



## Chapter 3

# THE ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL INEQUALITY: FROM NATIONAL TO COSMOPOLITAN PERSPECTIVE

Ulrich Beck

In order to analyse the dynamics of global civil society (global politics, global capital, global culture, global inequalities), we need a methodological shift from the dominant national perspective to a cosmopolitan perspective. A cosmopolitan frame of reference calls into question 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 nation state organised society and nation state organised politics; in other words, the concept of society is identified with the national imagination of society. When this belief is held by social actors, I call it 'national perspective'; when it is held by scientific observers, I call it 'methodological nationalism'. This distinction between the perspective of a social actor and that of the social scientist is important because there is *no* logical connection between the two, only a common origin.

## The Principles of Methodological Nationalism

Methodological nationalism equates societies with nation-states societies and sees states and their governments as the cornerstones of social science analysis. It assumes that humanity is naturally divided into a limited number of nations which organise themselves internally as nation-states and set external boundaries to distinguish themselves from other nation-states. It goes even further: this outer delimitation as well as the competition between nation-states represents the most fundamental category of political organisation. Much social science assumes the coincidence of social boundaries with state boundaries, thus presupposing that social action occurs primarily within, and secondarily across, these divisions.

From a social science perspective, the cosmopolitan question is not primarily normative; that is to say, it is not what a 'cosmopolitan society', 'cosmopolitan democracy', 'cosmopolitan state' or regime ought to be. Rather it is whether there is a

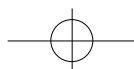
clear sociological alternative to the national mystification of societies and political order. Is there an *actually existing* cosmopolitanism, a reality of (re)attachment, multiple belongings or belonging from a distance? In fact, to belong or not to belong: that is the cosmopolitan question (Favell 1999; Beck 2002). Is global civil society part of this reality?

A sharp distinction should be made between *methodological nationalism* and *normative nationalism*. The former is linked to the perspective of the social sciences observer whereas the latter refers to the perspective of political actors. Normative nationalism holds that every nation has the right to determine itself within the frame of its cultural distinctiveness. Methodological nationalism assumes this normative claim as a given and simultaneously defines the conflicts and institutions of society and politics in these terms. These basic tenets have become the main grid through which social scientists see the world.

Indeed the social scientist's stance is rooted in the concept of the nation state, his or her sociological imagination dominated by a nation-state outlook on society, politics, law, justice and history. Social scientists are, to a large degree, prisoners of the nation-state.

These premises also structure empirical research; for example, statistical indicators are almost always exclusively national. A refutation of methodological nationalism from a strictly empirical viewpoint is therefore difficult, indeed nigh impossible, because many statistical categories and processes of investigation are based upon it.

Comparative analyses of societies, international relations, political theory, a significant part of history, and jurisprudence are all essentially based on methodological nationalism. Indeed, most positions in the contemporary social and political science debate over globalisation can arguably be systematically interpreted as trans-disciplinary reflexes linked to methodological nationalism. It is therefore very important for the future development of social science that methodological nationalism,



as well as the associated categories of perception and institutional discipline, be theoretically, empirically, and organisationally dissected and reassessed.

Methodological nationalism includes the following principles:

- 1 the *subordination* of society to the state; which implies
- 2 that there is no singular but only the *plural* of societies, in contrast to Niklas Luhmann's (2002) argument that there is only *one* society, that is 'world society';
- 3 a *territorial* notion of societies with state-constructed *boundaries*, that is, the territorial state as container of society;
- 4 the principle of reciprocal *determination* between state and society: the territorial nation-state is both creator and guarantor of individual citizenship rights, and citizens organise themselves to influence and legitimise state actions;
- 5 both states and societies are imagined and located within the *dichotomy-between the national and the international*, which up to now has been the foundation of the dominant ontology of politics and political theory;
- 6 the state as the guarantor of the social order provides the instruments and units for the collection of *statistics* about social and economic processes that empirical social science requires; indeed, the categories of the state census have come to be the main operational categories of empirical social science, and this is true even for most 'global' data, which are based on nation-state statistics and exclude transnational 'networks', 'flows', and 'scapes';
- 7 in membership and statistical representation methodological nationalism operates on the either-or principle, excluding the as-well-as principle: either 'us' or 'them', either 'in' or 'out'.

There is, however, a problem with the term 'methodological nationalism'. It can be thought of as a sort of prejudice, a 'belief', an 'attitude', and therefore something that can be eliminated from modern enlightened thought in the same way that we eliminate other attitudes such as racism, sexism, or religious bigotry. But the crucial point of methodological nationalism is that it is not a matter of values and prejudices, but rather of science and

scholarship and informed expert opinion. To be precise, methodological nationalism refers to a set of beliefs that are statements about empirical reality, statements that mainstream social scientists, using highly sophisticated empirical research methods, accept as true, as propositions supported by 'the facts'. Methodological nationalism is therefore very difficult to understand. We have to ask on what grounds we reflect upon and criticise methodological nationalism. And is there an alternative? Why should one accept it?

### The Cosmopolitan Perspective

The critique of methodological nationalism should not be mistaken for the thesis about the end of the nation-state. Nor is it necessarily the case that in criticising methodological nationalism one is promoting the elimination of the nation. 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 organisation as a structuring principle of societal and political action can no longer serve as a premise for the social science observer*. In order to understand even the re-nationalisation or re-ethnification trend in the USA or in western or eastern Europe one needs a cosmopolitan perspective. How to move away from this underlying methodological bias in the social sciences is primarily an analytical and empirical problem, but it is also a normative and political issue. In this sense, social science can react to the challenge of a global civil society only if it manages to overcome methodological nationalism and to raise empirically and theoretically fundamental questions within specialised fields of research so as to elaborate the foundations of a *cosmopolitan* social and political science.

This paradigmatic reconstruction and redefinition of social science from a national to a cosmopolitan perspective can be understood and explained as a 'positive problem shift' (Lakatos 1970) in the sense of 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 governing takes place in de-bounded 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'. (Grande and Risse 2000)

To sum up, traditional conceptualisations of terms and construction of borders between 'national' and 'international', domestic and foreign politics, and society and state are less and less appropriate for tackling the challenges linked to the global age.

One implication is that the national and the cosmopolitan perspectives understand sovereignty differently. In the national perspective we find it easiest to think about globalisation as a simple alternative to or negation of the modern state or the system of modern states. This framing is often articulated as an opposition between *political realism*

as a celebration of the necessity of state interests and a *political idealism* that celebrates the potentiality of some kind of universality, some global or human community. But the cosmopolitan perspective is not concerned with the fall (or rise) of the nation-state in the global age in the same way as the national perspective. The cosmopolitan perspective offers a way of analysing the whole global power game in which states are redefined as one class of actor among others. The either/or of realism and idealism does not make sense in a cosmopolitan perspective. In this either/or game, either the state exists, albeit only as an essential core, or it does not exist at all; either there is national sovereignty—that is, a zero-sum game between national and international competence—or there is no sovereignty at all. In the cosmopolitan perspective, 'realism' is a kind of political *non-realism* because it neglects the second great transformation of the whole global power game. A concept of cosmopolitan *Realpolitik* is necessary in order to understand the positive-sum game of pooled sovereignties. In an era of global crisis, national

**A concept of cosmopolitan Realpolitik is necessary in order to understand the positive-sum game of pooled sovereignties**

problems can be solved only by transnational-national cooperation and state networks (Beck 2002).

The horizon opened up by the distinction between methodological nationalist and cosmopolitan perspectives reveals a new configuration of the world. Previously, the national cosmos could be clearly decomposed into 'inside' and 'outside'. The nation-state-governed order was established between the two. In the inner experiential space, the central themes of work, politics, law, social inequality, justice, and cultural identity were negotiated against the background of the nation, which was the guarantor of a collective unity of action. In the international realm, that is, in the outer experiential field, the corresponding concept of 'multiculturalism' developed. Multiculturalism, by delimiting and excluding the foreign, mirrored and crystallised the national self-image. Thus, the national/international distinction 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 possible neither to clearly distinguish between the national and the international nor, in a similar way, to convincingly contrast homogeneous units. National spaces have become denationalised so that the national is no longer national, just as the international is no longer international. 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. (This is the research agenda of the 'Reflexive Modernization' Research Centre at Munich University; see Beck, Bonß, and Lau 2003.) What we are talking about is a paradigmatic shift as illustrated in Table 3.1.

The paradigmatic opposition between (inter-)nationalism and cosmopolitanism does not establish a logical or temporal exclusivity but an ambivalent transitional coexistence, a new concurrence of phenomena that are not concurrent.

Institutions and organisations focusing on a form of cosmopolitan social science research have a long history and have competed with the 'self-confirmation circle' of nation-state data and knowledge production. First of all, it is the scientific

**Table 3.1: Paradigmatic change from a national perspective to a cosmopolitan social science**

Political action		
	National perspective	Cosmopolitan perspective
Political science	Methodological nationalism	Nation-state-centred understanding of society and politics in both political practice and political science.
	Methodological cosmopolitanism	Globalisation seen from within the nation-state: under which conditions do actors change from a national to a cosmopolitan perspective? Actually existing cosmopolitanism.
	Opening up of the nation-state-centred society and politics, sociology and political science: new critical theory with a cosmopolitan intent; redefinition of basic notions and frames of references from a cosmopolitan perspective.	The cosmopolitan society and its enemies: what does a cosmopolitan society, state, and regime mean?

ethos that bases 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 the non-scientific, and often both of them, to 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 possible only 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 oversights. On the one hand the interpretation of the classical researchers and their nation-state premises has been a-historicised and set as an absolute. Whoever lauds the classical researchers masks her or his mental sterility, and forces herself or himself to assume the existence of a copyist, a fact which has already been the case for some time. On the other hand one reproduces the mistake according to the old principle of 'es darf nicht sein, was nicht sein soll' ('it cannot be, what ought not to be') of sacrificing curiosity about reality to institutionalised convictions about values. Even the most demanding of data from the methodological point of view can be

blind and lead to us being surprised and overwhelmed by the return of the suppressed cosmopolitan reality.

Global civil society actors can be understood as the agents of a cosmopolitan perspective, even though the phenomenon of global civil society encompasses a diversity of cross-cutting beliefs, prejudices, and assumptions. To put it another way, global civil society could be represented as one element of actually existing cosmopolitanism. To grasp the meaning of global civil society, social science must be re-established as a transnational science of the reality of denationalisation, transnationalisation, and 're-ethnification' in a global age—and this on the levels of concepts, theories, and methodologies as well as organisationally. The fundamental concepts of 'modern society' must be re-examined. 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 and re-conceptualised and empirically established within the framework of a cosmopolitan social and political science which remains to be developed. This is quite a list of understatements. But nevertheless it has to be handled and managed if the social sciences are to avoid becoming a museum of antiquated ideas.

## The Invisibility of Global Inequalities

In the second part of this chapter I would like to address a theme, as well as a research area, which has remained central but has until now received little attention from the cosmopolitan perspective. I focus on the sociology of social inequalities in order to both test and illustrate the relevance of a new critical theory and its empirical claims by using a concrete example. The World Bank's (2002) report on the financial situation of developing countries can be read like an official written accusation from child rights organisation Terre des Hommes against the ignorance of wealthy countries. The falling prices of raw materials on the world market, the commercial protectionism and the economic slump in industrialised states, and the decline of worldwide tourism after 11 September 2001 have all dramatically increased the destitution of the world's poorest regions. The world has become a dangerously unequal place—and this is true even for the rich in Western metropolises. Through debt repayment alone, \$US200 billion dollars is transferred annually from the South to the North. In parallel, private capital investment flows to the South have shrunk for the fifth successive year and have now stabilised at less than their 1997 value. While 1.2 billion people, almost a fifth of the world's population, must make do with less than a dollar a day, state development aid has decreased by 20 per cent since 1990 (World Bank 2002: 1, 11). 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 belong to the generation which 30 years ago pledged a form of 'international solidarity', were active in Third-World initiatives, or fought against poverty during ecclesiastical action days, and stood for the needs of 'One World'. Now it appears that the policies of this generation have transformed Germany into one of the laggards of development politics. Can this be adequately explained by the impotence of politicians? Or is the fading out of global injustices structurally conditioned? Is there a principle that

**The world has become a dangerously unequal place—and this is true even for the rich in Western metropolises. Through debt repayment alone, \$US200 billion is transferred annually from South to North**

can account for the contradiction whereby global inequalities grow while from the sociological point of view they are legitimised? There is now a growing global justice movement, sometimes known as the anti-globalisation or anti-capitalist movement, that tries to draw attention to these inequalities. This movement, described in Chapter 4, is probably the most active component of global civil society at the moment. Yet its voices do not translate into concrete policies or generalised public concern. Why not?

There are at least two possible answers to the question of what legitimises social inequality: the merit system and the nation-state principle. The first has been carefully elaborated and criticised, since it derives from the self-understanding of the national perspective and is related to internal, intra-state inequalities. The second can be derived from the cosmopolitan perspective and is related to the 'legitimation' of social inequalities. The bigger blind spots—and sources of error—of methodological nationalism linked to research on inequality can be revealed only by means of a systematic switch from the national to the cosmopolitan perspective. A new critical theory of social inequalities is needed which provides a scientific expression of the cosmopolitan perspective already held by parts of global civil society. Only on the basis of such a theory can the fundamental asymmetry of inequality, which is reinforced by a perception trapped in the national viewpoint as well as in the social and social science perspective, be unravelled. Such a theory would demonstrate that the 'legitimation system' of the nation-state rests on the fact that attention is exclusively focused on the inside, thereby excluding global inequalities from the field of vision of the (relatively) privileged.

From a purely spatial point of view, it is possible to distinguish between *big* inequalities (which can further be divided into transnational, supranational, international, and global inequalities) and *small* inequalities. Small inequalities are those found within the nation-state. They appear big to the people or groups concerned and this for the most obvious reasons, but from a cosmopolitan perspective they are small. The merit system both explains and legitimises intra-state inequalities. The appropriate metaphor

**Table 3.2: Sociology of social inequalities: national and cosmopolitan perspectives**

Matrix of social positions			
	Large (global) inequalities	Small (nation-state level) inequalities	
Legitimation	National perspective	Irrelevant, non-existent	Merit system
	Cosmopolitan perspective	The nation-state principle excludes the excluded and makes global inequalities invisible	The nation-state principle can only explain inequalities within the nation-state.

for this phenomenon is the exam: all enter as equals but come out unequals (with different positions in the hierarchy of needs). Under the merit system, incomes, for example, can be characterised as both unequal and legitimate. When we say that the nation-state principle 'legitimises' social inequalities, we mean that the lens through which the nation-state observes national inequalities blocks out global inequalities. Big inequalities are thus removed from the national perspective, and can therefore both grow and be 'legitimised' within a form of institutionalised irrelevance and non-reality. How is this possible? It is because the national perspective functions like a microscope. By focusing on small internal inequalities it leaves out the bigger, global ones. In other words, the preoccupation with small national inequalities legitimises big inequalities.

The 'law' of nation-state exclusion of global inequalities is obviously a case in point. The national particularism of the 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. Global inequalities have grown: 'the average income in the richest 20 countries is now 37 times that in the poorest 20. This ratio has doubled in the past 40 years' (World Bank 2003: 7). It is surprising how the big inequalities which are suffered by humanity can be continuously legitimised through a silent complicity between the state authority and the state-obsessed social sciences by means of a form of organised non-perception.

### Principles of the Construction of Non-reality

While the merit system provides a *positive* legitimisation of small inequalities, the nation-state principle produces a *negative* 'legitimation' of big inequalities. 'Positive' legitimisation means that the merit system validates a reflexive and reciprocal legitimisation, that is, social inequalities can in principle be tolerated by the underprivileged. In contrast, the legitimisation of the nation-state principle is 'negative' because it is characterised by *non-reflexivity* and *non-reciprocity*, meaning that it cannot be tolerated by the underprivileged and the excluded. The nation-state principle is based on non-reflection, not on reflection, as in the case of the merit system. Thus, negative legitimisation through institutionalised silence or blindness precludes acceptance by those whose acceptance is most needed, that is, the poor, the humiliated, and the excluded. The nation-state evidently does *not* legitimise global inequalities. Rather, the *non-legitimised* global inequalities are hidden from view and thereby stabilised. Historically, this means that the European nation-state represents the institutionalised forgetting of colonialism and imperialism, both of which fostered its development.

In elaborating this 'legitimation through silence', I should like to identify four principles of nation-state irrelevance and non-reality construction.

1. *The fragmentation of the world into nation-states removes accountability for global inequalities.* As long as there is no global jurisdiction or monitoring institution to survey global inequalities, these will

remain disaggregated into a motley pattern of nation-state inequalities. Because there are approximately 200 states, there are approximately 200 different frames of relevance and observation for small social inequalities. But the sum of these recorded inner, single-state inequalities does not correspond to the larger global inequalities, because the logic of the national perspective is not the same as that of the cosmopolitan perspective. 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 causalities also contribute to the explanation of 'intra-nation-state' inequalities.

In the South Commission (1990: 2) report it is argued 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.' This is both right and wrong: it does not recognise that the nation-state world order structurally ignores and therefore 'legitimises' global inequalities.

The nation-state principle explains why the connection between globalisation and poverty has been so seldom researched. As long as the national perspective reigns in both political action and in social science analysis, poverty and wealth will continue to be localised in the national context as a matter of course. Even the mere possibility that the problematic consequences of globalisation materialise in various historical contexts—in the shape of growing inequalities, eroding incomes, the over-exploitation of natural resources, and the undermining of democracy—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, causalities easily fade away or are misinterpreted within the closed circle of a national perspective. The crucial point is that this big mistake can be neither unravelled nor avoided using a national perspective; only a cosmopolitan outlook can provide a way out of the deadlock.

**Big inequalities are removed from the national perspective, and can therefore both grow and be 'legitimised' within a form of institutionalised irrelevance**

**2. The perception of social inequalities presupposes equality norms.** Within the nation-state perspective, the stability with which major inequalities can be excluded rests on the validity of national equality norms, whether they be 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 institutionalised equality norms. Within the national paradigm, at least in Westernised welfare states, equality norms rest on the formal equality of the citizen: income differences between men and women, places of residence, and so on, do not justify a differentiated citizen status. All individuals within a nation have the same rights and duties. In this context, a differentiated citizenship status is therefore unacceptable. This legally sanctioned citizen equality corresponds to the nation-state guiding principle of cultural homogeneity (same language, history, cultural traditions). The national principles of inclusion and exclusion thus determine and stabilise the boundaries of the perception of social inequalities. This leads to:

**3. The impossibility of comparing social inequalities between nation-states.** The national perspective and the 'functional capacity' of the nation-state to legitimise global inequalities rests on the fact that politically relevant comparisons can be completed only *intranationally* and not *internationally*. Delegitimising comparisons 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 where they have similar qualifications and functions—can be very important. But the delegitimising potential of these comparisons is felt only if they take place within a common framework of perception of institutionalised equality. This can be achieved through belonging to a particular nation or to a globally active corporation. To some extent, it also begins to be achieved through global civil society: international NGOs, for example, or Diaspora links.

This raises the interesting question of how far one can and will be able to legitimise the international wage differences within the European Union by means

of the principle of non-comparability. As European self-consciousness grows along with the institutionalisation of European self-observation, will inequalities which were previously ignored because they were international also be perceived as *intranational* inequalities, and will new equality norms have to be developed? To the extent that barriers enforcing the international non-comparability 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 solely to a so-called legitimisation function within the system of global inequalities.

4. *The 'fading out phenomenon' legitimises inaction*, or rather it legitimises those actions which increase big inequalities because so-called 'external' effects, from the national perspective, are precipitated into a form of pre-determined non-reality or political irrelevance. The exclusiveness with which social inequalities are thematised as inner inequalities thus facilitates a global redistribution politics whereby risks are externalised, that is, they are imposed upon weaker developing or emerging countries, while profits are maximised within the rich countries of the 'West'.

**As long as the national perspective reigns both in political action and in social science analysis, poverty and wealth will continue to be localised in the national, not the global context**

While western politicians were busy extolling the fact that we had reached a decade of unexpected peace and wealth, a growing number of countries were becoming engulfed in debts, unemployment, and the decline of health and social services as well as urgently needed infrastructures. What has proved profitable for Western corporations in terms of the strict enforcement of deregulation, privatisation, and flexibilisation in developing countries often turns out to be a disaster for ordinary people in these countries. To take just one example: the World Bank, in its role as implementation agent for the G-7 states, supported contracts with private energy suppliers both in Indonesia and in other countries. 'These contracts obliged the public sector to buy great quantities of electricity at very high prices' (Stiglitz 2002: 71). The international corporations pocketed the profits while the risks were imposed on the 'anyway already' poor states.

*The U.S. Department 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 U.S. administration put pressure on the new governments to honour the contracts, instead of releasing them from their obligation to pay or at least re-negotiating conditions. Indeed, there is a long list of unfair contracts, the honouring of which western governments achieved by exerting pressure through oppression. (Stiglitz 2002: 71)*

To sum up these principles: the nation-state world order fragments global inequalities, national equality norms exclude global inequalities, and intranational comparability of inequalities ensures international non-comparability. The predetermined irrelevance of big inequalities enables powerful and wealthy nation-states to burden poor states with risks that flow from their policies. Additionally, these policies are confirmed and strengthened by the methodological nationalism of the social sciences in rich countries. Inequality research based on this

perspective greatly reinforces national myopia; it also depicts both itself and its object of research within the framework of a nation-state science which endlessly gives birth to itself. What is normally seen as problematic from a scientific point of view, that is, research which reinforces the researchers' own premises, is extolled here as a methodological principle. At best, this form of national autism is extended into an international comparative autism. 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 are justified and cemented by the knowledge generated by a social science that bases itself on methodological nationalism. However, this social and social-science creation, that is, the non-reality of growing global inequalities, is proving increasingly problematic.



## Cosmopolitan Realities Intrude

Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness of the mistakes and contradictions of the national perspective, for several reasons.

First of all, boundaries have become permeable, and interdependences which transcend all borders are growing exponentially. Take for example the obvious contradictions in which restrictive immigration policies are trapped. On the one hand, the rich Northern countries are currently plagued by a spectacular demographic regression, with ageing populations that threaten to overwhelm pension and health systems and reinforce political conservatism. On the other hand, these very countries are busy building ramparts to ward off both the feared and the real immigration flows from the poorer South. In parallel, military, economic, and political interdependences are growing worldwide, leading to new flows of migrants and refugees. Every measure in this field is damned: it leads to side effects that can be anticipated and often proves utterly counterproductive. Thus, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the political desire to control migration flows, especially in the US but also in European countries, has been strengthened and sharpened. But it is precisely this repressive impulse that undermines the necessary readiness to authorise more immigration, which could counter falling demographic curves and rejuvenate the population.

The repressive impulse undermines the necessary readiness to authorise more immigration, which would rejuvenate the population

A second reason has to do with the processes of inner globalisation of nation-state experiential spaces. Several developments play a role in this evolution. Human rights are increasingly detached from citizenship status and are no longer bound by national contexts. Examples of this trend include international education curricula, the growing number of bi-national marriages and families, as well as increasing transnational work and private life connections. The national perspective is also imperilled by the growing mobility of communication, information, cash flows, risks, products, and services. Even indigenous groups that have remained immobile are being transnationalised within their experiential capacities through mass communication, publicity, and so on (Held 1999: 374). Moreover, supranational institutions such as the World Bank, UNESCO, or

various NGOs systematically provide data which publicise big inequalities worldwide, thus questioning the mechanisms of the national non-reality-making process.

Third, new methods and patterns of differentiating between inclusion and exclusion have gained considerable significance. Increasingly, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion no longer follow the classification of inequality into strata which end at the national border: a feature typical of the nation-state. New central patterns of inclusion and exclusion are being developed along the lines of, for instance, (1) supranational trade agreements (European Union, NAFTA, and so on), (2) Diaspora cultures which follow ascriptive characteristics: for example, 'Black Atlantic' (Gilroy 1993), or (3) the conditions of everyday life in global cities (Sassen 2001; 2002; Castells 1997; Albrow 1996; Eade 1996; 2000).

Garret Hardin, in 'Living on a Lifeboat' (1977), provided an early and famous defence of the national perspective and a critique of the cosmopolitan outlook. He compared nation-states with diversely equipped lifeboats in which the survivors of a shipwreck find refuge. Hardin argued 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 transformed into 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. This is no longer a moral issue but an empirical argument. The real current post- and transnational inequality situations, forms, and causalities are being misinterpreted. It is uncovering the misdiagnosis of the national perspective, not a moral critique of it, which constitutes the essence of the cosmopolitan outlook and substantiates its superiority.

Fourth, the distinction between big and small inequalities—or, put differently, between the cosmopolitan and national perspectives—has itself become questionable. We are increasingly confronted

with an *internationalisation of national models of inequality*. Competition within and between national spaces increases along with the permeability of national boundaries. Correspondingly, it entails a distribution of globalisation winners and losers according to production sectors that are either shielded from the market or exposed to it. Last but not least, the nebulous concept of 'globalisation' 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 inherent in the wealthy Western countries, but its practical consequences remain to be defined. On the one hand, the danger of terrorism, which defies national borders, undermines the nation-state vision boundaries behind which global inequalities continue to grow menacingly. On the other hand, the emergence of global movements opposed to war and linked to the global justice movement introduces a cosmopolitan perspective on inequality.

There is no doubt that these developments overstrain nation states. They have not developed the capacity to intervene to redress large inequalities. Indeed, they do not even possess the capacity to survey or monitor large inequalities, let alone do anything about them. This is the explanation of the central paradox of a new cosmopolitan orientation. To the extent that the boundaries between big and small inequalities become more permeable and no longer correspond to national borders, the mental wall—that is, the institutionalised non-perception of big inequalities—does not lose its significance; on the contrary, it is further buttressed. Why? Because it is only thus that the growing asymmetry between demands for intervention addressed to states and the actual capacity of these states to intervene can be bridged.

Conversely it can be inferred that, if the nation state 'legitimises' global inequalities according to the Brechtian principle that 'we don't see those who are in the dark', this legitimisation breaks down with the 'cosmopolitisation' of the state. The cosmopolitan

state which (however selectively) integrates cultural Others lets loose—even in the most optimal case of stable inequalities—an avalanche of legitimisation problems as a side effect. Why? For the simple reason that it abolishes the boundaries of the non-comparability of social inequalities. In other words, cosmopolitisation actually increases the seductive potential of re-ethnification and re-nationalisation of both society and politics. 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 a trap? Whatever the answer, it is clear that the non-reflective unity between both the state's and the social sciences' capacities to make

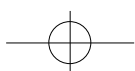
**The silence of social science concepts on the subject of global inequality is a scandal**

global inequalities invisible affects political and scientific actors in contrasting ways. Whether or not the national perspective can be attributed to 'functional performance' of the nation-state, it perverts the social sciences. These are gradually trapped into an increasingly obvious contradiction with their

scientific reality mission and ethics. Indeed, they base themselves (often imperceptibly and unintentionally) on the generation of non-reality within reality. The silence of social science concepts on the subject of global inequalities is a scandal.

## A New Critical Theory

In this new era, a new critical theory with a cosmopolitan intent has a crucial task. It must breach the fixed walls of category systems and research routines of the methodological nationalism used by the social sciences in order to, for example, bring big inequalities back into the field of vision. The established *intranational* maps of social inequalities are elegant, depicted in detail, and thought to be generally sufficient to manage politically the more privileged part of the world population. But the dragons of the large, unknown, completely inadequately researched worlds of global inequalities are no longer just simple decorative motifs adorning the borders. The nation-state belief, the national narratives, which dominate both public commentaries and academic research certainly cannot be overlooked or ignored. At least since the 11 September terrorist attacks it has become clear to many people that the view through the wall that separates small





inequalities from bigger ones goes straight down the barrel of a gun.

The new critical theory is also a self-critical theory. Its main claim is that, first of all, the cosmopolitan viewpoint, linked to various realities, detects the *chasms* that threaten the beginning of the twenty-first century. Critical theory investigates the *contradictions, dilemmas, and the unseen and unwanted (un-intentional) side effects* of a modernity which is becoming increasingly cosmopolitan and draws its critical definition power from the tension between political self-description and the observation that social sciences make of it. The main thesis is then that *the cosmopolitan perspective opens up negotiation spaces and strategies which the national viewpoint precludes*. The cosmopolitan contradicts the argument, often accepted by national political actors and social scientists, that there are no alternatives.

In the debate on globalisation the main point does not revolve around the meaning of the nation-state and how its sovereignty has been subordinated. Rather, the new cosmopolitan perspective of the global power field pushes new actors and actor networks, the power potentials, strategies, and organisation forms of de-bounded politics, or in other words global civil society, into the field of vision. This is why the cosmopolitan critique of nation-state-centred and nation-state-buttressed politics and political science is empirically and politically crucial.

## References

- Albrow, M. (1996). *The Global Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beck, Ulrich (2002). 'The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 19/1–2: 17–44.
- BonB, W., and Lau, C. (2003). 'The Theory of Reflexive Modernization'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 20/2.
- Castells, M. (1997). *Local and Global: The Management of Cities in the Information Age*. London: Earthscan.
- Eade, J. (1996). *Living in the Global City: Globalisation as Local Process*. London: Routledge.
- (2000). *Placing London: From Imperial Capital to Global City*. New York: Berghahn.
- Favell, A. (1999). *European Integration, Immigration and the Nation State: Institutionalising Transnational Political Actions*. Florence: European University.
- Featherstone, M. (2000). 'Technologies of Post-human Development and Potential for Global Citizenship', in J. N. Pieterse (ed.), *Global Futures—Shaping Globalization*. London: Zed.
- Gilroy, B. (1993). *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso.
- Grande, E. and Risse, T. (2000). 'Bridging the Gap. Konzeptionelle Anforderungen an die Politikwissenschaftliche Analyse von Globalisierungsprozessen'. *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*, 2: 235–67.
- Hardin, G. (1977). 'Living on a Lifeboat', in G. Hardin (ed.), *Managing the Commons*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.
- Held, D. et al. (ed.) (1999). *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lakatos, I. (1970). 'Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes', in I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (eds), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Luhmann, N. (2002). *Theories of Distinction: Redescribing the Descriptions of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Sassen, S. (2001). *The Global City: New York, London and Tokyo*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- (2002). *Global Networks, Linked Cities*. London: Routledge.
- South Commission (1990). *The Challenge to the South*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stiglitz, J. (2002). *Globalization and its Discontents*. London: Allen Lane.
- World Bank (2002). *Poverty Reduction and the World Bank: Progress in Operationalizing the WDR 2000/2001*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- (2003). *World Development Report*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

