rests on the formal equality of the citizens: income differences between men and women, places of residence, etc. do not endorse differentiated citizen status. All the individuals of a nation have the same rights and duties; differentiated citizenship status is unacceptable. This legally-sanctioned citizen equality corresponds to the guiding nation-state principle of cultural homogeneity (language, history, cultural traditions). The national principles of inclusion and exclusion thus determine and stabilize the perceptual boundaries of social inequalities.

This leads to a third principle, that of *the impossibility of comparing social inequalities between nation-states*. The “functional capacity” of the nation-state and the national perspective to legitimize global inequalities also rests on the fact that politicizing comparisons can only be completed *intranationally* and not *internationally*. Comparisons here again presuppose national equality norms. In that sense, income differences between, for example, Nigerians and Germans, South Americans and Finns, Russians and Chinese, Turks and Koreans – even in the case of similar qualifications and functions – can be very important. But the delegitimizing potential of these comparisons is only felt if they take place within a common perceptual framework of institutionalized equality. This can be achieved through belonging to a particular nation or belonging to a globally active corporation.

This leads to the interesting question of how far one can and will be able to legitimize the international wage differences within the European Union by means of the principle of incomparability. Another way of formulating the question could be how far – with growing European self-consciousness (and the institutionalization of European self-observation) – inequalities which were previously ignored because they were international will be perceived as *intranational* European inequalities and thus have to be legitimized. To the extent that these barriers enforcing the international incomparability of inequalities dissolve (for whatever reason), the states of the European Union – even when facing so-called “fixed” inequality relations – will probably experience considerable turbulence.

Nevertheless, the role of the nation-state is not confined to a so-called legitimization function within the system of global inequalities. The fourth principle can be summed up as follows: the “fading out phenomenon” legitimizes *inaction*, or rather it legitimizes those actions which increase large inequalities because so-called “*external*” effects, from the national perspective, fall into a form of pre-determined unreality or political irrelevance. Exclusively thematizing internal inequalities thus facilitates a global redistribution politics whereby risks are externalized, i.e., imposed on weaker developing or emerging countries and regions, while profits are maximized within the rich countries of the West. The latest example of this is how a trans-Atlantic “coalition of the unwilling” protected the most indefensible aspects of US and European protectionism in Cancún in summer 2003 against demands of Third World nations for free access to western markets.

While western politicians were busy extolling the fact that we had achieved a decade of unexpected peace and wealth, a growing number of countries were engulfed in debts, unemployment, and the decline of health, social services, and urgently needed infrastructures. What proves profitable for western corporations – the strict enforcement of deregulation, privatization, and flexibilization in developing countries – often proves a disaster for these countries. Just to cite an example: the World Bank, in its role as an extension of the G7 states, supported contracts with private energy suppliers in Indonesia and other countries. “These contracts obliged the public sector to buy great quantities of electricity at very high prices.” The international corporations pocketed the profits while the risks were imposed on the “anyway already” poor states:

The US Ministry of Finance and the World Bank became renowned for precisely this type of private commercial activity. That is already bad enough. But when the corrupt governments of these emerging economies were overthrown (cf. e.g. Suharto (Indonesia) in 1998...), the US administration put the new governments under pressure to honour the contracts, instead of releasing them from their obligation to pay or at least renegotiating conditions. Indeed, there is a long list of unfair contracts, the honoring of which western governments achieved by exerting pressure through oppression.¹¹

To sum up these principles: the nation-state world order fragments global inequalities, national equality norms exclude global inequalities, and intranational inequality comparisons ensure international incomparability. The predetermined irrelevance of large inequalities enables powerful and wealthy nation-states to burden poor states with the risks entailed by their decisions. Additionally, these decisions are stabilized because the scope of action of these rich nation-states is confirmed and strengthened by the methodological nationalism of their social sciences. The inequality research based on this perspective greatly reinforces national myopia; it confines both itself and its object of research within the framework of a nation-state “inborn science.” What is normally seen as problematic from a scientific point of view, i.e., research on one’s self, is extolled here as a methodological principle. At best, the autism entailed by the national perspective is extended into a comparative autism in international comparison. But this comparative methodological nationalism remains bound by methodological nationalism. The nation-state is a state of mind. Walls hindering perception are erected and fostered, and they are justified and cemented thanks to the knowledge produced by social science that bases itself on methodological nationalism.

However, this social and social-scientific creation, i.e., the unreality of growing global inequalities, is becoming increasingly problematic:

- The mistakes of the national perspective are recognizable to the extent that boundaries have become permeable and interdependences, which transcend all borders, are growing exponentially. One can illustrate this point by mentioning

the obvious contradictions of restrictive immigration politics. On the one hand, the rich northern countries are currently plagued by a spectacular demographic decline, entailing the known consequences of aging populations, jeopardizing pension and health systems, and bringing political conservatism. On the other hand, these very countries are busy building ramparts to ward off feared and real immigration flows from the poorer South. At the same time, military, economic, and political interdependences are growing worldwide, which entail new flows of migrants and refugees. Every measure in this field is doomed: it leads to foreseeable side-effects and often proves utterly counterproductive. Thus, in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the political ambition of controlling migration flows, especially in the US but also in Europe, has been strengthened and sharpened. But the associated reduction of civil liberties undermines the necessary readiness to authorize more immigration, which alone would enable the curbing of falling demographic curves and the rejuvenation of the population.

- Additionally, the national perspective is thrown into question by the inner globalization of nation-states as experiential spaces. Human rights are increasingly detached from citizenship status and are no longer bound by national contexts. Good examples of this trend are international education curricula, the growing number of binational marriages, as well as increasing transnational work and private connections. Finally, the national perspective is imperiled by the growing mobility of communication, information, cash flows, risks, products, and services. Even indigenous groups who had remained immobile are being experientially transnationalized through mass communication, publicity, etc.¹² Moreover, supranational institutions such as the World Bank, UNESCO, and various NGOs systematically provide data which make large inequalities visible worldwide, throwing the mechanisms of the national unreality-making process into question.¹³
- The mistakes of the national perspective are recognizable because of new and increasingly important ways of differentiating between inclusion and exclusion. Increasingly, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion no longer follow the classifications into classes and strata which end at the national border – a feature typical of the nation-state. New patterns of inclusion and exclusion are developing along the lines of, for instance, (a) supranational trade agreements (European Union, NAFTA, etc.), (b) diaspora cultures based on ascriptive characteristics (e.g., Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic"), or (c) the conditions of everyday life in *global cities* (cf. the analyses of Saskia Sassen, Manuel Castells, Martin Albrow, John Eade, Micheal Dürschmidt, and Rüdiger Korf). In these cases, the arguments with which the national perspective is defended also break down.

Garret Hardin, in his book *Living on a Lifeboat* (1974), provided an early and famous defense of the national perspective and critique of the cosmopolitan outlook. He compared nation-states with diversely equipped lifeboats, arguing

that every one of these boats is free to offer a seat to the many survivors who are struggling against the wild sea. But this possibility cannot be a duty, since the taking on of castaways disregards the very security regulations of the lifeboat, thus endangering all the passengers on board.

This “lifeboat ethics” (“the-boat-is-full”) argument, which is still very effective today, is especially inappropriate because the nation-state lifeboats suggested by the national perspective have become fewer and fewer. Current post- and transnational inequalities and their causes are misinterpreted. It is primarily therefore the uncovering of the national perspective’s misdiagnosis – and not a moral critique – which constitutes the essence of the cosmopolitan outlook and substantiates its superiority.

- The mistakes of methodological nationalism are also recognizable to the extent that the distinction between large and small inequalities – or, to express it differently, between the cosmopolitan and national perspectives – have themselves become questionable. We are increasingly confronted with an *internationalization of national models of inequalities*. Competition within and between national spaces increases along with the permeability of national boundaries. Correspondingly, globalization’s winners and losers are increasingly distributed according to production sectors that are either shielded from the market or exposed to it. Last but not least, the nebulous concept of “globalization” is often used in the *struggle between national and transnational elites*, who fight over positions and resources *within* national power spaces.
- Finally, the view-obstructing walls are also disintegrating in relation to the international situation. At least since the terrorist attacks, it has become more difficult to exclude the excluded: the increasing poverty of the world population is also perceived as a problem of the wealthy western countries, though the practical consequences of this remain to be defined. The danger of terrorism, which defies national borders, also abrogates the walls of nation-state vision, behind which global inequalities continue to grow menacingly.

There is no doubt that these developments overstrain nation-states. Not only do they not possess appropriate capabilities to intervene, they do not even possess the necessary observation capacities. Hence the central paradox of a new cosmopolitan orientation can be – self-critically, of course – justified. To the extent that the boundaries between large and small inequalities become more permeable and no longer correspond to national borders, the mental wall, the institutionalized non-perception of large inequalities, is further buttressed. Why? Because it is only thus that the growing asymmetry between intervention demands addressed to states and the actual intervention possibilities of these states can be bridged.

Conversely, it can be deduced that if the nation-state “legitimizes” global inequalities according to the Brechtian principle “because we don’t see those who

are in the dark,” this legitimization breaks down with the “cosmopolitization” of the state. The cosmopolitan state, which (however selectively) integrates cultural others, unleashes – even in the most optimal case of stable inequalities – an avalanche of legitimation problems as a side-effect. Why? For the simple reason that it abolishes the boundaries of the incomparability of social inequalities. With cosmopolitization, however, the seduction and possibilities of re-ethnification and renationalization of both society and politics increase. Precisely because boundaries are no longer fixed, the mental wall which hinders perception is cemented anew.

Can one or must one say now whether the nation-state principle is an achievement or a trap? Whatever the answer, it is clear that the non-reflective unity between the state and the social sciences’ ability to make global inequalities invisible affects political and scientific actors in contrasting ways. Whether or not the national perspective can be attributed to the “functional performance” of the nation-state, it perverts the social sciences, which are trapped in an increasingly obvious contradiction with their scientific mission and ethics. Indeed, they base themselves (often without noticing and unintentionally) on the generation of unreality within reality. The silence of social science concepts on the subject of global inequalities is a scandal.

In this new era, a new critical theory with a cosmopolitan intent plays a key role. It must break through the fixed walls of categories and research routines of the methodological nationalism used by social sciences, in order, for example, to shift the legitimatory role of the nation-state in the system of large equalities back into the field of vision. The established *infranational* maps of social inequalities are elegant, detailed, and generally thought to be sufficient to politically manage the potential agitation of the more privileged part of the world population. But the dragons of large, unknown, completely inadequately researched inequalities are no longer just decorative motifs which adorn the borders. The nation-state belief and the national narratives which dominate both public commentaries and academic research can no longer be overlooked or ignored. At least since the September 11 terrorist attacks, it has become clear to many people that a glance through the perceptual wall which separates small inequalities from larger ones can resemble a look into the barrel of a gun.

Finally, the new critical theory is also a self-critical theory. The cosmopolitan viewpoint first of all detects, linked to various realities, the *chasms* that threaten the beginning of the twenty-first century. The new critical theory investigates the *contradictions, dilemmas, and unseen and unintended side-effects* of a modernity which is becoming increasingly cosmopolitan and draws its critical power from the tension between political self-description and the observation of the social sciences. The main thesis is then that *the cosmopolitan perspective opens up negotiation spaces and strategies which the national viewpoint precludes*. This interpretation becomes more plausible when we consider that the negotiation space the cosmopolitan viewpoint opens up contradicts the absence of alternatives,

which, within the national viewpoint, is diagnosed both by political actors and the social sciences.

In this respect, one can differentiate between four large tasks, which remain to be substantiated by the new critical theory:

- (a) revealing and naming *the forms and strategies used to render cosmopolitan realities invisible*;
- (b) *criticizing national circularity*, i.e., uncovering the fact that neither the nationalization nor the ethnification of negotiation perspectives can justify the methodological nationalism of the social sciences;
- (c) overcoming the ahistorical self-perpetuation of social science concepts and research routines by fostering the creation of alternative concepts and research strategies; and
- (d) stimulating and contributing to the re-imagination of the political, i.e., marking and experimenting with the difference between the national viewpoint of political actors and the cosmopolitan perspective of the political and social sciences.

In debates about globalization, the main point does not revolve around the meaning of the nation-state and how its sovereignty has been subordinated, but rather focuses on gaining a new cosmopolitan perspective on the global power field, pushing new actors and actor networks, power potentials, strategies, and forms of organization of debounded politics into the field of vision. Thus, the cosmopolitan critique of the politics and political science centered on and buttressed by the nation-state from the standpoint of a new critical theory is empirically and politically central.

NOTES

This and other arguments are developed extensively in my book *Macht und Gegenmacht im globalen Zeitalter. Neue weltpolitische Ökonomie* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2002); forthcoming with Polity Press as *Power in the Global Age*.

1. M. Shaw, *Theory of the Global State: Globality as Unfinished Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

2. Excluding, for example, the opposite notion of Niklas Luhmann, who argues that there is only *one* society, "world society."

3. I. Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," in Lakatos and A. Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

4. E. Grande and T. Risse, "Bridging the Gap. Konzeptionelle Anforderungen an die politikwissenschaftliche Analyse von Globalisierungsprozessen," *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehung* 2 (2000): 235–67.

5. Beck, *Macht und Gegenmacht im globalen Zeitalter*.

6. Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies," *Theory, Culture & Society* 19, no. 1–2 (2002): 17–45; "The Terrorist Threat: World Risk Society Revisited," *Theory, Culture & Society* 19, no. 4 (2002): 39–57; "The Cosmopolitan Perspective: Sociology of the Second Age of Modernity,"

The British Journal of Sociology 51, no. 1 (2000): 79–107; “Understanding the Real Europe,” *Dissent* (Summer 2003); *Der kosmopolitische Black* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2004, forthcoming).

7. This is the research agenda of the ‘Reflexive Modernization’ Research Centre at Munich University; see U. Beck, W. Bonß, and C. Lau, “The Theory of Reflexive Modernization : Problematic, Hypotheses and Research Programme,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 20, no. 2 (2003): 1–34.

8. *Conversations with Ulrich Beck* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).

9. Quoted in R. Falk, *Humane Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), 50.

10. R. Stichweh, *Die Weltgesellschaft. Soziologische Analysen* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2000).

11. J. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 2002), 38ff.

12. Cf. the empirical data in M. Beisheim and M. Zürn, *Im Zeitalter der Globalisierung? Thesen und Daten zur gesellschaftlichen und politischen Denationalisierung* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1999); D. Held, A. McGrew, D. Goldblatt, and J. Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

13. Institutions and organizations focusing on a form of “cosmopolitan” social science research have a long history, and they have competed with the “self-confirmation circle” of nation-state data and knowledge production. First of all, the scientific ethos has based itself on the higher quality of nation-state data. In parallel, one witnesses, along with the feared “cosmopolitan turn,” the return of either metaphysics or non-scientific perspectives, and often both, into the centre of academic social science. Furthermore, methodological nationalism acquires its superiority from the prevalent conviction of philosophy and political theory that western values – democracy, the rule of law, social justice – are only possible in the shapes and contexts provided by the nation-state. This leads to the conclusion that the cosmopolitan opening betrays and endangers the democratic ethos.

In both these scenarios, the major mistake is based on two kinds of neglect. On the one hand, the interpretations of the classical researchers and their nation-state premises have been dehistoricized and absolutized. Lauding the classical researchers masks mental sterility when it reduces one to copyist – a longstanding tendency. On the other hand, one reproduces the mistake (according to the old principle of „es darf nicht sein, was nicht sein soll“ of sacrificing scientific curiosity to institutionalized value convictions. Even the most rigorous data from the methodological point of view can be blind and lead to our being overwhelmed by the cosmopolitan reality.