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**Sociology and the nation-state: Beyond  
methodological nationalism**

**by**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
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This PhD thesis is dedicated to Paula; it is only her who knows what this is all about.

## Declaration

Some of the materials contained in this thesis have already been published in:

Chernilo, Daniel 2002 'The theorization of social co-ordinations in differentiated societies. The theory of generalized symbolic media in Parsons, Luhmann and Habermas', *British Journal of Sociology* 53 (3): 431-49.

Fine, Robert and Chernilo, Daniel 2003 'Classes and nations in recent historical sociology', in Delanty, G. and Isin, E. (eds) *Handbook of historical sociology*, London: Sage.

Fine, Robert and Chernilo, Daniel 2004 'Between past and future: the equivocations of the new cosmopolitanism', *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society* 31: 25-44.

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

## Abstract

The equation between society and the nation-state in sociology has been subject to severe criticisms in recent times. This equation has been given the name of ‘methodological nationalism’ and is underpinned by a reading of the history of sociology in which the discipline’s key concept, society, and modernity’s major socio-political referent, the nation-state, allegedly converge. At the critical level, my thesis argues that this is too restrictive a view of the history of the discipline and at the positive level it reconstructs the conventional version of sociology’s canon in relation to nation-states. The first part of the thesis surveys the main trends in the current sociological mainstream, reviews the rise of the critique of methodological nationalism and establishes a distinction between a referential and a regulative role of the idea of society in sociology. The body of the thesis constructs a history of the sociology of the nation-state in its classical (K. Marx, M. Weber and E. Durkheim), modernist (T. Parsons and historical sociology) and cosmopolitan (U. Beck and M. Castells) moments. As an essay on the history of sociology, this thesis seeks to uncover how the *conceptual* ambivalences of sociology reflect the *actual* ambivalences in the position and legacy of nation-states in modernity.



## **Part I. The current situation of sociology and the difficulties in understanding nation-states.**

### **Introduction.**

The nation-state seems to be an odd subject of research at this moment in history. In the social sciences at large there is the widespread view that nation-states are increasingly an actor of the past and that their relevance has more to do with the historian than with the analyst of the present. Nation-states are thought to be fading away, being decentred, 'de-mystified', losing their influence, all these being the product of an explosive mixture between economic (globalisation), cultural (migration, multiculturalism and individuation), social (retreat of welfare institutions) and political (cosmopolitanism and regionalisms) processes. Commentators argue that these are the major tendencies at the beginning of the twenty-first century, so the failure to recognise them amounts to either political conservatism or intellectual self-delusion – or both. Moreover, as a good number of the horrors and massacres perpetrated during the twentieth century seem to have been on behalf of some form of nation-state, there does not seem to be much reason for crying over its passing away.

Within sociology, these claims about the fading away of nation-states have become very popular indeed. The number and prominence of the writers who have made similar arguments is very impressive; they form a clearly distinguished voice in the sociological scene and are the most salient trend in the 'sociology of the nation-state' at the turn of the new century. Martin Albrow (1996), for instance, refers to a 'global age' in which the decline of the nation-state marks also the end of modernity. Ulrich

Beck (2000a, c, 2002a, 2003) has been developing his ‘cosmopolitan perspective of the second modernity’ in which sociology either should change with the times or will be simply made redundant. Manuel Castells (1996-8) has centred his massive empirical analyses on the idea of the ‘network society’ in which the nation-state just fades away among the millions of nodes on which social relations are nowadays organised. The most recent of works of Anthony Giddens (1998, 1999), with his ‘global society and runaway world’, presents a view of the dissolution of ‘the society as we know it’ in which sociology is not necessarily doomed but, if it were to be able to cope with the tasks at hand, would have to re-invent itself dramatically. Scott Lash (1999) wants to capture the alternative aesthetic rationality that conventional sociology, centred on society and politics, has been unable to grasp. Last but not least, John Urry’s (2000a, b) ‘mobile’ sociology is designed as a thorough revision of the long-standing emphasis of sociology on ‘places’.<sup>1</sup>

These sociological works can be regarded as a coherent body of literature due to a number of factors: [1] their claims that new issues must be included in sociology’s research agenda; [2] their conviction that nation-states are no longer major actors of our time, so their fading away is presented as a major characteristic of a new epoch in the making; [3] their critique of the equation between the nation-state and society throughout the history of sociology and [4] their dismay with sociology’s failure to grasp and make sense of the new epochal condition. In this way, this recent wave of research has become a form of new consensus, or, more precisely, a *new orthodoxy*, in

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<sup>1</sup> According to M. Albrow (1996: 4), the main trends of our current times are: ‘the global environmental consequences of aggregate human activities, the loss of security where weaponry has global destructiveness; the globality of communication systems; the rise of a global economy; and the reflexivity of globalism, where people and groups of all kinds refer to the globe as the frame of their beliefs’.

sociology.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, to characterise this group of thinkers as orthodoxy is a risky generalisation, and I recognise that there are important differences among their works. However, it is the magnitude and ambition of their sociological undertaking which makes it possible to address their works collectively. On the one hand, they try to make sense of our historical condition through the thesis of the decaying role of nation-states and indeed welcome the fact that the retreat of the nation-state may also mark the retreat of nationalism as a major political force in modernity. On the other, they share the view on the need for a radical change in sociology's research-agenda and conceptual tools so that it can match the ways in which the social world itself is being transformed. Their message is clear: if sociology fails to change, change will simply make the discipline redundant.

With regard to the new orthodoxy, however, there are strong reasons to feel dissatisfied with some of the ways in which these writers have attempted to understand these 'epochal' changes. A certain lack of conceptual precision; oversimplification of normative concerns; weaknesses in the historical representation of the past *vis-à-vis* a cult of the new for its own sake, and disregard for the history of the categories with which sociological analyses have been carried out before are some of the reasons for

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'orthodoxy', although not free of problems – and with its ironic connotation – is used to emphasise the overall influence of this particular understanding of the current epochal condition and the challenges it allegedly poses to previous sociology (see Chapter 1). The idea of a new orthodoxy implies that this has become a kind of 'by-default' way of thinking when it comes to these issues, but the term says nothing about the plurality of paradigms in contemporary sociology and indeed this is not the only sociology being currently taught and practised in relation to the questions of nation-states, globalisation and cosmopolitanism (see Calhoun 1997, 2002; Fine 2003; Fulcher 2000; Habermas 1998, 2001; Hall 2003; Mann 1993b, 1997, 2001; Robertson 2000; Rosenberg 2000, forthcoming; Smelser 1997; Vertovec and Cohen 2002 and Wagner 2001b, c).

that dissatisfaction that I want to explore. Crucially for the argument of my thesis, they claim that the equation between society and the nation-state has become an unbearable burden for the discipline. The equation between society and the nation-state, which was given the name of ‘methodological nationalism’ in the 1970s, presents a view of the sociological canon that produces as its most substantive result a convergence between sociology’s key concept of society and modernity’s major socio-political referent, the nation-state. In the radical interpretation the new orthodoxy makes of this claim, the historical formation of nation-states and the theoretical idea of society are taken as one and the same thing within sociology, so the current decline of the nation-state is regarded as an epochal change that signals the end of the historical time for which sociological tools themselves were designed. Sociology would be unable to achieve an understanding of the current times due to historical (the nation-state’s decaying relevance) as well as theoretical (obsolescence of sociology’s analytical tools) reasons. The current historical transition would be the final expression of the intellectual impotence of the discipline: current sociology would be at a definitive crossroad.

The starting point of my thesis is then one of perplexity. On the one hand, regardless of one’s personal assessment on the current ‘epochal change’, the question remains as to why this belief in the decline of nation-states has become so dear as the marker of our times. The wide support these arguments currently hold, from neo-liberalism (Ömae 1995) to cosmopolitanism (Archibugi 2000), from Marxism (Hardt and Negri 2000) to mainstream social science (Scholte 2000 and indeed sociology’s new orthodoxy), is in itself a source of curiosity and may be also a reason to be sceptical about them. On the other hand, as change is a core feature of modern social life the claim that one

important tenet of modernity, the nation-state, is also changing is certainly plausible and thus has to be taken seriously.<sup>3</sup>

So, without denying that sociology has been instrumental to the unfolding of the mythic image of nation-states, I think it is possible to find, even within a rather conventional pantheon of sociologists, a number of different arguments on the relationships between society and the nation-state so that sociology's definition of society is not always, not necessarily, nor even primarily, attached to the nation-state. Sociology has not portrayed the nation-state as the necessary final stage of modernity but rather it has struggled throughout with trying to grasp the ambivalent position and legacy of nation-states in modernity. I believe that these are issues worth considering so instead of addressing the thesis of the decline of the nation-state directly I will reconstruct and re-assess a version of the sociological canon from the point of view of its concept of nation-state. In the certainty that no 'objective' reading of that canon can be achieved (or is even desirable), my hypothesis is that the current uncertainty on the future of the nation-state opens a space for a renewed reflection upon the history of sociology and the relationships between sociology, society and nation-states.

In itself, the studying of nation-states has proved to be quite a complicated problem for the social sciences at large. During the last century and a half, nation-states have been treated as a god and a demon; been declared born and dead many times; been regarded as modern as well as primordial forms of social and political community; been conceived of as both rational structures and imagined/imaginary communities; created

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, we need to make sense of the fact that the more commentators talk about the decline of the nation-state the more crowded the Plenary Room of the United Nations is: 191 member states by the end of 2002, see United Nations (2002).

as much welfare as misery; been equally a source for political democracy, cosmopolitanism and ethnic cleansing; co-existed with Empires, colonies, blocs, protectorates, city-states and other forms of socio-political organisation; gone through experiences of unification, totalitarian terror, occupation, division, and then reunification; and been legitimised around ethnic/racial, republican, monarchic, liberal, democratic, federal and even class principles. Despite, or possibly because of, all this variation nation-states have somehow succeeded in presenting themselves as solid and stable forms of social and political organisation and again in this case the sources of this alleged solidity have proved difficult to identify: increase in the state's control over 'its' population through nationalisation policies such as alphabetisation, schooling, taxation and military recruitment; the use and abuse of sentiments of belonging to emphasise cultural and/or ethnic differences; the rise of a 'system of nation-states' composed of a growing number of at least formally equal autonomous members; the development of a capitalist class structure at the national level and the expansion of capitalism at the global level; the 'universalistic' appeal of popular sovereignty and democracy. I shall show throughout the thesis that sociology has, in its own particular language, considered these questions, confronted these problems and battled to solve these ambiguities. The fact that sociology has been only partly successful in understanding nation-states may as well be related to nation-states' own ambivalences; nation-states and sociology mirror each other in that they have tried to 'square the circle' of the project of modernity; they both have faced – and are a result of – the progressive and conservative forces that pull modernity apart.<sup>4</sup> In modernity, arguably, only nation-states have had such troubled history, have been conceptually so

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<sup>4</sup> In Habermas' (1969: 221) account of the rise of sociology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sociology 'has emerged equally from the spirit of the revolution as from the reaction; each party of the civil war claimed it for itself'. In his view, this ambivalence still remains with us.

opaque and have left such an ambivalent normative legacy; sociology's ambivalences between its descriptive and normative dimensions can help us understand and reflect on the nation-state, the most ambivalent of modern themes.<sup>5</sup>

### **Aims and structure of the thesis**

The critical aim of the thesis is *to criticise the equation between society and nation-states in sociology*. The argument here is that the equation between society and the nation-state is based on a 'referential' use of the term society, namely, that sociology would have used it for the definition of geographical units, more often than not, nation-states. Indeed, this is a use of society that can be extensively found in sociological texts, both classical and contemporary, and this is core to the rise and the critique of methodological nationalism. Equally, in so far as sociology has been part and parcel of nation-states' self-understanding, this view in which the nation-state becomes the most desirable form of social and political organisation in modernity has in fact been the case. There is no need, however, to content ourselves with an interpretation of the history of sociology that surrenders its explanatory capabilities to an equation of society and the nation-state and to the alleged necessity of the roles of states and nations in modernity.

The more positive aim of the thesis is *to reconstruct critically some key sociological works in relation to their concepts of the nation-state*. Here, I shall reflect upon a

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<sup>5</sup> I concur with P. Wagner (1994: xii) in that there is 'the need, analytically as well as normatively, to maintain the ambiguity and ambivalence which (...) are inherent in the modern project'. It seems to me that the equation between nation-state and society provides an interesting angle from which to re-assess how these ambivalences have permeated into the history of sociology.

number of major sociological texts and discuss their major theses on the historical development and major characteristics of nation-states. This construction of ‘a history of the sociology of the nation-state’ will hopefully be able to tell us how nation-states have shared the world with other forms of social-political organisation, how the image of the nation-state itself has been changing, how the thesis of the stability of the nation-state arose and how it is affecting our current comprehension of nation-states. Furthermore, in contradistinction to the referential use of society, I shall argue that sociologists have also made use of the term in a ‘regulative’ manner; society performs a regulative role in sociology. Based on Kant’s understanding of regulative ideals, I shall try to prove the argument that sociology’s knowledge claims comprise another use of society as both an *impossible* and *necessary* object of enquiry for sociology. The claim of the regulative role of society does not attempt to impose a particular view as to how society *must* be understood in sociology but rather is based on an observation of the different ways in which sociologists have *actually* used the idea of society. In that sense, the thesis of the regulative role of society does not come to replace that of the referential use; rather, the argument of society’s role in sociology is complete only with the recognition of its twofold referential and regulative function.

In terms of its structure, this first part of the thesis introduces the new orthodoxy’s main theses about current sociology and the current epochal change; reviews the rise of methodological nationalism during the 1970s and establishes the distinction between society’s referential and regulative role as regulative ideal more rigorously. After this, the thesis is divided into three chronological parts that constructs a ‘history of the sociology of the nation-state’ in its *classical*, *modernist* and *cosmopolitan* moments. For each of these parts, I shall discuss some key writers that sociologists have accepted as leading figures in the field. The use of these conventional figures



tries to make my reconstruction more conclusive; I shall test the two aims of the thesis against sociology's best-established canon, the same canon that allegedly has equated society with the nation-state and has reified the role of nation-states in modernity.<sup>6</sup>

The second part of the thesis goes back to the period of the formation of sociology, from the second half of the nineteenth century until the end of World War I, and discusses how K. Marx (Chapter 2), M. Weber (Chapter 3) and E. Durkheim (Chapter 4) came to terms with the rise of the nation-state *vis-à-vis* the development of sociology. I will argue that the classics, with their different approaches to the study of social life, provide us with useful resources to understanding the formation and main characteristics of nation-states precisely because, on the *world* scene, nation-states were in the making at their time. In a way, they are unlikely candidates for a methodologically nationalistic sociology as the discipline they were about to found was, at the very least, as concerned with the world arena as it was with the national one right from the start; whatever the problems in their works – and I shall have something to say on these as well – they did not seem to have equated the nation-state with society. Marx tried to understand nation-states in the context of the contradictory character of the global expansion of capitalism, Weber set his concern with the nation-state within his broader analysis of politics in modernity as one of the value spheres in which the 'tragedy of modern culture' takes place, and Durkheim regarded nation-states as a form of social political organisation which found its moral basis on an emerging 'global consciousness' – world patriotism. In their different ways, moreover, they all found it extremely difficult to produce a clear *concept* of the nation-state and

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<sup>6</sup> Selective as any reconstruction must be, this brief 'history of the sociology of the nation-state' leaves out more than what it actually includes. My hope is that this difficulty is kept in check as the writers selected form a rather 'conventional' version of the canon of sociology.

in that sense they anticipate some of the problems sociology has faced since. Although it is true that they did not remain immune to some of the nationalistic attitudes and views of their time, I shall try to unpack the complicated ways in which *political* and *methodological* nationalism related to each other in their works.

The third part of the thesis focuses on ‘modernist sociology’, that is, on a body of sociological knowledge that developed roughly in the post-war period. This modernist sociology is especially relevant here as it coincides with the time in which the *faith* in the ‘nation-state as society’ was at its peak. It is precisely towards the end of this period when the arguments on methodological nationalism became a standard view to reconstruct the history of sociology. In analysing some of Talcott Parsons’ theoretical and political writings, I portray an admittedly unorthodox image of Parsons’ understanding of nation-states (Chapter 5). At the historical level, it is argued that Parsons contrasted what he called ‘liberal-democratic nation-states’ with totalitarian regimes and that in this contrast he saw both as possible developments within the Western world: Parsons did not see the nation-state as the necessary result of modernity because the menaces of fascism and totalitarianism were too great for that. At the logical level, it is shown that Parsons’ conceptualisation of society included, in addition to nation-states and totalitarian regimes as the geographical definitions of society, the categories of modern society and social system in which ‘society’ was used as a regulative ideal. Also in this modernist period I shall discuss another body of sociological literature on nation-states that has tried to combine sociological and historical descriptions of them; I shall survey some of the arguments in the historical sociology of nation-states (Chapter 6). The first issue here will be on the role of class structures and struggles in the processes of nation-state formation; an argument I will call the ‘co-originality’ of class and nation. The second argument of this chapter will

be the ‘historicity of the nation-state’, that is, historical sociology’s claim that nation-states are the result of a variety of historical trajectories; nation-states as an end product but not a necessary product of modernity.

In the fourth and final part of the thesis I come back to the sociology’s new orthodoxy and argue that this ‘cosmopolitan’ sociology conveys a one-sided view of the major arguments of both classical and modernist sociology, and this has the consequence of reinforcing their thesis of the epochal change we allegedly now experience. The works of M. Castells (Chapter 7) and U. Beck (Chapter 8) will be discussed at some length as case studies of the wider tendency in current sociology.

The unity of the thesis is based on the critical and positive aims as for each part I will concentrate on both the links between society and nation-state and the different arguments about the historical development and major characteristics of nation-states. The expectation is that in reconstructing these three periods of the history of sociology we should be able to understand how and why nation-states have been a crucial although never the exclusive form of social and political organisation in modernity, on the one hand and advance the question of the theoretical roles of the idea of society in sociology, on the other. Although the thesis’ focus is more on sociology than on nation-states the expectation is that, towards its end, the *conceptual* ambivalence between the descriptive and normative dimensions of sociology may have helped understand some of the *actual* ambivalences in the position and legacy of nation-states in modernity.

**A word on the methodology: The reflective vocation of sociology.**

This thesis takes inspiration from a certain mode of sociological work that has an established position within the discipline's history. To mention two of its most important exponents, T. Parsons' *The Structure of Social Action* and J. Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* are works that, in a self-reflective style, not only have helped create a particular version of the canon of sociology but also have become exemplars of a particular way in which sociology constantly reviews its own history. Indeed, Parsons' and Habermas' works are different in many respects but they both represent a certain vocation of sociology when it comes to reflecting on its own development. They did not adopt a canon uncritically but were even less prepared to accept already established criticisms of previous works; they valued their tradition but did so in an explicitly critical and even self-critical fashion: it is this *critical admiration* which I regard most inspiring in their works and it is also this which my thesis has unashamedly tried to copy.

Despite all criticisms to be made of Parsons' thesis of the convergence between idealism and positivism, it is the self-reflective tone of the book that has become its most respected feature. Parsons's *Structure* inaugurates quite an important and characteristic form of sociological work: the critical engagement with the tradition with the intent of facing current – theoretical and/or historical – challenges. Beyond the fact that Parsons' reading of the classical tradition was indeed quite contentious and that, eventually, he himself disregarded the more substantive results of this particular work – the 'unit act' did not become Parsons' definitive analytical framework for sociology – Parsons' *Structure* actually created a version of the canon and in the process he produced a theory of social order in modernity. As an

investigation into the ‘history of [sociological] theory with systematic intent’, Habermas’ (1984: 140) work operates both at a critical and positive level in a way that I have consciously rehearsed in the thesis. In *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas reviewed a conventional version of sociology’s canon and argued that the concept of instrumental rationality does not account for the history of what sociology has had to say on the subject. Although he recognises that instrumental rationality has indeed been part and parcel of the discipline’s conceptual framework, he refused to equate sociology’s knowledge claims with instrumental rationality; Habermas’ critical argument is precisely that sociology has not focused exclusively on instrumental rationality and that hints towards a *different* idea of rationality can be found within the sociology’s history. The positive level of Habermas’ argument is that a reflection on rationalisation and modernisation processes needed also to be based and focused on a different categorical framework: communicative rationality. A sociological understanding of modernity therefore needed to consider the problem of rationality from this twofold angle.

Ultimately, neither Parsons’ nor Habermas’ work belongs to the field of intellectual history. They are exemplars, rather, of what has become a particularly sociological way of critical engagement with one’s own intellectual tradition which finds its justification in goals other than intellectual history itself – they can be pedagogic, historical, conceptual or indeed political. Above all, it is this *reflective vocation* that I have tried to rehearse in the thesis. The contribution of these works has principally to do with their function within sociology’s history: they have become exemplars of a way of assessing and re-constructing the canon in relation to the most urgent tasks of the day.

## **Chapter 1. Sociology, society and the nation-state.**

### **1.1. The rise of a new orthodoxy in sociology.**

Although the bulk of the thesis will proceed chronologically and will eventually discuss the works of U. Beck and M. Castells in more detail, I have decided to introduce the major characteristics of these works at the beginning because my thesis was written in an implicit conversation with the current sociological mainstream. Even though the general tone of the discussion is critical I could hardly have attempted a thesis on ‘the history of the sociology of the nation-state’ without addressing this literature; their particular critique of the equation between society and the nation-state helped create the framework from which my own argument arose. Somewhat ironically, that is, despite their scepticism about the current state and future of sociology, they are far too close to the intellectual and institutional core of the discipline; they are already part of the discipline’s canon in which I am interested.

In terms of the disciplinary development of sociology, one reason to explain the rise of the new orthodoxy seems to be a reaction against a Parsonian type of ‘general-theory’.<sup>7</sup> There is a generalised distrust in the implicit metaphysics of any form of grand theory; a mistrust in ‘meta-narratives’ (this disbelief is, in itself, their own ‘meta-narrative’) and a critique of theory-building as a valuable activity in its own terms. A further reason to explain their break with previous sociology is that of the reflective vocation

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<sup>7</sup> This finds expression, for instance, in their rejection of functionalism. It is not only that functional explanations presuppose teleology, but also that the emphasis on structural and systemic constraints in the social world prevents functionalism from understanding the ways in which individual and collective actors make their choices, see Giddens (1977: 106-29).

of sociology; the question of whether or not the critical engagement with the canon is a valuable task. Giddens' (1971, 1984) early work is widely known for having dealt with sociology's intellectual tradition; J. Urry (Keat and Urry 1982 [1975]) had also done this type of sociology in the 1970s. Yet, it is difficult to make sense of Giddens' or Urry's most recent work in connection with their own previous social theory; their current position can hardly be accounted for by looking at what they argued at that time. The question that emerges here is that of the relationship between theory and research in sociology or rather, the question of the scientific self-comprehension of sociology. On the one hand, this sociology has adopted the core of post-modernity's concerns; it is a sociology aware of gender and environmental issues and of 'post-traditional' ways of life. On the other, the new orthodoxy is a 'scientific' sociology based on empirical research and proofs: a new sociology is needed, they say, because the world itself has changed.

At the programmatic level, the new orthodoxy argues that sociology must overcome both empiricist research that believes it can go solo – without theory – and the type of general theory that believes it can ignore the 'real world'. When it comes to their own empirical research, however, a rather different picture appears. Albrow (1996: 2, 106-11), for instance, has claimed that he is not concerned with the 'theory' of modernity but with 'the reality of the Global Age in which we now live'; he is interested in history rather than social theory. Castells (2001: 543) – arguing boldly against claims that his *social theory* is flawed on the grounds that his work is *not* social theory – presents his research as being focused on 'the real world as it is configured nowadays'. Beck (2000b: 8-9; 38-58) introduces what he calls 'visionary non-fiction' as a way in which 'external, extreme and explosive things to be incorporated within the horizon of that which is sociologically conceivable, observable and explicable' (Beck 1997: 19)

and Urry (1990, 2000a) bases his radical revision of social theory on his empirical research on tourism – social theory must now concentrate on ‘mobilities’ rather than places. How are we to understand these references to the authority of the ‘real world’? Indeed, one could see them as rhetorical, as if they only point to emphasising the role of empirical research and avoiding the metaphysics of ‘grand theories’. Yet, I can see two problems in using the authority of the ‘real world’. Firstly, there is the underlying belief that sociology has become finally true to its own image as science: we live in the type of society that empirical research can surely prove that we actually live in. Secondly, the new orthodoxy wants to understand the transformations in the real world as an epochal change, but this latter question cannot be dealt with within the narrow limits of scientific sociology; the comprehension of epochal changes can only be addressed by looking to the changes in society and sociology *at the same time*.

The central ambiguity of the new orthodoxy lies, therefore, in their critique of positivism vis-à-vis their scientific comprehension of sociology; there is a positivistic understanding of the role of theory, of the link between theory and research in the social sciences. These arguments on the position of theorising within sociology do not consider, however, the central role theory has played since the rise of sociology (Wagner 1998) and more importantly they disregard the other roles of theory in our discipline such as the definition of meta-theoretical frameworks (Mouzelis 1995: 1-11; Ritzer 1988); philosophical underpinnings (Sica 1998); ontological presuppositions (Archer 1995) and normative implications (Strasser 1976). These roles and uses of theory are as important as the idea of theory as the means for ‘making sense of empirical data’. In fact, at the centre of sociology’s identity is the claim that the



discipline has never been *only* a specialised science.<sup>8</sup> Especially inadequate is the instrumental view of theory, this idea of theory as a set of ‘disposable tools’. The type of research in which the new orthodoxy is interested, the understanding of an epochal change that renders obsolete previous sociological categories, requires a bolder conception of theory that they are not prepared to accept. In what follows, I shall introduce the new orthodoxy’s major theses with special emphasis on some of the problems that in my view undermine their chances to succeed in the task they themselves define as crucial: the mapping of our current epochal condition.

#### **a. Understanding epochal changes.**

Surely, a major contribution of these writers is to have introduced into the research-agenda of the discipline a number of new themes and approaches. Their theoretical frameworks are the result of generalisations based on years of empirical research on, among other new issues, ecological risks, economic globalisation, the social impact of the internet, and tourism. I do not wish to dispute their finding on empirical grounds; I recognise that they represent some of the most sophisticated *sociological* accounts of what ‘globalisation’ means as an understanding of our time. It is the theoretical dimension of their work, however, which I find most troubling. The new orthodoxy’s aim is to understand the current epochal change, so it can be said that these writers echo the many-times heard claim that recent historical changes are so dramatic that the intellectual tools at our disposal are of not much use and, in so doing, they put themselves within the sociological tradition that has sought to grasp how radical the

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<sup>8</sup> ‘[A]lone among the disciplines of social science, sociology has retained its relations to the problems of society as a whole. Whatever else it has become, it has always remained a theory of society as well’ (Habermas 1984: 5).

changes that modernity brings with it are. So Urry (2000a: 1-2; 2000b: 186) invites us to think (after both Durkheim and Giddens) of 'newer' rules of sociological methods with which to make sense of the current historical condition; Beck (1997: 12-22) criticises the 'Marx-Weber consensus' that in his view has largely prevailed in sociology and is preventing us from understanding the 'second modernity' that has replaced the 'first modernity of industrial society'; Castells (2000: 6) prescribes that sociology should once and for all stand up to its scientific vocation and clearly distinguish theory from facts; and Albrow (1996: 172) claims that '[t]he delinking of the ideas of state and nation has been the most important aspect of the transition from the Modern Age to the Global'. Globalisation and the decline of nation-states are thus the trademark of the way in which this new orthodoxy marks the historical transition we experience.

These arguments for historical novelty, intellectual creativity and the courage to reinvent our social world may make the challenge of some of these views look rather conservative, as if caught in a conceptual and historical world which no longer exists. This way of presenting historical change as a radical epochal break is, however, rather conventional; it has internalised conventionally modern claims that social change is inevitable, that it brings with it more positive than negative effects, that some idea of progress comes with change and that current epochal changes are ever more radical than any previous one. In relation to their theses on the obsolescence of the sociological tradition, it is worth noticing that their claims on the cognitive deficits of the intellectual traditions in which they themselves were brought up, as well as their idea of experiencing a radical historical break in which everything has to be rethought, are not at all new arguments.

Habermas (1969), for instance, has already argued that, due to its historical connection with the social consequences of the French Revolution, sociology's epochal diagnoses are attached to some idea of crisis and crises have therefore become the standard way in which 'the present' makes its presence and urgency felt in the discipline. At the same time, the idea of the crisis of sociology on the basis of its inability to keep pace with the changes in society is as old as sociology itself (Marshall 1963). From a strictly *sociological* point of view, then, there is nothing intrinsically new or radical in claiming that the nation-state is in crisis, the direction of that change being unknown, neither is it new to argue that the *pace* of social change gets quicker by the day. There is nothing intrinsically new in a group of scholars claiming that they live in hectic times, and that they are the privileged observers (and participants) of an epochal change. What else did Marx, Parsons or Arendt think about their own times? It is as though intellectuals 'need' to believe that they live in hectic times, they do not seem to experience their own times as 'un-historical', as moments when history is not or cannot be made. They can be disappointed with the mediocrity that surrounds them, but that is a different argument altogether. How can intellectual activity possibly find personal and social legitimacy in a historical context without major social issues to be tackled? As we shall see, both classical and modernist sociologists have regarded themselves in a critical crossroad: the excitement with the intellectual and historical possibilities that are open to one's own generation is one of *the* characteristics of history of the social sciences.

Yet, this is not to say that *nothing* changes nor is this running away from a serious engagement with the thesis of the decline of the nation-state; I have no intention to 'defend' nation-states politically or intellectually. It seems to me that F. Webster (2002: 267) has got it fundamentally right when he argued that these writers have

fallen into a ‘fallacy of presentism’; he accounts for a tendency in these works to dismiss the present by prematurely declaring the redundancy of traditional concepts and by turning any major event or series of events that catches the public eye into a sign of a new epoch.<sup>9</sup> Here, however, there seems to be a major difference between the new orthodoxy and the classical and modernist sociology I will revisit in my thesis: the recognition that the study of major social changes is to be done within and not beyond the intellectual tradition of the social sciences; as part of the reflective vocation of sociology. In this sense, I propose that we will be better off if we read these works not so much as an answer to the question of what the decline of the nation-state can tell us about the world but rather why this thesis has become so crucial in sociology’s epochal diagnoses; instead of asking what can sociology tell us about the decline of the nation-state I will use this argument to assess the history and current state of sociology.<sup>10</sup>

### **b. Revisiting *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft***

With the new orthodoxy, we also witness the rise of a new version of one of sociology’s foundational tensions. The transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* is now being replaced by the transition from *nation-states* to *world/global society*. Indeed, these transitional constructions have long ago been subject to criticisms

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<sup>9</sup> See Bauman (2002), Beck (2002) and Urry (2002) on the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York.

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, this formulation is adapted from Z. Bauman’s (1991: 3) *Modernity and the holocaust*: ‘the holocaust has more to say about the state of sociology than sociology in its present shape is able to add to our knowledge of the holocaust’. Although my overall assessment of the history of sociology is more positive than Bauman’s, I think that his methodological insight remains valid: I will focus *less* on what the decline of nation-states is and *more* on how this argument on the decline of nation-states can be used to reconstruct ‘a history of the sociology of nation-states’.

(Gusfield 1967) and the authors of the new orthodoxy concur that these antinomies are part of sociology's intellectual tools that are in need of revision. As we know it, in classical sociology the concept of *Gemeinschaft* would have been used to describe those forms of communal life that were not mediated by abstract forms of social coordination. The market and monetary exchanges, on the other hand, were taken as the paradigmatic representations of *Gesellschaft*; a fully developed nation-state, as both a national market and a national political community, would be the closer we could get to that version of *Gesellschaft* (as in Beck's and Albrow's concept of the 'nation-state society'). This mode of thinking would have been replicated in modernist social science in the form of the transition from 'tradition' to 'modernity' which involves a form of 'romantic fallacy' in the way in which the past social structure is conceived (Bendix 1967: 319; Gellner 1996).

In its current version, the *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* antinomy takes the nation-state, which would be in its final crisis, as the new *Gemeinschaft*, whereas the new *Gesellschaft* is now presented with the different names sociologists give to the social formations that are allegedly coming to replace nation-states: global society, network society, world risk society and so on. No doubt, the new version of the antinomy is implicitly formulated and never formally presented but the argument works all the same. The new *Gesellschaft* is thought to be radically different from the nation-state *community*, so radical as to make obsolete all previous forms of social theorising; this seems also to imply that with the passing of the nation-state, sociology itself is about to pass. The radical historical break we now allegedly experience is in itself presented as something new, whereas in fact that type of claim is at the very core of the classical formulation of *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft*. As said already, there is nothing intrinsically new and radical in claiming the 'newness' and 'radicalness' of social

change. Moreover, the same criticisms that were directed against the naivety with which classical sociology looked at *Gemeinschaft*, the romantic fallacy of a communal life that is free of conflict (Gellner 1996), can now be pointed to the ways in which current sociology looks at historical development of nation-states. In paraphrasing Bendix (1967: 320), if classical as well as modernist sociology reconstructed historical transitions ‘by contrasting the liabilities of the present with the assets of the past’; we can now say that the new orthodoxy echoes this by contrasting the liabilities of past *and* present – the nation-state – with the assets the future should, hopefully, provide – the new global society.

**c. The declining role of the idea of society in sociology.**

The critique of the equation between society and the nation-state is a recurrent argument in the new orthodoxy. The reference to ‘national societies’ just as societies (‘British’, ‘Japanese’, ‘Peruvian’ society) becomes for them the simplest manifestation of a deep-seated tendency to conflate nation-states and society, a tendency which is only complicated further by the alternative use of the term in ways like ‘global’ or ‘European’ society. My final point in relation to the new orthodoxy is therefore that, in rightly criticising the equation between society and the nation-state, they do not pay attention to the role of society *beyond* this equation and thus fail to provide a satisfactory account of the uses of society in sociology. Their argument is that, due to the nature of that link between society and the nation-state, the concept of society cannot convey any strong sociological or theoretical meaning (Beck 2000a: 20-1, 2002: 51). They argue that a sociological definition of society has become indistinguishable from the conditions which allegedly characterised nation-states, so

the weaker the nation-states the more unnecessary a concept of society: nation-states and the concept of society will eventually disappear together.

Urry (2000a: Ch. 1; 2000b: 190-5) maintains what is probably the most radical version of this argument, by rejecting the possibility of attaching *any* relevant meaning to society, while Beck (1997: 15, 28-33, 48, 125; 2000b: 12-22; 128) is unable to see what is behind his own use of the idea of society in, for instance, his 'world risk society'. Albrow (1996: 43-50; 167; 212) refers to the differences between the concepts of human, world, and global society, all of which would transcend what he calls the core of the modern project, that is, the 'nation-state society'. In so doing, however, he only exemplifies a problem that is common to the new orthodoxy as a whole: there is a purely 'referential' understanding of society. His argument runs simply: if we have no more 'nation-state society' then some new form of empirically distinguishable society has to come in its place. Albrow searches, vainly, for that empirical referent to which he can attach the concept of society, hence he comes up with the concept of 'global society'. The problem, however, is that the question itself is misplaced. In addition to understanding society as a geographical referent, I shall argue later in the chapter that society performs a regulative function in sociology that these thinkers do not see: the referential use of society is only half of the role of a sociological use of society. The idea of society is also a necessary part of the sociological discourse as it brings with it a reference to the nature of social relations and this is something the new orthodoxy systematically fails to recognise. In trying to de-reify a sociological understanding of nation-states, then, the new orthodoxy has ended up re-reifying what society means for sociology.

To summarise, then, it is the ‘foundationalism’ of the new orthodoxy – the claim that a radical transformation of sociology is the only way in which it will be able to understand our radically transformed world and time – that I find most problematic. My critique, however, does not arise out of conservatism (fear of history and change), intellectual purism (trying to find the ‘correct’ understanding of the sociological canon) or a pathological Freudian Oedipus complex (a necessity of killing one’s own father). Rather, I think that the new orthodoxy might be more instrumental in grasping the ambivalences of nation-states, reconstructing the sociological canon, understanding our current epochal condition and setting the parameters for a new normative order if it located itself more clearly within and not beyond the intellectual traditions and tensions of sociology. It is the reflective vocation of sociology that seems to be at stake here; the question of whether or not the critical engagement with the canon is a plausible form of sociological inquiry as it may help us understand the world and age in which we live. In trying to understand the ways in which previous sociologists have tried to comprehend the social world, we may be able to say something about sociology, that social world, and the relations between the two. The problem this creates for the new orthodoxy is apparent in the fact that these writers have taken at face value the claim that during a few decades of the post-war period some very few nation-states could be regarded – or had regarded themselves – as the embodiment of the project of modernity. They seem to have been confounded by a certain ‘intellectual opacity’ of nation-states, by the ambivalent position of nation-states in modernity so that, instead of using the problems and ambiguities in sociology’s canon to account for the troubled history of the nation-state, they dismiss the discipline’s legacy as inadequate and nation-states as obsolete. This does not mean, however, that a reconstruction of the history of the sociology of the nation-state will have to lead to



that result and this is the context in which the question of the rise of the idea of methodological nationalism needs to be explored further.

## **1.2. Revisiting methodological nationalism.**

The first systematic arguments about the links between the idea of society and the historical formation of nation-states in sociology were developed in the early 1970s; one of the central features of what has been referred to as the ‘second crisis of modernity’ was precisely a more reflexive approach towards the relationships between sociology, society and nation-states (Wagner 1994: 30-1). In fact, a number of commentators started to reflect upon the implications of the equation between society and the nation-state in sociology at that time. For instance, towards the end of his volume on the class structure of the advanced societies, Anthony Giddens (1973: 265) made the following claim

The primary unit of sociological analysis, the sociologist’s “society” – in relation to the industrialised world at least – has always been, and must continue to be, the administratively bounded nation-state. But “society” in this sense, has *never* been the isolated, the “internally developing” system which has normally been implied in social theory. One of the most important weaknesses of sociological conceptions of development, from Marx onwards, has been the persistent tendency to think of development as the “unfolding” of endogenous influences with a given society (or, more often, a “type” of society). “External” factors are treated as an “environment” to which the society has to “adapt” and therefore merely conditional in the progression of social change (...) In fact, any adequate understanding of the development of

the advanced societies presupposes the recognition that factors making for “endogenous” evolution always combine with influences from “the outside” in determining the transformations to which a society is subject<sup>11</sup>

Similar views were being expressed in British sociology at the time and Herminio Martins and then Anthony D. Smith coined the term ‘methodological nationalism’ to describe, on a critical note, what they saw as some crucial developments in sociology. According to Martins (1974: 276)

[I]n the last three decades or so the principle of immanent change has largely coincided with a general presumption – supported by a great variety of scholars in the entire spectrum of sociological opinion – that the “total” or “inclusive society”, in effect the nation-state, be deemed to be the standard, optimal or even maximal “isolate” for sociological analysis (...) In general, macro-sociological work has largely submitted to national pre-definitions of social realities: a kind of *methodological nationalism* – which does not necessarily go together with political nationalism on the part of the researcher – imposes itself in practice with national community as the terminal unit and boundary condition for the demarcation of problems and phenomena for social science (emphasis added)

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<sup>11</sup> A decade or so later Giddens (1985: 30) was arguing that the problem was less the lack of a ‘sociology of the nation-state’ and more that the understanding of nation-states had remained unrelated to ‘the main trends of thinking in social theory’. In a way, that is precisely what I am trying to do in the thesis.

In his discussion of Martins' definition of methodological nationalism, A. D. Smith gave it a slightly different emphasis. His argument was that 'the principle of "methodological nationalism" operates at every level in the sociology, politics, economics and history of mankind in the modern era', hence

[T]he study of "society" today is, almost without question, equated with the analysis of nation-states (...) There are very good reasons for proceeding this way, but the theoretical underpinning derives much of its force from acceptance of nationalist conceptions, and goes a long way to reinforce those conceptions. In this way, the world nation-state system has become an enduring and stable component of our whole cognitive outlook, quite apart from the psychological satisfactions it confers (Smith 1979: 191)

All three arguments coincide in a number of points. Firstly, they all endorse the view that sociology's central concept, society, has been equated to the nation-state. Secondly, they also agree on the fact that this equation between society and the nation-state takes an endogenous or internalist explanation of social change for granted.<sup>12</sup> Thirdly, they express a dissatisfaction with this internalist focus and agree that a thorough revision of that self-contained image of society was needed. Fourthly, they seem to agree on the idea that, as long as the internalist focus was discarded, there was no intrinsic problem in equating the nation-state with society. Finally, they also share the claim that 'society' and the 'nation-state' have tended to fuse in modernity; the nation-state became the 'normal' form of society in modernity – at least in the developed world. In relation to history and conceptual core of sociology, then, the

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<sup>12</sup> Earlier comments on an excessive 'internalist' concern in recent (i.e. Parsonian) sociology can be found in Dahrendorf (1958) and Poggi (1965)

quarrel was not against the equation of society and nation-state as such but particularly against its internalist emphasis.

These arguments differ, however, on the extent to which *political* and *methodological* nationalism presuppose and require each other. For Martins, the question was one of logical presuppositions and conceptual definitions; the rise of methodological nationalism was the result of a thirty-year long process based upon the assumption of this endogenous model of social change in the sociology of his time. As long as sociology presupposed that social change was ‘internally-driven’ the discipline would always conceive of its object of study as self-sufficient; the link between society and the nation-state was made on the basis of the national structure of sociological categories. I shall call this proposition the *logical* version of the argument of methodological nationalism.

In Smith’s view, on the other hand, the question was related to the fact that states themselves are interested in reinforcing the image of their solidity and self-sufficiency, and also to the rise of an ‘international system of nation-states’ which reinforces the relevance of the nation-state at all levels: social, intellectual and political. Smith claims that there is a somewhat natural ‘psychological satisfaction’ of state-bureaucrats and state-intellectuals from small countries in seeing their own flags alongside those of bigger, ‘historical’, more powerful nation-states. Smith understands the rise of methodological nationalism as yet another consequence of the importance of the state nationalisms of the twentieth century so his is a *socio-historical* argument.

As said, for Martins and Smith, the thesis of sociology’s methodological nationalism was meant to convey a certain *critique* of well-established trends and practices in the

sociology of that time; their problem with the internalist focus that characterised sociology's methodological nationalism was that it diminished the discipline's intellectual possibilities of understanding social change. To have 'discovered' the problems in methodological nationalism, to have opened a discussion about them, was seen as a crucial critical insight into the strengthening and development of the social sciences. These authors addressed sociology's methodological nationalism critically so that it could be challenged and did not continue to exercise its influence upon the discipline. In so doing, moreover, they did not seem to have reified the development of sociology; on the contrary, they understood this methodological nationalism as a result of a certain set of intellectual and institutional practices within the discipline; so, while Martins conveyed his logical case as a factual result of his analysis of the recent trends in sociological theory, Smith's argument was based on his observations of the ways in which sociologists behave in their concrete, state-based, practice. Their arguments on methodological nationalism were conceived of as a reconstruction of sociology from within sociology itself, and certainly did not amount to a renunciation to the knowledge claims of sociology nor was it an invitation to giving up the use of general categories such as society. On the contrary, they located their works within the reflective vocation of sociology.

For the purposes of the thesis, it is important to keep in mind that the logical and the historical versions of the argument of methodological nationalism are different and that although they reinforce one another they do not require each other.<sup>13</sup> The point is

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<sup>13</sup> N. Smelser (1997: 52) has forcefully made the case that the two arguments reinforce each other: '[t]his "strong" and "closed" notion of the national society was a product not only of the intellectual efforts of social theorists and social scientists. It also emerged from the more or less organized projects of modern national societies themselves (...) national societies themselves have worked toward that fusion, or unity of national economy, polity, society and

that, when these views on methodological nationalism first arose in the 1970s, the historical argument (the nation-state as a political project) could be regarded as much less contentious than the logical argument – the internalist emphasis of the equation between society and the nation-state. Indeed, the problem we face now is that, after the new orthodoxy's critique of methodological nationalism, it is apparent that the historical argument is at least as contentious and consequential as the logical one.<sup>14</sup> The nation-state cannot be regarded any more as though the final representation of modern societies and this change in the historical circumstances makes the logical argument even more untenable because it is precisely the nationally bounded structure of sociology that allegedly incapacitates it to make sense of a world which is no longer organised around nation-state principles. My argument here is that we need to differentiate the logical and the socio-historical versions of methodological nationalism as a way into disentangling the equation between society and the nation-state; the argument is that the conflation between the two versions gives plausibility to the new orthodoxy's claim that the obsolescence of the historical argument – the decline of the nation-state – means the definitive defeat of the logical argument – the uselessness of the idea of society and eventually the decline of sociology as 'we know it'.

On the contrary, I maintain that a reconstruction of the history of the sociology the nation-state, and an understanding of the theoretical functions of society in sociology, require a clear distinction of both arguments. In the same way as B. Yack (1997) has

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culture'. These two aspects of the equation must be disentangled for a reconstruction of the history of the sociology of the nation-state that can also move beyond methodological nationalism.

<sup>14</sup> This is the line of reasoning that leads J. A. Scholte (2000: 56-8) to claim that the rise of globalisation gives a 'farewell' to the 'methodological territorialism' of *all* social sciences.

shown that the conflation between a substantive and a temporal dimensions of modernity turns it into a 'fetish', I would like to argue that the conflation between the logical and the historical versions of methodological nationalism creates the *fetishism* of the nation-state.<sup>15</sup> Nation-states are a fetish when they are conceptualised as self-sufficient, solid, well integrated and teleologically necessary forms of socio-political organisation in modernity; this is what methodological nationalism, and to a certain extent also the new orthodoxy's critique of methodological nationalism, have done to our understanding of nation-states. The more important consequence of this is that it prevents us from capturing the troubled history of nation-states in modernity and the way in which this is reflected in sociology's attempts to study nation-states.

It is in examining the tensions and relations between the two arguments of methodological nationalism that the possibility arises for 'a history of the sociology of the nation-state' in which the equation between society and nation-state becomes neither logically nor historically necessary. I shall distance my position from the new orthodoxy's claim that sociology can no longer use strong theoretical categories such as society on the basis of the necessity and inevitability of sociology's methodological nationalism and argue that there is still much to be gained for sociology in maintaining a strong idea of society. At one level, I argue that the idea of society can and must be kept if one looks at the roles it has actually performed in sociological analyses: that that function transcends the attachment of society to any particular geographical unit.

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<sup>15</sup> Modernity is a fetish when it becomes 'social myth (...) that unifies many-sided social processes and phenomena into a single grand object (...) the secret of our current obsession with the fate of modernity is the persistent tendency of many contemporary intellectuals (...) to treat the human condition in recent centuries as a coherent and integrated whole' (Yack 1997: 6). It seems to me that the same holds true for a methodologically nationalistic understanding of the nation-state.

Also, I propose that the sociological canon provides a more complex image of nation-states than the one that is implied in methodological nationalism. I will endorse the original *critical* insight of Martins and Smith in relation to the links between society and the nation-state but against their view I will argue that sociology has used the idea of society not only in that particular way; society has also played the role of a regulative ideal in sociology. Overall, I shall take their starting point, but from then on a new route is to be attempted.

### 1.3. Society as a regulative ideal.

In this final section of the chapter I will address the question of the different uses of society in sociology with a view of criticising the logical argument of methodological nationalism; the necessity of the link between the concept of society and the nation-state. In addition to the critique of the equation between society and the nation-state in sociology; a number of other claims have been made as to why sociology's relation with society is problematic.<sup>16</sup> In that context, at least the following arguments can be identified:

- 'Society', as a concept, was coined before the rise of sociology, so it has kept its meaning attached to questions that are not specifically sociological, the

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<sup>16</sup> For a conceptual history of the term *société* in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries France, that is, before the rise of sociology, see Baker (1994). The question of the role or position of 'society' *within* sociology has been raised many times so, in chronological order, the following works can be mentioned: Simmel (1910 [1908]); Parsons (1956 [1934]); Nisbet (1967: 3-7); Adorno (2000 [1968]: 5; 28-34); Mayhew (1968); Tilly (1984: 20-6); Giddens (1985: 1-22); Frisby and Sayer (1986); Mann (1986: 1-32); Archer (1995: Ch. 1); Freitag (2002 [1995]); Albrow (1996: 43-50); Crow (1997: 9-19); Smelser (1997); Luhmann (1998); Calhoun (1999: 218-21); Urry (2000a: Ch. 1); Rigney (2001); Wagner (2001b) and Touraine (1998; 2003).



distinction between state and civil society being one but not the only example of that (Luhmann, Mayhew, Parsons).

- ‘Society’ has permeated into everyday language to such an extent that it precludes any attempt to define it more technically (Mann) or to make it sociology’s central concept (Nisbet).
- ‘Society’, in a positivistic self-understanding of sociology as an empirical science, is discarded as a philosophical and not a sociological question (Adorno).
- ‘Society’ has been defeated, for better or worse, by alternative concepts such as ‘the social’ in becoming the core category in sociology (Freitag, Wagner).
- ‘Society’ has been given many different meanings within sociology so that it is now a chronically hopeless conceptual tool (Albrow, Urry).

Indeed, good reasons have been given in support for all these arguments. In asking, once again, the question of the role of society in sociology, I would like to follow a different route. This does not mean, however, that I regard previous efforts to deal with this question necessarily flawed; nor do I convey a purely normative argument as to why society ‘must’ be seen as a regulative ideal. My argument, rather, is that in looking at the ways in which sociologists have actually used the idea of society one can find that society has played a *regulative* function and now is the time to justify this claim.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, I. Kant defined ‘regulative principles’ or ‘regulative ideals’ as a way of linking pure knowledge to empirical objects and Kant distinguished three different levels at which that relationship is expressed. First, there are the ‘categories’ of understanding which are closest to sensible experiences, to the

representation of empirical objects; these would be the concepts with which empirical sciences describe the world. Kant (1973: 485) then introduced the 'ideas', which are 'further removed from objective reality than are categories, for no appearance can be found in which they can be represented *in concreto*. They contain a certain completeness to which no possible empirical knowledge ever attains'. Finally, there are also 'ideals' which are 'further removed from objective reality even than the idea' (Kant 1973: 485). Kant's (1973: 486) argument continues as follows

Although we cannot concede to these ideals objective reality (existence), they are not therefore to be regarded as figments of the brain; they supply reason with a standard which is indispensable to it, providing it, as they do, with a concept of that which is entirely complete in its kind, and thereby enabling it to estimate and to measure the degree and the defects of the incomplete

Regulative ideals then allow us to recognize the defects that are intrinsic to any contemplation of the empirical world, and at the same time they help us to think about the connection between these abstract forms of representation and the empirical world. As '*focus imaginarius*' (Habermas 2002: 23) they are counterfactuals that by their non-empirical condition are meant to play a role in the study of actual social phenomena (Apel 1998: 167-71). In philosophy, Kant mentions 'humanity' as one of these ideals because it contains all the essentials 'which belong to human nature and constitute our concept of it' (Kant 1973: 485). In the same way that humanity is not an object of empirical research but that philosophical thinking requires some idea of humanity; sociology's relation to society is not contingent or accidental but immanent; society is an *impossible* and *necessary* object of knowledge for sociology (Blum 1974: 207-8). It

is an impossible object of study from the point of view of an empirical discipline.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, society is a necessary object of study for sociology as a way of setting up the question of ‘social relations as such’; a sociological reflection upon social relations implies some mention to society. This is the first *philosophical* argument in favour of the thesis of the role of society as a *regulative ideal*.

In order to make my argument on the regulative function of society more plausible, another claim can equally be made; there is also a more *sociological* sense in which the argument can be justified. In a broad sense, the intellectual mission of sociology is to provide comprehensive accounts of the nature and meaning of the epochal changes that have shaped the modern world during the last two centuries or so. This intellectual outlook was supposed to integrate, within a single framework, the *description* of these social changes and a *normative* understanding of the ongoing social transformations.<sup>18</sup> My argument here is that, in order to avoid equating sociology with nation-states, a critical engagement with sociology’s use of society has to focus on three different sets of issues. Firstly, there is the question of the formation of the intellectual tools necessary to pursue sociological analyses: concepts have to be created; different intellectual traditions have to be put together; a more rationalistic-scientific approach has to be applied on to different social contexts and institutional spaces have to be fought for and created. This can be called the question of the formation of the *sociological canon(s)*. Secondly, there is the need for the definition of a *social space* in which modern social relations can take place and develop. A *society* to be studied has

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<sup>17</sup> In fact, this is nothing particular to sociology as empirical sciences are always troubled when they try to define their core concepts (Luhmann 1998: 51).

<sup>18</sup> This tension between descriptive and normative elements is a constant in the formation of sociology and ‘social theory’, at least in the social theory that is closer to sociology (Bernstein 1976).

to be created both in terms of location and scale of the sociological analysis – the referential use of society – and in terms of the core features of these social relations – the regulative use of society.<sup>19</sup> Thirdly, there are also sociology's *epochal diagnoses*, that is, general and comprehensive accounts of the major trends that make the world change so quickly.

In terms of the reflective vocation of sociology, and on the basis of the scheme just presented, it can be argued that the idea of society links sociology's epochal diagnoses with the formation of the intellectual tools that are required to pursue these diagnoses. In other words, the changes in sociology's definition of society inform what sociology has stressed at both historical-normative (diagnoses) and theoretical (canon) levels, at different moments in time. Different conceptions of society mediate between sociology's *theoretical tools* and *epochal diagnoses* in order to understand the social world of which sociology itself is part. For the different periods of 'classical', 'modernist' and 'cosmopolitan' sociology, I shall make the case that, by looking at how the idea of society is defined, one can clarify the ways in which conceptual apparatuses (the canon) relate to epochal diagnoses and this is society's regulative role in the development of sociological thinking.<sup>20</sup>

The claim that society is a regulative ideal in sociology then results from observing different ways in which sociologists have actually used the term society in their works;

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<sup>19</sup> This double referential and regulative function of society is what may distinguish it, for instance, from sister concepts like 'the social' that do not include any reference to place and time. This is also the sense in which M. Freitag (2002) argues against 'the dissolution of society within the social'.

<sup>20</sup> Most explicitly, towards the end of Chapter 2 (on Marx), in the second part of Chapter 5 (on Parsons), and in the excursus at the end of Chapter 7 (on Castells).

it finds expression in the history of sociology. In fact, it is possible to identify two different traditions within sociology that have made use – more or less critically – of Kant’s formulation in relation to their understanding of society. The first of such traditions connects explicitly Kant’s regulative ideals with Simmel’s (Frisby 2002: 50) and Parsons’ (Münch 1981) views on society. The argument here is that ‘society’ is sociology’s ultimate concern as it points to an idea of social relations in general and that its role as regulative ideal prevents us from being able to study it empirically. Simmel (1994: 29) thus proposed the concept of ‘sociation’ instead and Parsons focused on the concept of ‘social system’ (see Chapter 5, below); through sociation and social system Simmel and Parsons used society as a regulative ideal – as an impossible but necessary object for sociology. The second tradition is that of critical sociology, from Marx to the Frankfurt school, in which society took the form of an idea of totality. Here society points again to an idea of social relations in general; society becomes, for Marx, ‘socialised humanity; the relations of production in their totality’ (see Chapter 2, below) or in the case of the Frankfurt school society is ‘the unity of the general and the particular in the total complex of relationships of human beings, as these relationships reproduce themselves’ (Frankfurt Institute for Social Research 1975: 27-8).

It is interesting to note that despite their differences the two traditions share at least the following characteristics in the way in which they understand the role of society in sociology: [1] they start from Kant’s regulative principles and build their own arguments as a critical engagement with it; [2] take society seriously from the point of view of its role in sociology; [3] entail some (although different) ontological standpoint about the social world and the ways in which sociology can apprehend that world and; [4] need to make no reference to society as an empirical object (which in

the case of methodological nationalism has to do with the definition of a geographical referent).

For the purposes of my thesis this means that the attachment of society to a historical-geographical formation (nation-states or whatever else) is not an innocent decision. The referential use of society that is at the base of sociology's methodological nationalism is then a question of not having distinguished clearly between these two different and complementary functions. In Kant's sense, the problem behind the 'referential' use of society is that society loses its role as a regulative ideal. As argued in the previous section, the consequences of this referential use of society are the reification of the historical forms to which 'society' can be related (methodological nationalism's historical argument) and the inadequate understanding of the theoretical function of society (methodological nationalism's logical argument). The question is then neither whether society is sociology's core object of study nor how 'empirical' societies are to be defined after the decline of nation-states; rather, the issue at stake is the role of society in the theoretical apparatuses with which sociology actually looks at the social world.

Sociology's use of society as a regulative ideal is not a matter of will but is part and parcel of sociology's general reflection on the nature of social relations; we shall see throughout the thesis that sociologists have in fact used 'society' in this regulative sense. The detachment of society from whatever empirical reference is not an *ad-hoc* hypothesis to save sociology's capacity to reflect on current social changes, but the recognition of the role that society has actually played in the formation of sociology's canon and epochal diagnoses. Having said all this, I still am sensitive to the fact that the task of justifying the claim of society's role as a regulative ideal is too complex for

what I have done here; surely this issue has some implications of which I am not fully aware (I say a bit more on this at the very end of the thesis). At this stage, however, I think it is enough to have introduced a way of envisaging society that can help us move beyond methodological nationalism and maintained that this is part of the sociological legacy in which this thesis is interested.

## **Conclusion**

In this first part I have tried to set up the framework within which to attempt the reconstruction of a history of the sociology of the nation-state. The main characteristics of sociology's new orthodoxy have been exposed and criticised; the rise of methodological nationalism in the 1970s was explored and given a new twist with the distinction between a logical and a socio-historical version of it and finally the claim of society's role as a regulative ideal was justified. The problems with the arguments of methodological nationalism, as well as with the new orthodoxy's critique of methodological nationalism, can be summarised as follows: they *distort* sociology's intellectual history by reducing it to the equation between society and the nation-state; they *prevent* us from capturing the ambivalent position and legacy of nation-states in modernity as they make a fetish of them; and they *undermine* sociology's theoretical apparatuses by ignoring the role of society as a regulative ideal. So far, then, I have concentrated mainly on the critical side of the thesis; I have disentangled the different components upon which the equation between society and the nation-state has been assembled and prepared the soil for the second positive part of my argument. Let then the reconstruction of the history of the sociology of the nation-state now start.

## **Part II. Classical sociology. Nation-states and the world dimension of modernity.**

In the claim that sociology is a methodologically nationalistic discipline, a certain view of the disciplinary canon is assumed. If K. Marx, M. Weber and E. Durkheim are the ‘classics of sociology’, and ‘sociology is the science of the nation-state’, one should reasonably expect to find in their works the arguments to support this particular conception of sociology. Without addressing the question of their status as ‘classics’ directly, my reading of Marx, Weber and Durkheim centres on their understanding of nation-states in the context of trying to explain the rise of sociology’s methodological nationalism.

Marx’s substantive focus, even when it came down to the understanding of concrete ‘countries’ (such as France or Germany), had less to do with these ‘societies’ as self-contained units of analysis and more with class relations, structures and struggles. Marx’s critique of both political economy and political philosophy can be read as a critique of what he may have regarded as the ‘early’ methodological nationalism of these traditions: Marx developed a critique of methodological nationalism *before* the rise of the nation-state. German political philosophy’s idealisation of the modern state was a permanent object of critique for the young Marx as expressed in his critique of Hegel and in the distinction between political and human emancipation, between the national and a world revolution. Also, in relation to political economy, Marx explicitly made the case that *national* markets and currencies presuppose and require *world* capital and market. We shall see how Marx’s understanding of nation-states is framed within his thesis that, in capitalism, all forms of social relations ‘become antiquated before they can ossify’: nation-states are being constituted and pulled apart, formed



and dissolved, as part of the contradictory dynamic of capitalism. In Marx's analysis, the nation-state is dissolved in the tensions between world capitalism and world revolution – between Empires and the Commune. Marx's idea of the nation-state resembles the image of a 'void', of a type of social and political organisation that emerges from, but cannot deal with, the contradictory character of capitalist social relations. This image of the void captures, in my view, the major strengths and weaknesses of Marx's conceptualisation of the nation-state. For the former, Marx realised that nation-states are always under immense pressures that they can handle only just: global accumulation of capital, class struggle, internationalism are all forces at work that create contradictions that escape from the nation-state's control. For the latter, Marx lacked a clear conceptualisation of what nation-state can actually manage to achieve and how they can find ways of resisting these same pressures. If Marx clearly appreciated that nation-states were not such solid and stable forms of socio-political organisation as methodological nationalism would argue, he equally exaggerated the extent – and pace – of their possible disintegration. Nation-states have proved far more resilient than Marx would have prescribed and indeed hoped.

Weber's early writings show a preoccupation, interest and valuation for the German nation that became less central in his mature works. He not only clearly understood that nations and nation-states exist as much in people's heads as in the real world but also realised that it was precisely this feature that made nations and nation-states so intellectually opaque as well as politically powerful. On the one hand, he was aware of the fact that nation and states hardly ever coincide so the idea of the nation-state was not adequate for an empirical representation of politics. When powerful and strong, states expand beyond the nation's limits and become multi-national *Empires*. When states are weak and 'forsake power', the peoples living within these states cannot be

conceived of as nations at all. On the other hand, he understood well that ‘the people’, language, ethnicity, class and culture all can and have been taken as the nation’s *true* core and yet none of them was really so. Above all, nations are for Weber a form of political community that is based on ‘sentiments of prestige’. Furthermore, even if nations need to be defined in relation to some form of political community, Weber’s conceptualisation of the modern state is *totally* independent from the nation. Modern states are characterised, firstly, by the fact that the ‘administrative staff is separated from the means of administration’ and secondly by the specific means states use to fulfil their tasks: violence. This becomes apparent in Weber’s diagnostic of the tragedy of modern culture. Modernity is conceptualised there as the ‘secularisation of culture’, the process of differentiation of value spheres that make it so hard for modern individuals to make sense of – and act upon – the world around them. Politics is just one of the values spheres of modernity, a sphere that has more to do with power and violence than with nation-states.

Durkheim, for his part, seems to have become more nationalistic as he grew older. The more influential and involved he became in the (educational) politics of the French Republic; the more he felt that his own person was attached to the institutional fate of the Republic, and the more he moved towards what we would today call a type of ‘civic nationalism’. Durkheim supported, throughout all his life quite a substantive idea of humanity and he became increasingly entrenched in the position that France (or at least the French Third Republic) had become the incarnation of that idea of humanity which he associated with moral individualism. His concern was with how to achieve the adequate checks and balances in which capitalism, individual freedom and the state can all develop and relate to each other. On the one hand, individuals need to be defended from any possible authoritarian development of the state; they had to be

left alone to pursue their interests and will without external impositions and Durkheim regarded this as the role of professional bodies in a modern state. On the other hand, the state was the agency in charge of defending individuals' freedom from any type of unfair treatment like class exploitation, racism and chauvinism. At the international level, Durkheim regarded that Germany's 'bellicose spirit' was the main cause of the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 and this made France's role quite unique; Durkheim took the defence of France's national identity as a 'moral duty' precisely because he regarded it *universal* as well as *national*. The whole point of Durkheim's conceptualisation of the nation-state is that 'national patriotism' and 'world patriotism' are 'equally high-minded kind of sentiments' on the grounds that he understood that abstract moral ideals such as 'world patriotism' have to be anchored in 'real' communities and states – national patriotism. The seriousness in his attempt to combine normative and sociological arguments is what seems to me Durkheim's greatest achievement. Despite all shortcomings of his anti-German chauvinism and a certain naiveté in his ideas of humanity and moral individualism, Durkheim never surrendered in his effort to make normative and sociological arguments work together.

From this brief outline of the 'sociology of the nation-state' for each writer, I would like to spell out three issues that run through this whole second part of the thesis. First, the question that the classics did not conflate their ideas on the nature of sociological knowledge with their political concerns on nation-states and yet, at the same time, they did not seek to separate the two realms completely. Rather, their works show how *real* that tension is and that the relationships between *political* nationalism and their 'sociology of the nation-state' can express themselves in different ways. In other words, I shall argue that although no automatic connection or translation is to be made between political and methodological nationalism, no absolute separation between

them is possible either; a clear-cut separation between political and methodological nationalism is just as untenable and problematic as the positions in which they are conflated. The classics did not regard their emergent ‘sociology’ as an instrument for the development of particular nation-states; none of them regarded the nation-state as the final, central or necessary repository of modern social relations. It seems to me that here the case on their alleged methodological nationalism becomes particularly problematic: they saw nation-states in the making and maintained no idea of their necessary generalisation as social and political unit.

Second, it is interesting that in their different and somewhat defective way, the three writers had something to say about Empires. An adequate treatment of this relationship between empires and sociology is beyond the scope of my thesis – in fact, it would have meant a different thesis altogether. Indeed, in other disciplines or intellectual traditions the idea of Empire is more central for the characterisation of modernity than for sociology. For instance, what books as different as H. Arendt’s (1958) *The origins of Totalitarianism* and E. Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* both point out is that Empires, more than nation-states, are to be taken as the most important political form of modernity. In fact, for Arendt and Said the question of imperialism transcends the actual permanence of Empires over time. On the one hand, they expanded on the arguments on the connection between the rise of European Empires and the development of capitalism in the late nineteenth-century. On the other, in accounting for imperialism ‘after the end of the age of empires’ they transcended an economicist view of the subject by stressing both the cultural (Said) and political (Arendt) relevance of Empires.

The question of the connection between sociology and the rise of Empires in the late nineteenth century has been largely absent in the reconstructions of the sociological canon, although recently R. Connell has addressed it. Connell explicitly criticises the idea of classical sociology being methodologically nationalistic; he rightly highlights the problems of the ‘internalist focus’ on which the *reconstructions* of the sociological canon are traditionally based: ‘the rise of sociology cannot be understood by internalist models (...) because it crucially involves the structure of *world society*’ (Connell 1997: 1519). His argument is that this internalist focus is something imported by later sociologists into the works of the classics and therefore does not reflect what the writers themselves saw as their central concerns. Connell rightly highlights the fact that the global perspective was part of the original agenda of the classics, but his understanding of this global agenda is flawed on two grounds. On the one hand, he opposes this global perspective of sociology to the national one; he fails to see how complementary the two viewpoints are and, in pressing on the global too strongly, he ends up disregarding completely what the classics actually said about nation-states (Collins 1997). On the other hand, Connell (1997: 1524) wrongly equates that global agenda of sociology with what he calls the ‘imperial gaze’, so his revisionist thesis on the rise of ‘classical sociology’ is as unsatisfactory as the methodologically nationalistic view it opposes. Crucially, the problem with his argument is that it offers a view of the rise of sociology that is as one-sided as methodological nationalism; Connell’s (1997: 1519) claims that sociology ‘embodied a cultural response of the colonized world’ or that sociology’s ‘comparative method and grand ethnography deleted the actual practice of colonialism from the world of empire’ (Connell 1997: 1530), can only be described as *methodologically imperialistic*. Indeed, there is no point in criticising methodological nationalism just to replace it with methodological imperialism.

Finally, it is worth stressing that the three authors tried to grasp modernity as both national and global right from the start, and this holds true for both their ‘idea of science’ – science knows no nationality – and their object of study – the rise of the modern world as both national *and* global (Turner 1990; Robertson 2000: 15-24). In all three cases, their reflections on the rise and main characteristics of the nation-state are made in the context of a world that is taken as a whole. They wanted to understand the modern world that was emerging before their eyes and as nation-states were part of that world they could only be understood within it. Indeed, it goes without saying that their ideas of the world differ greatly as they took the form of a global market and a global revolution, humanity and world patriotism and the secularisation of culture as the tragedy of modernity. In all cases, the agenda of the classics cannot be accounted for with either nation-states or the world as a whole: they needed them both – and so do we.

I hope that my review of what classical sociologists have to say about nation-states in the context of the rise of the modern world might portray an image of our own discipline that is not methodologically nationalistic and help understanding of the historical formation of nation-states. Through their different objects of concern, the works of these writers are worth revisiting because of the questions they pose as well as the *ways* in which they do so. The question of the ‘dissolution’ of the nation-state that Marx so clearly perceived; the relationships between politics and science with which Weber painfully tried to come to terms; and the forms of mediations between moral ideals and nation-states that troubled Durkheim have all remained important themes of concern in sociology ever since. The challenges we currently face are, at least in these crucial regards, not far from theirs.

## **Chapter 2. Karl Marx: World market, world revolution and the premature dissolution of the nation-state.**

The work of Karl Marx is a good starting point for a reconstruction of a ‘sociology of the nation-state’ that is at the same time, a critique of methodological nationalism. Although even sympathetic commentators have made the argument that Marx’s work is not particularly helpful for understanding nation-states (Giddens 1985: 23-31); the fact that Marx did not address the question of nation-states directly can be turned here into an advantage: Marx neither conceived nation-states as the highest form of socio-political organisation nor did he anticipate a ‘universal’ process of nation-state formation. In his work we are going to find a clear rebuttal of the thesis that nation-states are the only, crucial or final yardstick to assess the ‘political’ forms of capitalist development. Furthermore, Marx’s doubts as to what nations are, how we must study them, and what role will they play in the future are all problems that scholars interested in these subjects have faced ever since (Smith 1983).

Without pushing the analogy between Marx’s time and our own too far, it seems fair to argue that our current epoch mirrors Marx’s in that for neither him nor us can nation-states be taken for granted. Marx’s early critique of nation-states and the current ‘post-national’ theories share, I think, a type of uncertainty that can be used to our advantage; it may be useful to review Marx’s account on the formation and future of nation-states, the connection Marx saw between the local and global aspects of capitalism and also the tensions between different forms of nationalism and internationalism. It seems to me that Marx glimpsed a particular form of ‘methodological nationalism’ in previous Political Philosophy and Political Economy; his critique of these traditions is definitively worth revisiting in this context. This does

not imply, however, that his understanding of nations and nation-states was free of problems; it is arguable that, at times, it was equivocal (as in the concept of ‘people without history’), Eurocentric (as in some statements on colonialism), and chauvinistic (as with the support of German national unification and against the separatist claims of some minority groups).

The chapter is divided into two sections. First, I shall discuss some secondary literature that has dealt with Marx’s reflections on nations and nation-states and has tried to formalise the ‘theory’ of the nation-state that Marx never actually produced. I shall argue that these arguments are problematic, mainly because they import methodologically nationalistic claims into Marx’s views and in so doing they violate Marx’s deeper understanding of the nature of capitalism and social life. In the second part of the chapter I argue that Marx’s understanding of nation-states is set up by his idea that, in capitalism, all social relations ‘become antiquated before they can ossify’. Marx disintegrates the nation-state in his analysis of the tensions between Empires and the Commune, between national and world revolutions. Marx’s idea of the nation-state resembles a type of social and political organisation that emerges from, but cannot deal with, the contradictory character of capitalism; nation-states are being constituted and pulled apart, formed and dissolved, as part of the contradictory dynamic of capitalism.

### **2.1. The problems of reconstructing Marx’s ‘theory’ of the nation-state.**

In an early study on Marx’s conception of the nation, Solomon Bloom (1967 [1941]) made the case that, for Marx, terms such as ‘nation’, ‘society’, ‘national’ and ‘social’ were all virtually interchangeable. To Bloom (1967: 17) ‘the “nation” of Marx may be described as an individual society which functions with a considerable degree of



autonomy, integration and self-consciousness'. According to Bloom, Marx's 'theory' of the nation can be presented in three dimensions.

Firstly, the material base constitutes the core of any nation; Marx's emphasis being on the 'objective' conditions of society such as class structure and economic system. Cultural or symbolic elements usually attached to the nation (common language, common culture and ethnic ties) would be part of the definition of a nation, but only in a subordinated role. Bloom (1967: 20-2) argues that Marx understood nationality as neither an indissoluble (natural) bond nor as a subjective preference; nation-building is one result of the broader set of social changes brought about by capitalism. Secondly, there is the question of the nation's relation to the necessary international character of the socialist revolution. Here there is the tension between the particular requirements of different national movements *vis-à-vis* the final goal of the international revolution. Issues such as the peculiarities of historical experiences, cultural characteristics, and the degree of the nation's economic stage, were all going to influence the specificity of the revolutionary tasks within each nation. According to Bloom (1967: 88), Marx thought that the workers should organise primarily at home as 'the nation was the irreducible unit for the establishment of socialism'. Thirdly, there is what Bloom calls Marx's internationalism. Marx would have rejected any idea of a 'global society' as an amorphous ideal; his picture of the world order could not have been cosmopolite as '[c]osmopolitanism seeks to pass from the individual to mankind without the intermediate stopping place of social units less comprehensive than the whole species' (Bloom 1967: 207). Marx's conception of the nation would be 'substantive' because the nation will remain in socialism. Bloom (1967: 206) thinks of Marx as an 'enlightened patriot', a doctrine that he regarded as 'fairly synonymous with sound

internationalism'. This is, in fact, the leitmotif of Bloom's book; his argument is that Marx's world is a 'world of nations' as he would have accepted

the nation as a substantial historical entity, by an attempted reconciliation of national and class factors in politics, by a revaluation of national welfare and national devotion, and by an internationalist rather than a cosmopolitan view of the organization of the world (...) [n]ational traditions were quite real, they reflected the economic development of society, the arrangement of classes at different periods, and the special, perhaps unique, features of the course taken by particular countries (Bloom 1967: 204).

In scholarly systematising Marx's diffused references on the nation, Bloom expected to contribute to place Marx into the great pantheon of nineteenth-century social scientists. Bloom read Marx in a methodologically nationalistic fashion because he saw nothing to oppose in methodological nationalism *per se*; and indeed this way of interpreting Marx has continued in subsequent attempts to formalise Marx's 'theory' of the nation-state. Thus, whilst Bloom represents an 'internationalist' interpretation of Marx; a cosmopolite view would be that of J. Petrus (1971), for whom Marx would have argued that nations will remain only as long as capitalism remains; nations would simply be the political and cultural form of capitalism.<sup>21</sup> In the context of that debate P. Zwick (1983: 2) has argued that '[t]here is no inherent contradiction between national and communist sentiments' in Marx. However, while he claims that 'Marx

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<sup>21</sup> 'Universal, cosmopolitan society, on the highest level of global communism, will be without the divisions of and conflicts between such secondary forms of human existence as distinct social systems, classes, nationalities, nations and states. These latter are secondary modes of civil society brought about by alienation, division of labor, and private property' (Petrus 1971: 800)

was not postulating a theory of nationalist revolution', as the true 'source of revolutionary identity was unquestionably the class' (Zwick 1983: 21); he also argues that 'the vehicle of communist progress has been the nation-state, not the international proletariat' and even that 'from its very conception communism has been national' (Zwick 1983: 13). Zwick's way out of this aporia is to resort to a distinction between a 'legitimate' and an 'illegitimate' nationalism from a Marxist point of view, the distinction between the two being based upon the promotion of bourgeois development that can bring bourgeois society 'closer to the revolutionary stage' (Zwick 1983: 23). None of these interpretations is satisfactory, I think, because they are all equally trapped in a methodologically nationalistic framework. Their difficulties in making sense of Marx's views on the nation-state have to do, above all, with the commentators' understanding of nation-states as the 'highest' form of capitalism. As we shall discuss in some detail in the next section, they import into Marx's work views that not only Marx did not hold but also that are quite opposed to those of Marx; particularly Bloom's (1967: 1-10) opposition between the nation and the abstract notion of a 'generic development of humanity'; Petrus' (1971: 811) flawed confrontation between internationalism and cosmopolitanism and Zwick's (1983: 20) struggle to find firm ground to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' nationalism.

In trying to come to terms with all these problems, commentators have attempted to put together the 'theory' of the nation-state that Marx never produced. A major path that debate has followed is whether Marx's (and for that matter also Engels') thoughts on nations can be formalised with some *criteria of viability* through which to decide whether 'nations' can become fully-fledged 'nation-states'. These criteria are usually related to the possibilities of economic development of nations; their historical position in the expansion of capitalism; and the potential role of these nations in fostering the

global revolution. Language, common history or ethnicity would be conditions to be considered in the constitution of nations, but they were not thought of as crucial aspects in their constitution. In Bloom's (1967: 85) version, for instance, nations are grouped in three classes: advanced countries (Western Europe and the US); countries which were economically backward but could progress (Russia, Turkey and China); and countries which were not only backward but socially and economically stagnant (the rest of the world). In this argument, only the first two groups of countries are or will eventually become nation-states.

Another, more elaborate, version of a similar argument is that of I. Cummins (1980: 36-9). In his view, the criteria are: [1] *territory of an adequate size*, which includes both physical factors (clear geographical boundaries) and social factors (size of the population); [2] *advanced economic system*, nation-states are to be based on a capitalist class structure; [3] *bourgeois leadership*, only the bourgeoisie can push the nation forward and represent, at least initially, the interests of the nation as a whole and; [4] *centralised state institutions*, a strong state was crucial in shaping and maintaining nation-states. The claim of Marx having implicitly set up these criteria is interesting for us because it contains the *potential* for a critique of the thesis of the universality of the nation-state; it could reflect Marx's idea that nation-states are neither the automatic nor the necessary result of the development of capitalism. It seems to me, however, that Bloom's and Cummins' versions of the criteria still take nation-states as the ideal political form of capitalism. It is a form of methodological nationalism 'in spite of itself' as for Cummins those nations which fail the test of the

criteria are to become integrated within bigger, viable units which are to become nation-states in their own right.<sup>22</sup>

According to Erika Benner's (1995: 16-34) recent work on Marx and Engels' theory of nationalism, in the German-speaking world of the mid-nineteenth century the idea of the nationality (*Nationalität*) could take one of three meanings. There was first an *ethnic* understanding of it which, rooted in the tradition of German Romanticism, exacerbated the distinctiveness of peoples along 'racial' and cultural lines.<sup>23</sup> This was a sense, she says, in which Marx did not use the idea of the nation. There was also a second *statist* idea of nation that, arising from Hegel, took the nation as the same as a sovereign state; the nation was here identified, was made co-extensive, with the state.<sup>24</sup> The third concept of the nation would be the one closest to Marx's programme: the *democratic* idea of the nation.<sup>25</sup> The nation here is related to popular sovereignty, personal freedom, individual equality and a sense of community; no-one but the people should determine the conditions of the association within a state. To Benner, there would be a tension running through Marx's understanding of nations between the

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<sup>22</sup> As my focus here is on Marx's 'theory' of the nation, I say nothing on the 'empirical' difficulties that may arise from these formulations (for instance, what constitutes a 'big' population or a 'sufficiently centralised' state?).

<sup>23</sup> I shall point out here that I do not want to echo the view of a quasi-direct connection between the critique of the Enlightenment of the early German romantics and twentieth-century German nationalism: '[t]he concern of the German romanticists was not with politics and national power, but with the national mind and poetic character' (Kohn 1961: 69). The claim of the connection between early nineteenth-century romanticism and extreme twentieth-century nationalism is, in fact, an expression of the methodological nationalism I criticise.

<sup>24</sup> Rosdolsky (1968-7: 85) also argues that both Marx and Engels used the terms 'nationality' and 'statehood' without distinguishing them clearly.

<sup>25</sup> In Avineri's view (1980: 209-18), for instance, this democratic conception of the nation was most strongly expressed in Marx's support for universal suffrage.

‘Hegelian’ or ‘statist’ conception of the nation and the ‘Rousseauian’ or ‘democratic’ definition: there would be the Marx who supported democratic reform in Germany and also the Marx who felt more strongly about the importance of building strong state institutions.

It is in this context that Benner has also put forward the idea of the criteria for understanding Marx’s theory of the nation. Interestingly, she relates this not to the viability of ‘nations’ as such but to whether ‘national movements’ deserve international support. Benner’s criteria refer specifically to the ways in which particular groups and classes locate the idea of an independent nation-state within their broader political programmes. The first of her criteria has to do then with the question of *social reform*: Marx (and Engels) would have been in favour only of a democratic form of nationalism. As the struggle for the ending of foreign oppression does not automatically lead to more freedom for the people, nationalist movements should also be movements for social reform and it is precisely this, more than their actual nationalism, that counts. A national movement would therefore be eligible for ‘support’ only in so far as its ‘national’ agenda coincided with a democratic one; the movement should address the concerns for social justice of broad sections of the nation. Benner’s second criterion is *international reciprocity*; the support to national movements is also to be decided upon the substantive political agenda of the movement beyond the nation’s frontier. If national movements are unable to transcend their programme of national independence and self-determination then there is nothing in them to rally for.<sup>26</sup> Nationalism, to be legitimate, should strive, internally, for

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<sup>26</sup> If we were to consider this in the terms of the contemporary literature on nationalism, we would say that Marx supported national movements only when they were not ‘truly’ nationalistic as nationalism has come to mean placing ‘the nation’ at the highest position in the

freeing the people from tyranny and class exploitation and, externally, for making itself ready to fight for the global revolution. The question of *national viability* is Benner's third criterion. In contradistinction to Cummins' proposal, Benner's idea of viability is based more on the conditions of political struggle than on given factors: "viability" was not simply an attribute of immutable national characteristics. It was, more importantly, a matter of commitment to a countervailing network of international power (...) [n]ations which failed the test of "viability" on a purely geopolitical yardstick need not give up their hopes of self-determination' (Benner 1995: 162). The question of viability means here the consideration of the actual chances of 'nation-states in the making' to become strong enough to resist a conservative reaction that could arise against them.

As stated, Benner's formulation is interesting because it does not surrender to a methodologically nationalistic view of Marx nor of nation-states. In fact, her major argument is precisely that Marx 'undercut the very assumption that the authoritative agents of international relations must be states or national "units"' (Benner 1995: 159). Yet, some of her arguments hardly stand the test of some of Marx's views on particular nation and national movements. Roman Rosdolsky (1986-7: 30), for example, claims that for Marx 'national oppression *by itself* in no way obliges democrats to take up the causes of the nationality oppressed; rather, this obligation arises only when the political actions of the nationality in question bear a revolutionary character'. In other words, it is the revolution, and not democracy, that was central for Marx. The most (in)famous example of this is possibly found in Marx and Engels' writings on national issues in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* and the representation of Slavic peoples as

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list of political values (Alter 1985: 4-13; Breuilly 1985: 4; Canovan 1996: 7-12; Calhoun 1997: 3-7; Smith 1979: 186-7).

‘peoples without history’. During the revolutions of 1848-9, Slavic peoples were thought of in terms of their lack of state institutions, incomplete economic development and weaknesses of their bourgeoisie; all these factors came together in the thesis that any ‘national’ project of these peoples was doomed: peoples ‘without their own history’ are ‘those peoples who were unable to form a strong state of their own in the past and therefore lacked, in Engels’ opinion, the power to achieve national independence in the future’ (Rosdolsky 1986-7: 19).<sup>27</sup>

Charles Herod (1976: 30-8) has made the point that the concept of ‘peoples without history’ has to do with the still very strong influence of Hegel and the statist conception of the state on Marx’s writings. The Slavic peoples could be seen in this crude way because they had lacked autonomous state institutions and, in that sense, the concept of peoples without history would be politically rather than racially inspired. Furthermore, the concept had also to do with the conservative position of some Slavic groups during the 1848 revolutions and not with any ‘intrinsic’ or racial characteristic.<sup>28</sup> This conservatism was due to their underdeveloped class structure: without a strong bourgeoisie nations have few, if any, chances of developing into nation-states (Rosdolsky 1986-7: 96-9).<sup>29</sup> Herod argues that Marx favoured processes

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<sup>27</sup> Avineri (1980: 179-80) has argued that Marx gave himself licenses to use a more openly nationalistic language when writing for the public forum. J. Larraín (1989: 57-62) has systematised and criticised the use of the concept of ‘peoples without history’ for Latin America and D. Sayer (1991: 14-5) has also commented on this subject in relation to Asia.

<sup>28</sup> Similarly, H. Draper (1977: 591-608) has argued that Marx’s comments on the Jews in *On the Jewish Question* have more to do with the Jews’ social position than with any racial conceptualisation of them.

<sup>29</sup> It has also been argued that these comments on the class structure of Slavic peoples reflected Marx’s and Engels’ insufficient knowledge of the actual living conditions in Eastern Europe at the time (Himka 1986-7: 4; Rosdolsky 1986-7: 149-52).



of state-centralisation as they reinforce state power; yet, he also realised that centralisation did not necessarily coincide with nationalisation and even less with democratisation. Herod's argument is that Marx emphasised 'state centralisation' rather than 'nation-building', and crucially that Marx realised well that the two do not necessarily coincide. Marx and Engels

[F]avored large and even multi-national politico-economic units since in their view only such large units could provide an adequate frame for industrial capitalist production and, thereby, could contribute to the growth and further development of a class-conscious proletariat. In their view national groups would be an impediment of this politic-economic development (Herod 1976: 37).

The idea that centralisation and nationalisation had to coincide has been attributed to Marx's writings; it speaks more of the interests of later readers of Marx and it overstates Marx's views on nations and nation-states (more on this below).<sup>30</sup> For Marx,

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<sup>30</sup> Editorial and translation decisions are not necessarily a good strategy to pursue the clarification of conceptual misunderstandings but here it may help to illustrate how methodological nationalism has been imported into Marx's and, in this case, Engels' work. The English edition of Engels' (1956 [1850]) book on the *Peasants war in Germany* includes an appendix entitled 'The decay of feudalism and the rise of national states'. This appendix, however, has nothing to do with nation-states and in fact the term does not appear at all in it. Interestingly, the editors of the German edition of Marx and Engels' *Werke* point out that Engels wrote that appendix in 1884 probably to make it the new introduction to the revised edition of his book. Most tellingly, the editors of the German edition also note that Engels (1962: 597) left the piece untitled! (In this edition, incidentally, the appendix is entitled *Über den Verfall des Feudalismus und das Aufkommen der Bourgeoisie* – On the decay of feudalism and the rise of the bourgeoisie).

the ‘global scene’ was formed by nation-states, empires, colonies and indeed classes and class alliances that were not controlled by ‘national’ borders.

The question of setting up a list of criteria has proved to be highly problematic and far from conclusive. Furthermore, these attempts to formalise Marx’s statements on nations in one unified ‘theory’ pre-decide the issue that there are going to be no clashes between the criteria. An example of this is found in the concept of ‘peoples without history’ whose underlying racism, sociological inaccuracies and theoretical gaps show that an agenda for social reform within the nation and an internationalist agenda do not coincide automatically. Also, all these arguments end up battling with the question of how to decide between legitimate and illegitimate, acceptable and unacceptable forms of nationalism; and this battle they just cannot win. In fact, they are a representation of the extent to which nationalism – methodological nationalism, for my purposes here – has permeated into post-war Marxism (Fine 1994: 434-7). The question remains, in any case, whether there is methodological nationalism in Marx’s reflections on nations and this is the focus of the next section of this chapter.

## **2.2. Marx’s critique of the ‘early’ methodological nationalism of political philosophy and political economy.**

Marx’s reflections on nation-states can be placed in the context of his more general arguments on the intellectual traditions with which he was coming to terms; I think that at least part of Marx’s understanding and reconstruction of Political Philosophy and Political Economy can be translated into a critique of methodological nationalism. In a way, Marx criticised what can be called the ‘early’ methodological nationalism of

these traditions. As Marx did not face the question of methodological nationalism directly, however, we must look for clues that allow us to reconstruct his argument.

I start by looking at Marx's utilisation of the concept of 'self-sufficiency'. Historically, Marx used 'self-sufficiency' for his description of pre-capitalistic modes of production: early 'communal forms of life and production' are described as self-sufficient. Yet, Marx did not take the self-sufficiency argument very far; for him social change is brought about by the increase in the contacts between groups of peoples. Economic exchange is the most important type of contact between peoples and Marx (1973: 256) claimed that, even in the case of early forms of social organisation, it is via the '*civilizing influence* of external trade' that 'the sphere of needs is expanded; the aim is the satisfaction of the new needs, and hence greater regularity and an increase of production'. Marx also mentions a second type of contact between 'clan communities' that dissolves self-sufficiency and, in so doing, brings about social change as well: war. The rise of primitive forms of states is crucially associated to the increasing material and organisational demands of war (Marx 1973: 471-5). No form of social organisation, simple or complex, primitive or developed, is self-sufficient; historical development can be narrated, then, from the point of view of the dissolution of whatever form of self-sufficiency. Marx (1978g, h) found a contemporary example of this – the dissolution of self-sufficiency through war and exchange – in the newly established relationship between the British Empire and India. It is nothing but the primitive self-sufficiency of India that Marx said the English destroyed by inoculating capitalism there through colonial rule. In bringing together war and commerce, capitalism destroys any meaningful idea of self-sufficiency: both as national market and national sovereignty. That is the global vocation of the bourgeoisie: '[i]n place of

the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations' (Marx and Engels 1976: 488).

Still in the context of the British rule in India, Marx (1978h: 663) wrote that '[t]he profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilisation lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked'. The argument here is that the development and expansion of capitalism does not lead, automatically or necessarily, to any single political form. The result of the relationships between politics and the economy will depend on the role, timing and history of nations and classes in the context of the ever-expanding capitalist system. The contrast between the 'respectable form' of capitalism at home and its 'naked' form in the colonies is one way in which Marx provides us with an understanding of the role of nations in the development of capitalism without, in the same move, reifying or presupposing the emergence of nation-states.

The fact that Marx struggled to come up with a consistent concept of the nation-state could indeed be due to historical circumstances – the absence of well-defined nation-states to be studied. Yet, a more theoretical argument can also be made. Marx seems to have perceived that what passes as nation-states – for intellectuals as well as for nations and states themselves – is, more often than not, something else. In the *Communist Manifesto*, for instance, the argument revolves around the tension between nationalisation and 'cosmopolitisation' that capitalism brings with it

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, *all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify*. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy

is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind (Marx and Engels 1976: 487, emphasis added)

What immediately precedes and follows this paragraph, it must be remembered, is nothing but the description of the rise of a world market, world literature and world-wide means of communication; this is how the famous ‘all-that-is-solid-melts-into-air’ sentence has usually been interpreted. In relation to nation-states, however, it seems to me that the crucial sentence is the previous one.<sup>31</sup> Marx points out there how new forms of social relations are obsolete before they mature: if capitalism forms nation-states, it also erodes them before they are fully formed. Nation-states are ‘impossible’ because states cannot be based on nations: nations ‘become antiquated’ before they can create ‘their own’ states. The contradiction Marx exposes here is that, although nation-states are a forward-looking project, they are at the same time outdated even before they can actually establish and settle in the present.

Still in the Manifesto, Marx and Engels (1976: 495) argued ‘[t]hough not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matter with its own bourgeoisie’. This distinction between form and substance must not be interpreted as a division between ‘real’ and ‘illusionary’ forms of social relations. If social and political struggles appear in a ‘national’ form, this form must be taken seriously: the nation and the nation-state are no illusion. On the one hand, then, the

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<sup>31</sup> M. Berman (1982: 91-105) has wonderfully made the case for the ‘cosmopolitanisation’ of the world that the Communist Manifesto portrays and yet he has nothing to say on the role of nations in Marx’s argument.

national form of struggle is an expression of the importance of nations in the development of capitalism; on the other hand, however, it is also a warning that nations are never the ultimate cause of the social conflicts in capitalism nor are they definitive forms of capitalist social relations.<sup>32</sup>

In *The Civil War in France* – originally written in 1870-1 – the nation-state also disappears, in this case behind the struggle between the French Empire and the Commune. It is quite remarkable that Marx expressed in that text that current political struggles were to be fought between the Empire and the Commune: it is as if the nation-state had already passed away!<sup>33</sup> On the one hand, Marx presents imperialism as ‘the most prostitute and the ultimate form of State power which nascent middle-class society had commenced to elaborate as a means of its own emancipation from feudalism’ (Marx 1978f: 631). In the Europe of that time, ‘monarchy’ was just ‘the normal incumbrance and indispensable cloak of class-rule’ (Marx 1978f: 634). On the other hand, Marx (1978f: 631) also argued that, in opposition to the Empire did not stand any form of nation-state; rather ‘[t]he direct antithesis to empire was the Commune’. And in fact, for the middle classes ‘there was but one alternative – the

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<sup>32</sup> In the *Critique of the Gotha Program* – originally written in 1875 – Marx himself commented on this last quotation from the Communist Manifesto. He argued that, in the project of working class emancipation ‘*within the framework of the present-day national state*’, to which Lasalle makes reference in the fifth point of his program, the national state is nothing but the German Empire and that the Empire itself is ‘economically “within the framework” of the world market [and] politically “within the framework” of the system of states’ (Marx 1978e: 533).

<sup>33</sup> This is probably the first of a number of opportunities in which the claim about the decline of the nation-state has been made. For instance, H. Arendt’s (1958: 267-302) argument in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is also that the beginning of the Age of Imperialism marks the decline of the nation-state. Currently, the new orthodoxy makes a similar argument although based on quite different grounds.

Commune, or the Empire – under whatever form it might reappear’ (Marx 1978f: 636). Marx argued as though nations do not and cannot constitute states; or, in other words, that nation-states, as a form of political organisation in capitalism, are being formed and dissolved, constituted and pulled apart, in the same process of capitalist development.

It seems to me that this argument follows from a point I have made already: Marx’s distinction between state centralisation and nationalisation. State centralisation has to do with strategies to increase state power on a class basis; both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat pursue policies that reinforce their own class power through the state. Capital accumulation requires political power and this is a power that only the state can deliver. This is expressed quite clearly, for instance, at the end of part II of the Manifesto, where Marx and Engels (1976: 504) express that the proletariat should fight for ‘political supremacy’ which means ‘to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, *i.e.*, of the proletariat organised as the ruling class’. Centralisation is also central to the measures they propose as the agenda of the Communist Parties in the most advanced countries (Marx and Engels 1976: 505).

Nationalisation, on the other hand, has to do with the particular role of the nation in the processes of capital accumulation and class struggle. The nation is, then, neither capitalism’s superstructure; nor a trap the bourgeoisie set to the proletariat, nor an ethnic form of community, nor even ‘the people’. The nation is a form of social relation that is structurally associated with capitalism in so far as capitalism both forms and dissolves the links between classes and states

[t]he unity of the nation was not to be broken, but, on the contrary, to be organised by the Communal Constitution and to become a reality by the destruction of the State power which claimed to be the embodiment of that unity independent of, and superior to, the nation itself, from which it was but a parasitic excrescence (Marx 1978f: 633)

Or, in another well-known formulation

The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself *the* nation, it is so far itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word (Marx and Engels 1976: 502-3)

The distinction between state centralisation and nationalisation allows us to understand that Marx does not deploy a critique of the nation but only of the particular ‘illusion’ he found in the conceptualisation of the nation-state as the necessary form of state in capitalism. He put forward a critique of methodological nationalism and not of the nation-state, a critique of what much later developed as the ‘solid image of the nation-state’, which missed Marx’s central insight: nation states ‘become antiquated before they can ossify’. It is in the context of this analysis where the image of the nation-state as a *void* appears more clearly: nation-states arise from the development of capitalism and yet it is this same capitalism that creates the conditions for their dissolution. Nation-states do exist in ‘real’ politics as well as in people’s minds and yet they are attributed with powers they do not possess; they are this ‘empty’ social and political framework which evolves towards their own dissolution from either within or the



outside; they can be strong or weak and yet in either case they change into something different – Empires or the Commune.

Marx conceived no equation between society and nation-states. In the terms that were introduced in Chapter 1, it can be argued that Marx used the concept of society more as a regulative ideal than in a referential manner, that is, Marx's concept of society is closer to a generic concept of 'social relations' than to nation-states. Certainly, Marx used the concept of society in the sense of a 'country' and thus has been interpreted – as we just saw in the previous section. Yet, even when 'society' is used in the definition of a geographical referent, no 'isolated' society, no idea of society as self-sufficient unit, is to be found and in fact Marx strongly criticised any treatment of society as an 'an isolated monad, who can be considered independently of historical and social context' (Frisby and Sayer 1986: 91). Marx argued as though nation-states had already been reified and that is the methodological nationalism he inherited and criticised: '[r]eified conceptions of society (...) reflect the real alienation of social relations from their participants characteristic of bourgeois society' (Frisby and Sayer 1986: 95).

Marx's (1918, 1978b, 1978f, 1984) analysis of particular national cases are always connected with the history and developments of class relations, structures and struggles (Dahrendorf 1976: 7). In his works on France and Germany, for instance, Marx's analyses systematically link internal politics and the global expansion of capitalism. Marx saw quite clearly that nation-states depended on class alliances that were permanently being re-negotiated so that their constitution could never be taken for granted. Furthermore, as we just saw, there was a constant tension, or rather a gap, between the political self-conceptions of 'nation-state' and 'empire' – between the

respectable and the naked form of bourgeois order – within the big European powers. Marx's analysis of the realm of national politics during his lifetime included different types of nationalism and internationalism; any of which could be progressive, or conservative, depending on its class composition. The political forms that internationalism may take can change historically and cannot be pre-decided. In his analysis of the defeat of the popular revolts of 1848, Marx saw that whereas the workers were nationally organised and thus put forward a democratic agenda on the basis of their national organisation, the political strategy of the privileged classes took the form of a conservative class-internationalism that ran much deeper than their national differences. Nationalism and internationalism have therefore no 'invariable' or 'inevitable' political colour.<sup>34</sup>

Marx's strongest conception of 'society' is then not connected with any idea of the nation-state but with his more abstract reflection upon the nature of social life 'in general'; society is the representation of a truly *social* sphere of life; society is an ontological reality that is 'independent' of particular individuals (Frisby and Sayer 1986: 95). In the theses on Feuerbach, for instance, the young Marx (1978c: 145) refers to society as 'socialised humanity'. According to S. Clarke (1991: 57), in this early use the idea of society is 'understood not as yet another abstraction' rather, society becomes 'the mediating term between the "material" and the "ideal" (...) the everyday practical activity of real human beings'. This understanding of society reinforces Marx's move from a philosophical to a 'socio-historical (...) project of investigating the relation between individual and society, and between humanity and

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<sup>34</sup> Recently, P. Anderson (2002: 10) has argued that a reconstruction of the history of nationalism should be made *vis-à-vis* the history of internationalism and has taken Marx as a stepping stone for this.

nature, within the framework of the historical development of concrete social relations' (Clarke 1991: 58).<sup>35</sup> In Marx's (1978d: 207) own words

*The relations of production in their totality constitute what are called the social relations, society, and, specifically, a society at a definitive stage of historical development, a society with a peculiar, distinctive character. Ancient society, feudal society, bourgeois society are such totalities of production relations, each of which at the same time denotes a social stage of development in the history of mankind*

In the context of his dispute with the 'young Hegelians', Marx criticised 'the fetishism of the state' which finds in 'Hegel's idealism its ultimate expression' (Fine 2002: 65). Marx argued that Hegel described 'a particular state of affairs (like hereditary monarchy, a reformed bureaucracy, a bicameral parliament, the incorporation of the judiciary within the executive) and assigned to it the logical attributes of universality. Hegel idealized empirical reality, turning the existing state into the embodiment of the universal' (Fine 2002: 68-9).<sup>36</sup> According to Marx, before Hegel German political philosophy remained focused on the problem of religion, that was a philosophical consciousness which reflected, in an inverted form, the real inversions of the German socio-political situation

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<sup>35</sup> In *Grundrisse*, Marx (1973: 265) similarly said that '[s]ociety does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand'.

<sup>36</sup> I make no claim here about whether Marx's reading of Hegel is fair or accurate. Indeed, it has been documented that Marx subtly but clearly changed his mind in relation to Hegel (Clarke 1991: 52) and also that Marx's evaluation of Hegel was ambivalent (Fine 2001: 79-85). My argument is only that Marx's critique of Hegel echoes the critique of methodological nationalism in which I am interested.

The struggle against religion is, indirectly, a struggle against *that world* whose spiritual *aroma* is religion (...) *Religious* suffering is at the same time an *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering (...) [t]he abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of men, is a demand for their *real* happiness (Marx 1978b: 54)

The definitive importance of Hegel, says Marx, is to have realised that ‘the criticism of heaven’ must be ‘transformed into the criticism of earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law*, and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*’ (Marx 1978b: 54). The work of Hegel thus represents the highest and most profound critique of both ‘*German philosophy of right and of the state*’ and of ‘the modern state and of the reality connected with it’ (Marx 1978b: 59). This is in fact the core of what can be called Marx’s critique of the ‘early’ methodological nationalism of German philosophy. This critique centres on Hegel because of his role in the idealisation of the Germans’ understanding of their country’s situation

In politics, the Germans have *thought* what other nations have *done* (...) the *status quo* of the *German political system* expresses the *consummation of the ancien régime*, the thorn in the flesh of the modern state, the *status quo* of *German political science* expresses the *imperfection of the modern state* itself, the degeneracy of its flesh (Marx 1978b: 59-60)

Against what he sees as the limitations of Hegelian philosophy of right, namely, the missing distinction between philosophical and practical revolutions, Marx criticises this diagnostic of Germany in which the country is taken as self-sufficient and without

consideration of broader social processes all over the world. Marx refers to Hegel's view of Germany as '*the deficiency of present-day politics constituted into a system*' (...) [i]t is not *radical* revolution, *universal human* emancipation, which is a Utopian dream for Germany, but rather a partial, merely political revolution which leaves the pillars of the building standing' (Marx 1978b: 62). Marx's critique of Hegel is the critique of turning the project of a German nation-state into a form of religion; Marx's argument on Germany, as well as his general critique of Hegel's idea of the state, pointed in the direction of a critique which involved transcending the methodologically nationalistic framework and assumptions with which, in his view, Hegel endorsed the German state.

In *On the Jewish Question*, Marx revolves around a similar subject as he discusses the limits of what can be achieved in the transformation of social life when the political form of the modern state is taken as the ultimate framework of social and political relations. This is Marx's critique of 'political emancipation', a struggle that misapprehends the *form* of modern political relations for its *substance*. On the one hand, Marx (1978a: 44) writes that political emancipation is the 'dissolution' of the old society, of 'Feudalism'; on the other, Marx's (1978a: 35) argument is that political emancipation is a necessary stepping stone in the process of modern society reaching its own limits: '*[p]olitical* emancipation certainly represents a great progress. It is not, indeed, the final form of human emancipation, but it is the final form of human emancipation *within* the framework of the prevailing social order'. Marx refuses to regard political emancipation as the real battle against the sources of alienation and inequality; whilst the *idea* of political emancipation makes possible the rise of the modern form of socio-political relations – represented in the division between the state and civil society – the *critique* of political emancipation exposes the limitations of

these social relations and political order. The ultimate problem with the project of political emancipation is not that it fails to *transcend* the actual form of the state but that it actually *reinforces* that same state by consecrating the separation of civil society from the state. In Marx's (1978a: 46) own words

*Every* emancipation is a *restoration* of the human world and of human relationship to man *himself*.

Political emancipation is a reduction of man, on the one hand, to a member of civil society, an *independent* and *egoistic* individual, and on the other hand, to a *citizen*, to a moral person.

Human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a *species-being*; and when he has recognized and organized his own powers (...) as *social* powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as *political* power

Marx argues that the political programme that aims to the reform of the modern state within the limits of that state fails to grasp not only its historical and contradictory character but also the ultimate source of alienation and inequality of modern social life. The project of human emancipation is based on the transcendence of the bourgeois state and the contradictory form of reproduction of social life upon which that state is founded: civil society. Furthermore, part of Marx's critique of Bauer in that piece has to do with the latter's thesis that political rights were to be attached to religious, ethnic or indeed national background: '[w]e do not say to the Jews, therefore, as does Bauer: you cannot be emancipated politically without emancipating yourselves completely

from Judaism. We say rather: it is because you can be emancipated politically, without renouncing Judaism completely and absolutely, that *political emancipation* itself is not *human* emancipation' (Marx 1978a: 40). Marx's claim – the argument refers to the Jews but it certainly applies not only to them – is in fact twofold. On the one hand Marx argues that, even within the framework of the modern (nation) state, political rights should be independent of religious or cultural differences. Marx criticised Bauer on the grounds that he attached the recognition of political rights within the state to an alleged abolition of these differences. On the other hand, Marx realised that the actual result of that 'abolition' can only be the imposition of one privileged national (German) and/or religious (Christian) form of identity upon other minority groups. Marx's critique of political emancipation is also in this sense a critique of making the nation the basis for the recognition of political and civil rights within the state (Marx 1978a: 29-30; Stoelzer forthcoming). Political emancipation mirrors methodological nationalism because they both take the bourgeois state as something that state is not: the final stage in the historical development of modern societies.

A similar argument can be made in relation to Marx's critique of Political Economy. In fact, S. Clarke (1991: 58) has argued that 'Marx's critique of Hegel can be translated immediately into a critique of political economy because it is a critique of their common ideological foundations'. According to Marx (1973: 108)

The concept of national wealth creeps into the work of the economists of the seventeenth century – continuing partly with those of the eighteenth – in the form of the notion that wealth is created only to enrich the state (...) This was the still unconsciously hypocritical form in which wealth and the production of

wealth proclaimed themselves as the purpose of modern states, and regarded these states henceforth only as means for the production of wealth

Marx criticised the illusionary character of the idea of 'autonomous individuals' with which both political economists and political philosophers operate. In capitalism, says Marx (1973: 163-4)

[T]he ties of personal dependence, of distinctions of blood, education, etc. are in fact exploded, ripped up (...) and individuals *seem* independent (this is an independence which is at bottom merely an illusion, and it is more correctly called indifference), free to collide with one another and to engage in exchange within this freedom; but they appear thus only for someone who abstracts from the *conditions*, the *conditions of existence* within which these individuals enter into contact

This critique of the abstract individual mirrors Marx's critique of the self-sufficient conception of society; the alienated conception of the individual is the complement of the alienated conceptions of state and society. Marx described the capitalist economy as a complex web of social and economic relations; in the rise and functioning of market relations no self-sufficient unit can resist the systemic integration into the multiplicity of layers with which capitalism operates. He argues that for the determination of the actual processes of production and exchange, 'individual', 'local' (communal), 'national' and 'global' aspects are all to be integrated and taken into account (Marx 1973: 172). Programmatically, Marx says that the first section of his proposed study of economic relations '*as relations of productions*' implies the study of the



[E]xchange of the superfluous only (...) [t]he internal structure of production therefore forms the second section; the concentration of the whole in the state the third; the international relation the fourth; the world market the conclusion, in which production is posited as a totality together with all its moments, but within which, at the time, all contradictions come into play. The world market then, again, forms the presupposition of the whole as well as its substratum (Marx 1973: 227-8)<sup>37</sup>

In the context of his reflections on money, furthermore, Marx argues that there is an opposition between the idea of money – in general – and the actual deployment of particular (national) coins. Marx describes this opposition as a representation of the relationships between the universal and the particular and, crucial for our purposes here, between the global and the national. This conception of money is twofold: on the one hand, money is the ‘means for expanding the universality of wealth’, on the other, money is also required ‘for drawing the dimensions of exchange over the whole world’ (Marx 1973: 225). Either way, money is necessarily actualised in particular coins, which in capitalism take the form of ‘national’ coins: ‘[m]oney *posited* in the form of the medium of circulation is *coin*. As coin, it has lost its use value as such, its use value is identical with its quality as medium of circulation (...) as coin, it also loses its universal character and adopts a national, local one’ (Marx 1973: 226). There is a mutual dependence between particular coins and money in general; Marx argues that national coins, to become and remain such, are inextricably related to the generic conception of ‘money’ in general. National currencies and money in general are –

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<sup>37</sup> The same programmatic argument is found in Marx’s (1987) preface of 1859, where he argues that the world-market is the final unit in the analysis of capitalism.

quite literally in this case – two sides of the same ‘coin’. To the argument that no national coin exists without money in general, Marx adds that, from the point of view of their raw materials – gold and silver – the coin loses its particular national character ‘again’ as it ‘acquires a political title, and talks, as it were, a different language in different countries’ it serves thus as ‘medium of exchange between the nations, as universal medium of exchange, no longer as *symbol*, but rather as a definite amount of gold and silver’ (Marx 1973: 226). In capitalist society, then, the existence of national boundaries, in this case the boundaries of a national economy, depends on the concurrent expansion of capitalism in a way that simultaneously *undermines* these same national boundaries.<sup>38</sup>

### **Conclusion.**

There is a sad paradox in the fact that those who have tried to formalise Marx’s ‘theory’ of the nation-state had so badly misjudged Marx’s insight that nation-states are not the highest or necessary political form of capitalism; the influence of methodological nationalism is clearly felt in those commentators that should know better. On the contrary, I have argued that Marx’s reconstruction of Political Philosophy and Political Economy is more a critique than an exemplar of methodological nationalism as he seems to have understood the fact that, even before that nation-states expanded throughout the world, they had already been seen as the highest form of modernity. Marx regarded nation-states as one part of a complex web of social and political relations; his argument is not only that nation-states are not self-

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<sup>38</sup> ‘[A]lthough the state is constituted politically on a national basis, its class character is not defined in national terms, the capitalist law of property and contract transcending national legal systems, and world money transcending national currencies’ (Clarke 1992: 136).

sufficient but also that political relations can take other political forms in capitalism – such as Empires or the Commune. Yet, Marx did not argue for a contingent link between capitalism and nation-states either; rather, he subjected nation-states to the dialectics of formation and dissolution of social relations with which capitalism has made itself famous. Nation-states are in this sense no different from all other forms of social relations that under capitalism *become antiquated before they can ossify*: nation-states are being created and dissolved, established and pulled apart in the same way as everything else is in capitalism.

Marx's idea of the nation-state is that of a type of social and political organisation that emerges from, but cannot deal with, the contradictory character of capitalist social relations; the image of the *void* arises here from the contradictory character of capitalism. Marx seemed to have realised that nation-states are constantly under immense pressures: the global dynamic of capital accumulation, national and international class struggles, civil and international wars, are all forces at work that create contradictions that not only escape from nation-states' control but also that they battle hard to resist. This subtle vision of the problems nation-state will have to face in capitalism also creates problems to Marx's conceptualisation; he lacked an idea of what nation-states can actually achieve in terms of strength and stability; he did not pay enough attention to the ways in which nation-states can learn to resist these pressures. No doubt, Marx clearly understood that nation-states were not the type of socio-political organisation that methodological nationalism would argue, and yet, in so doing he overestimated the extent of their possible disintegration. *Pace* Marx, nation-states have demonstrated themselves quite durable and resilient.

### **Chapter 3. Max Weber: The nation-state in the context of ‘the tragedy of culture’.**

The question of the links between politics and scholarship is at the core of the reception of M. Weber’s life and work. Both activities were undoubtedly very dear to Weber himself and this has allegedly made his teachings on both subjects somewhat contradictory: his claims on the neutrality of science do not necessarily or automatically go down well with his ideas on the worth of the German nation. One issue to be addressed here then is whether or not Weber’s political nationalism leaves its marks on his sociological work; whether his political nationalism translates into methodological nationalism. The second, more substantive issue is the attempt to come to terms with Weber’s conceptualisation of nation-states; Weber seems to have realised that there is something particularly obscure in nation-states: they are as intellectually opaque as politically powerful.

In dealing with these questions, two issues are to be considered and on them this chapter is structured. Firstly, there is the question of Weber’s sociological conceptualisation of the nation; I shall try to produce an account of Weber’s sociology of the nation-state through an analysis of some of Weber’s *political* and *scholarly* writings on the subject. Weber regarded nations as political communities that are organised around ‘sentiments of prestige’; no other element apart from politics could be used to unify the nation. And yet, at the same time, we shall see that his ideas about *modern* politics and state are independent from the nation. This becomes apparent in the second section of the chapter where I shall discuss Weber’s conception of politics in the broader context of his thesis of the ‘tragedy of culture’; Weber’s representation of politics in modernity as one value sphere among others. The argument here is not

only that politics became less central in Weber's late diagnostic of the modern age but also that this conception of politics was increasingly detached from political nationalism. Weber's understanding of politics has to do with the determination of the specific means of politics, and not with politics' substantive values or ends: violence (as a means) and not the nation (as a value or end) is the core of Weber's doctrine of politics.

### **3.1. On the relationships between nation and states.**

There is now more than half a century of well-established secondary literature on the nationalism of Weber's politics and there seems to be no doubts about the fact of how strongly Weber felt for the fate of German nation (Aron 1971; Beetham 1974; Bendix 1966; Collins 1986; Giddens 1972, Jaspers 1989; Gerth and Mills 1970; Mommsen 1974, 1984, 1992a, b, 1993; Parsons 1965; Roth 1965). Early in his career, Weber tried to come to terms with the most recent social trends in Germany in order to help foster its development as a world power; towards the end of his life, by the time of World War One as well as after the German defeat, he made himself ready – health permitting – to 'serve the nation' in whatever way he could have been needed; and throughout all his life he was concerned with the role and destiny of Germany, which he associated both to a particular cultural outlook and to the material welfare of the German people. When analysing the nature, content and extent of Weber's nationalism, however, the agreement in the literature suddenly ends. On the question of the philosophical roots of Weber's politics, it has been argued that he was a liberal, an elitist, a republican, a nationalist or even a proto-fascist; in terms of the importance of politics in Weber's life, there is the question of whether he saw himself as a political man or as a scholar; in relation to the influence of this nationalism on his sociological work, people have

argued in favour *and* against the views that his science was ‘instrumental’ to his politics but also that there is a radical break between the two.<sup>39</sup>

Another feature common to this literature is that it tends to make a *political*, but not a *sociological*, assessment of Weber’s ideas on nations and nation-states. In other words, however much has been made of the ‘legitimacy’ and/or ‘excesses’ of Weber’s *politics* of nationalism, this same question has not been used, to the same extent, to put forward a sociological account of Weber’s understanding of the nation. On this, perhaps, Weberian scholars have been just too genuinely Weberian: Weber himself approached the question of the nation and nationalism mostly as a political rather than as a sociological or even historical concern. When Weber made references to the nation it was generally in relation to the concrete situation of Germany; on this particular subject his problem was not the national question as such but mostly the question of the *German* nation.

To D. Beetham, Weber’s conceptualisation of the nation-state is nothing short of ‘the modern form of the state’ (Beetham 1974: 121). In other words, although neither the state nor the nation would be a modern phenomenon, it is precisely the interaction between nation and state that makes the nation-state *the* modern form of socio-political organisation. According to Beetham (1974: 122), there are three key elements in Weber’s idea of the nation: [1] an objective factor that distinguishes the group from other groups; [2] whether this factor produces some kind of inner solidarity and; [3] whether this solidarity finds expression in autonomous political institutions. Indeed, Beetham summarises well a methodologically nationalistic reading of Weber’s

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<sup>39</sup> See Stammer (1971) for a collection of essays in which all these different views are discussed.

conceptualisation of the nation-state. According to R. Collins' (1986: 156-7) interpretation of Weber's conceptualisation of the nation-state, there is a twofold link between the nation and the state. On the one hand, national solidarity must provide to the state the legitimacy it requires for its monopolistic use of force, externally as well as internally. On the other hand, the state apparatus is the organisational form that the nation gives itself in order to fulfil its goals and strengthen its culture and values. A different interpretation, by W. Mommsen (1993: 164-9), is that nation-states are the result of a combination between charismatic leadership and processes of rationalisation. This tension between charisma and rationalisation would be the core of 'Weber's philosophy of history'; these two would represent the most abstract elements in Weber's understanding of politics in the modern world.<sup>40</sup>

Weber's (1994d: 310-1) concept of the state is well known, based as it is on the question of the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical violence. For Weber, however, what really characterises a *modern* state is not its national component but the fact that state's duties are fulfilled through particular means. Weber's understanding of the modern state is framed within his broader understanding of the processes of bureaucratisation of social life and this finds expression in the fact that the state's administrative staff is separated from the means with which they fulfil their roles

All forms of state order can be divided into two main categories based on different principles. In the first, the staff of men (...) *own* the means of administration *in their own right* (...) In the other case the administrative staff

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<sup>40</sup> Mommsen's reading has the advantage of framing the question within the more abstract terms of Weber's theory of modernity and this prevents him from importing methodological nationalism into Weber's formulations. I shall come back to this in the next section.

is “separated” from the means of administration, in just the same way as the office-worker or proletarian of today is “separated” from the material means of production within a capitalist enterprise (...) the development of the modern state is set in motion everywhere by a decision of the prince to dispossess the independent, “private” bearers of administrative power who exist along him, that is all those in personal possession of the means of administration and the conduct of war, the organisation of finance and politically deployable goods of all kinds (Weber 1994d: 314-5)

Weber’s (1970b; 1978: 385-98) *scholarly* accounts on the nation are rare and rather unsystematic. Even the most methodical of pieces on the subject, although analytical in scope, are full of references to the political events of his day. The nation, for Weber, is ‘one of the most vexing, since emotionally charged concepts’ to be found in the sociological lexicon (Weber 1978: 395). Above all, Weber was sceptical as to whether the nation could be truly formalised as a concept. ‘If the concept of “nation” can in any way be defined unambiguously’, he says, it can just refer to ‘a specific sentiment of solidarity’ of a certain group of people ‘in the face of other groups’ (Weber 1970: 172). Weber argued that there is no single causal component in the emergence of nations so that no conclusive explanation of their development can be given. He made quite clear to the reader the substantial problems he faces in framing his inquiry as he expands on the difficulties of grasping what a nation is and laboriously tried to attach the definition of the nation to other aspects of social life: ‘[t]he concept of “nationality” shares with that of the “people” (*Volk*) – in the “ethnic” sense – the vague connotation that whatever is felt to be distinctively common must derive from common descent (Weber 1978: 395). This ambiguity is only the beginning of the problem as nations do not have ‘an economic origin’; they are not ‘identical with the “people of a



state” neither are they ‘identical with a community speaking the same language’ and indeed ‘and one must not conceive of the “nation” as a “culture community”’. Furthermore, ‘a common anthropological type (...) is neither sufficient nor a prerequisite to found a nation (...) “national” affiliation need not be based upon common blood’ so that ‘the sentiment of ethnic solidarity does not by itself make a “nation”’. Finally, in relation to classes, the claim is that an ‘unbroken scale of quite varied and highly changeable attitudes towards the idea of the “nation” is to be found among social strata’ (Weber 1970: 171-8).<sup>41</sup>

It is only in the context of all these troubles that Weber hesitantly presented us with a positive definition of the nation. His argument is that the only element that fulfils, although imperfectly, the role of centring the concept of the nation would be that of ‘sentiments of prestige’. It is through these sentiments of prestige that the nation relates to politics and, eventually, a nation would try to find expression in an autonomous state: ‘a nation is a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own; hence, a nation is a community which normally tends to produce a state of its own’ (Weber 1970b: 176). This is indeed a definition of the nation-state that could be charged with methodological nationalism and, as we have said already, thus has been read. Now, I will argue that we should not do so.

Firstly, the general tone of Weber’s sociological reflections on the nation in this piece is one of scepticism of the whole enterprise. The sentence that precedes the definition of the nation just introduced states that the nation is ‘located in the field of politics’

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<sup>41</sup> Note how Weber uses the term nation consistently within inverted commas; I have made no alterations to any of the quotations in this regard. These ambiguities support the argument that Weber doubted of any foundational claim in which racial differences could be taken as a distinctive element for the definition of the nation (Manasse 1999).

only ‘in so far as there is at all a common object lying behind the obviously ambiguous term “nation”’ (Weber 1970b: 176); and equally ‘the concept [of the nation] seems to refer – if it refers at all to a uniform phenomenon – to a specific kind of pathos which is linked to the idea of a powerful political community (...) such a state may already exist or it may be desired’ (Weber 1978: 398). Also, in the very last paragraph of one of the pieces from which we have quoted extensively, Weber accepted to associate nations with states only ‘if one believes that it is at all possible to distinguish national sentiment as something homogeneous and specifically set apart’ and, *even if that were the case* ‘one must be clearly aware of the fact that sentiments of solidarity, very heterogeneous in both their nature and their origin, are comprised within national sentiments’ (Weber 1970: 179). This is repeated even in more general terms when Weber (1978: 397) concludes that ‘feelings of identity subsumed under the term “national” are not uniform but may derive from diverse sources’ and among these sources he mentions the factors I have already introduced. Class structure, power politics, common memories, religion, language and racial features are all only imperfectly associated with the nation and none of them can really give us the just impression of what a nation is.

There is another reason as to why Weber’s understanding of the nation-state is not methodologically nationalistic. We have seen already that his concept of the *modern* state is independent from the nation and, as we shall see in the next section, the same holds true for his conception of politics. Even if nations need states, the latter do not require the former and that dissolves any possible trace of teleology and logical necessity in Weber’s conceptualisation of nation-states. In fact, Weber argued that the ‘national sentiment is variously related to political associations, and the “idea” of the nation may become antagonistic to the empirical scope of given political associations.

This antagonism may lead to quite different results' (Weber 1970: 175). The political expression of national sentiments produces different political results in different groups: Spaniards, Poles, Croats, Russians and Germans have all had to come to terms with an 'idea of the nation' which is 'entirely ambiguous' for the purposes of sociological generalisation (Weber 1970: 175).

It is in sharing the prestige of the state that individuals become members of the nation; a state heightens national prestige through power politics. Nations do want powerful states but, if successful, they become victims of their own success: imperialism is the representation of the disintegration of the nation-state because power politics pushes the state *beyond* the limits of the nation. Interestingly, the opposite case is also possible: 'there are cases for which the term nationality does not seem to be quite fitting' (Weber 1978: 397). Weber argues that Belgian or Swiss would not be conceived of as nations because 'these neutralised states have forsaken power' (Weber 1978: 397). If in the case of imperialism nation-states explode as victims of their own success, in this other case nation-states implode due to the lack of power and prestige politics that can maintain their own project as nation-states. In either case, nation-states are unlikely to survive *qua* nation-states due to either their success or their failure. So, even when Weber recognises that the "'nation state"' has become conceptually identical with "state" based on common language' he would do so by emphatically stating at the same time that '[i]n reality, however, such modern nation states exist next to many others that comprise several language groups' (Weber 1978: 395).

Weber's politics should not be understood apart from its historical context; his reflections on nations and states permanently referred to the question of the role of the 'German nation' as world-power and its incarnation in the idea of the *Reich*, the

German Empire (Mommson 1984: 35-40). The more abstract reflections on nations and nation-states we have just discussed illuminate – and are illuminated by – Weber’s views on the relationships between the ideas of the *Reich* and the *nation-state*. Weber was well aware of the ambiguities that underpinned the formation of the *Reich*; in fact, he was not alone on this as it was widely recognised in the Germany of his time that the *Reich* was neither the same as, nor completely different from, a nation-state. On the one hand, the *Reich* presented itself as a nation-state; it developed from an idealised image of how a German nation-state ought to be: ‘[t]he new *Reich* saw itself as a nation-state’ (Langewiesche 2000: 122). On the other, however, there seems to have been an equally clear awareness among the actors involved in the long process of founding the *Reich* that Germany was an ‘incomplete’ nation-state. The German ‘nation-state’ was more a project than a social or political reality ‘the internal formation of the nation had not yet taken place’ because the *Reich* ‘did not fully absorb the old imperial nation, and at the same time expanded beyond the ethnic nation’ (Langewiesche 2000: 122).

If the differences and tensions between the ideas of the *Reich* and the nation-state are missed, so that the foundation of the *Reich* is taken to mean the foundation of the German nation-state, Weber’s writings are taken out of context and his political nationalism can thus be translated into methodological nationalism. In this sense, it can be argued that – at least for the early Weber (1994a) – imperialism and nationalism are connected and it is precisely this link that makes him a critic of methodological nationalism: the situation of Germany seemed to have taught him that the German nation-state was not even desirable at that particular moment and that an Empire was needed. Nation-states, then, were a project instead of an already made solution; they

were difficult to establish and, more important for my argument here, they were not the only or even the best answer for political struggles.<sup>42</sup>

Weber's imperialistic arguments came from two sources. The first relates to the functioning of the economy, the requirements of expansion of the national market, the cyclical condition of world-capitalism with its tendency of profit-rates to decline; the German state had the 'duty' of guaranteeing the security and welfare of the German people and imperialism seemed to Weber a requirement for a country that has a mission to fulfil in world-politics. He believed that an imperialist expansion was necessary, and also that this may need to be done violently, with the power of the state. It is this pessimistic view about the development of capitalism that pushed him towards economically-based imperialist policies. Weber would have assumed

[T]hat the dynamics of capitalism depended, at least to some degree, on the continuous opening-up of virgin territories all over the globe, by which capitalist industrialism would constantly be supplied with fresh opportunities of exploitation. Weber appears to have expected that the process of economic growth was bound to gradually slow down, at least in the long run (Mommsen 1974: 41)

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<sup>42</sup> Weber wrote in the middle of the *Age of Empire* (Hobsbawm 1994b) so his views on the tensions between imperialist and nationalistic policies seem to have reflected the common views of the German middle-classes, the National-Liberal Party, and the quasi-hegemonic ideology of nationalism, all over Europe, at the turn of twentieth century (Joas 2003: 61-4; Langewiesche 2000: 124-49; Mommsen 1974: 25-6; Weber 1970: 172). It is the conflation between imperialism and nationalism in Weber's political writings that creates an illusion of methodological nationalism in his sociological work.

The second source of Weber's imperialism is the cultural role of the German state in the world stage; keeping a position for the German 'culture' in the battle for cultural supremacy between the Slav (Russian), Latin (French, Italian), and Anglo-Saxon (Britain; US) fields of influences: this was a responsibility to both the predecessors and future generations of Germans (Weber 1970b: 172). In this sense, Weber's imperialism has been described as 'instrumental imperialism' (Mommsen 1971) or 'progressive imperialism' (Langewiesche 2000: 239); his support of imperialist policies had to do with whether they remained useful to the state and the improvement of living conditions for working classes, imperialism was not an end in itself. This can be biographically represented in the fact that towards the end of his life Weber moved to a different position, conceiving the First World War as a pending disaster and a challenge for Germany to find a new role in Europe (Aron 1971: 89). Since the second half of the war, Weber no longer believed in the idea of the *Reich*; rather he pushed for the expansion of the 'influence' of Germany within Europe without this implying political annexations or the use of force.

Analytically, this has been interpreted in the sense that Weber regarded no fundamental differences between external and internal politics (Collins 1986: 146-50; Arndt 1971); the argument being that Weber did not visualise politics as divided into foreign and home politics, both realms being governed by the same principles. Collins (1986: 145) even argues that Weber's conception of '[p]olitics works from outside in, and that the external, military relations of states are crucial determinants of their internal politics. This is because of the centrality of legitimacy as a resource in the struggle of power'. The consequence I would like to draw from this is that, even when the Empire gave way to an idea of nation-state in Weber's heart, this nation-state needed to be related to *world* politics and markets. In fact, the 'international system'

becomes as much the focus of analysis as individual nation-states; foreign and home policies are closely tied together right from the start.<sup>43</sup>

In relation to the social composition of the nation, Weber maintained that the constitution of a nation was linked with the form that class relations adopt within it; the question of the links between classes and nations can be reconstructed from Weber's reflections on the class relations of the Germany of his time. For Weber, the nation and nationalist feelings are closely linked to processes of class formation (Beetham 1974: 120; Gerth and Mills 1970). Lassman and Speirs (1994: xiv), in their introduction to the Cambridge edition to Weber's political writings, thus point out: '[t]he central question for Weber is one of political leadership. Which class or stratum could provide national leadership?'. The building of a nation-state required the leadership of a strong class that Germany lacked, and Weber contrasted this with the ruling class of Victorian England. Weber did not regard the *Junker* class capable to rule Germany after the unification. In recognising the leadership they had during the two centuries that led to the unification in 1870-1, Weber thought that the *Junkers* were now suffering the consequences of the success of their own political project. Their precarious economic position made them unreliable as the class that Germany needed to achieve its development. From the first studies he carried out during the early 1890s, which were summed up in his inaugural lecture (1994a [1895]), Weber was convinced that the *Junkers*, pressed to make a choice between their own welfare as a class and the national interest would privilege the former. This was exemplified in the problems of economic migration in the East part of Germany. At that time, Weber

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<sup>43</sup> According to Bendix (1964: 207) Weber's emphasis on the primacy of foreign policy (*Primat der Außenpolitik*) reflects his awareness on the 'military and political vulnerability of Germany'.

supported the closure of the German frontier to Polish peasants, in order to prevent their employment as temporary workers (Weber 1994a: 9-10). However, due to their class position the *Junkers* successfully opposed this measure on the grounds that Polish labourers were cheaper than their German counterparts. This made apparent to Weber that they were no longer the class that Germany needed (Weber 1994b: 114-25).<sup>44</sup>

Weber supported the introduction of universal suffrage as a political strategy of middle-class political parties in the aftermath of the War because, by extending political rights in the form of universal suffrage politics started to become truly national politics: political education through universal suffrage meant also increased access to the cultural goods of the nation (Weber 1994b). Just after the end of the Great War, the refusal of the social democrats to pact with bourgeois parties was for him the main cause for the weaknesses of the newly formed constitutional government. Weber understood that there were different attitudes towards the nation among social classes, although the relatively minor impact of working class internationalism was for Weber (1970b: 174) a representation of the nation's strength. In his view, the idea of the nation was not expressed uniformly throughout society: the proletariat seemed to Weber less interested in the nation because its economic interests were in opposition to the bourgeoisie. This meant, according to Weber, that the working class was 'erroneously' unconcerned with the well being of the whole nation. This would add to the lack of a bourgeois revolution in Germany: the main agent in German politics of his time had been Bismarck instead of the bourgeoisie; Weber regretted the bourgeoisie's inability to take control of the state and called them a class of *parvenus*,

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<sup>44</sup> This was also the position of the National Liberal Party, which was closely connected, for example, with the Association for Social Policy that had supported Weber's research on the East border (Langewiesche 2000: 179; Lassman and Speirs 1994: viii).



a class without political experience, maturity and will. The key difference between the bourgeoisie and the *Junkers*, however, is that while the former have a future the latter belonged to the past (Mommsen 1974: Ch. 2).

Weber's argument about the relationship between classes and nations can be seen beyond the German scope; it seems to me that Weber links the building of a nation-state to the degree and shape of class relations within society; for Weber it is the capitalist character of the nation-state that makes it closely related to the rise of social classes. On this subject, Giddens (1972: 12) has proposed a link between Weber's political opinions and his sociological work: 'it became increasingly apparent to Weber after the turn of the century, that the immediate future of Germany must lie with a sharpening of the political consciousness of the bourgeoisie. An important underlying motif of "The Protestant Ethic" was certainly that of identifying the historical sources of such a "bourgeois consciousness"'. This is indeed an interesting question and I shall discuss its implications later in the chapter. For the moment it is enough to remember that, in *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber repeatedly emphasised that national differences were insufficient to explain the issues on which he is interested.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For instance, in relation to the differences between Puritanism and Lutheranism, Weber (1992: 47) argues that: '[t]he appeal to national character is generally a mere confession of ignorance (...) To ascribe a unified national character to the Englishman of the seventeenth century would be simply to falsify history (...) a difference of character between the English and merchant adventurers and the old Hanseatic merchants is not to be found; nor can any other fundamental difference between the English and German characters at the end of the Middle Ages, which cannot be easily explained by differences of their political history. It was the power of religious influence, not alone, but more than anything else, which created the differences of which we are conscious to-day'. Similar arguments, in which national differences are explained on the basis of different political and religious traditions, are found many times in the text (Weber 1992: 6, 10, 38, 79, 136-7).

Finally, a word on the cultural dimension of Weber's conceptualisation of the nation. Language is the most important *cultural* component of Weber's (1970b: 177-8) idea of the nation, although it is neither indispensable nor sufficient in itself. Weber (1970b: 172) argued that the nation is broadly associated with the existence of a common language but at the same time, the possession of a 'national' language does not secure a coherent national solidarity; a nation is not only, or necessarily, a community speaking the same language. Yet, Weber pointed out that there are economic interests behind the expansion of a single and unified national language and in that sense, he precedes the thesis on the link between the rise of capitalism and national languages.<sup>46</sup> Weber (1970b: 176-8) also highlights how vernacular languages are important to both the state and the church, especially in the former gaining influence against the latter; the crucial role intellectuals have played in this; and also that 'the importance of language is necessarily increasing along with the democratization of the state, society and culture' (Weber 1970b: 178).

At this point, on the basis of a combination of his analysis of Germany and his more general comments on the subject, it should be clear that Weber's understanding of the nation-state is not methodologically nationalistic. Weber thought that Germany was not really a nation-state yet and there was no certainty that it would ever be so either. Equally, Weber's efforts to define nations sociologically faced the problem of the nation's incredible empirical variability and we saw how hard he battled to find a centre for his concept of the nation. So, although he eventually defined the nation in relation to the state and politics Weber's concept of the state was attached to the

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<sup>46</sup> Represented, for instance, in the tendency towards the decline of bi-linguism (Weber 1970b: 179) or the 'practical problems' created by the 'multi-lingual' character of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Weber 1994c: 273).

property of administrative means and thus remained independent from the nation. Nation and states came indeed closer and closer in modernity but, from historical experience, Weber drew also the lesson that they eventually become the victims of their own success – states expanding beyond the nation – or failure – nations failing to form states.

### **3. 2. The position of politics in Weber's diagnosis of modernity.**

Among the secondary accounts of Weber's politics discussed in the previous section, two appear to have linked (or in fact conflated) Weber's *political* nationalism with an alleged *methodological* nationalism. The first of these is D. Beetham's (1974: 121) argument that Weber's representation of the nation-state should be taken to mean the *modern* form of the state, which is supplemented with his the idea that the *Kultur* has to find its most important expression at the national level.<sup>47</sup> The second argument is found in A. Giddens' thesis (1972: 12) that Weber's interest in the 'Protestant Ethic' is in fact instrumental to his political concern with the 'failures' of the German bourgeoisie in carrying on a successful bourgeois revolution. Unsurprisingly, these interpretations arose in the 1970s, which is also the time in which the argument on sociology's methodological nationalism first emerged. As argued in the first chapter of the thesis, there are two versions of the argument of sociology's methodological nationalism. First, there is the historical argument of making the nation-state the final form of modern socio-political arrangements. Second, there is the logical argument in

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<sup>47</sup> In Beetham's (1974: 125) view, a *Kultur* is composed by: 'those particular values which distinguish a group of society from others – which constitutes individuality ("Eigenart") – and which are given self-conscious formulation, typically in the art or literature of the society (...) all culture is national culture'. See Berger and Bendix (1959: 106-7) for a rejection of this interpretation of Weber's idea of *Kultur*.

which the ‘ideal’ image of society is equated to the nation-state. Interestingly, these two arguments are present here in relation to Weber’s work; whilst Beetham’s reading would be close to the historical argument (the nation-state would incarnate Weber’s *modern* society), Giddens’ interpretation would fall into the logical one (Weber’s ideal society would be those nation-states that have experienced successful bourgeois revolutions). Against these arguments, it seems to me that if we take Weber’s own views on the relationships between politics and science seriously a rather different picture emerges.

It is worth noting that in those interpretations which do not concentrate on Weber’s politics, nationalism, both political and methodological, is very much downplayed. Thus, for K. Jaspers (1989), it is scholarship that truly captures Weber’s life-passion; for Gerth and Mills (1970: 23, 72) Weber belongs to a ‘generation of universal scholars’ and conveyed a ‘defensive pessimism for the future of freedom’; for Bendix (1966: xx) ‘Weber’s work belongs to the intellectual heritage of European liberalism’; for Schluchter (1981: 6) ‘[c]apitalism is Max Weber’s first theme’, for Habermas (1984: 143) Weber wanted to comprehend ‘the process of disenchantment in the history of religion’ as well as the processes of ‘societal rationalization’; for Parsons (1965: 172) he was a ‘highly cosmopolitan intellectual passionately concerned with (...) understanding the significance of the society of his own time in Europe’ and for Whimster (1998: 72) Weber ‘was not explicitly a nation-state theorist. What we find instead is a theory of power’.

Indeed, it is impossible to review even sketchily the many different themes on which Weber attempted to contribute. The comparative question of world-religions and the rationalisation of life; the social character of Ancient Civilisations; the question of the

‘polytheism of values’ and the relation between ideas and interests; epistemological and methodological questions on the objectivity of science; the rise of capitalism and bureaucracy are some of those topics and this does not look like the scholarly agenda of a champion of the nation-state. Any of these themes, in fact, could provide the argument I require as a critique of a methodologically nationalistic reading of Weber. In what follows, I concentrate on Weber’s understanding of politics in the context of his reflections on the nature of modern social life and culture because had his sociology been methodologically nationalistic it would have to be here where that would make its appearance.

According to C. Turner (1992: 172), the question of Weber’s understanding of politics has to be made in the broader context of his conceptualisation of the transformation of culture in the West; Weber’s thesis of the secularisation of culture in the modern age has to do with its fragmentation in different value spheres, each of which would be independent and autonomous from the others.<sup>48</sup> Weber (1970a, c, e) starts from the fact of religion’s diminishing primacy and privilege in establishing the true and only meaning of life in the modern age; religion has lost its power as a unifying force. Weber’s argument, however, was not only that in modernity different value spheres are independent from one another but also that each sphere attempts ‘to hold validity for *all* cultural practices’ (C Turner 1992: 89). Instead of partial worldviews, these value spheres become “‘sublimated” into total world views’ (C. Turner 1992: 99), so they all develop a form of imperialist device in trying to control what happens outside their own particular realm.

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<sup>48</sup> According to S. Seidman (1983: 233), Weber explicitly ‘repudiated’ the idea that these value spheres could be understood, in a methodologically nationalistic fashion, as ‘emanations of the *Volksgeist*’. See also Frisby and Sayer (1986: 68-72).

The tragedy of modern culture lies in the existence of multiple spheres – as a result of the process of secularisation – and in that this ‘disenchantment’ makes any attempt to find a unifying centre for culture doomed to fail: this is Weber’s (1970a: 147-8) thesis of ‘the polytheism of ultimate values’. There is a ‘tragedy’ in the fact that each value sphere tries to embrace the other spheres through the imposition of its particular value on them, that is, in the process of ‘the sublimation of intrinsic logics into cultural values’ (C. Turner 1992: 122). The tragedy of culture would in fact be a double tragedy. On the one hand, it has to do with the distance between values and the world *within* each sphere: there is always a loss in the transition from values to the ‘real world’; when ideas are put into practice the process is necessarily imperfect. On the other hand, there is the problem of the ‘sublimation’ of values. This is the second, more important part of the tragedy of culture in which each sphere strives, but fails, to control or unify the world outside itself. The real struggle of the modern culture is the drama, the inevitability and impossibility, of human beings attempting this unified account of culture with which to answer the question of the ultimate meaning of life.

Weber (1970e) distinguished six value spheres (religion, economics, politics, aesthetics, the erotic and the intellectual), all of which had the same analytical status (C. Turner 1992: 70-1, 89). Without thoroughly addressing that issue here, I think that from the point of view of their content – from the angle of the substantive meaning of their ultimate values – three of these spheres stand above the others: religion, the intellectual (science and philosophy) and politics. This does not automatically challenge the thesis of the equal analytical status of all spheres; religion, science and politics have no special position regarding the *causes* of social change and none of them becomes at any point the unifying core of culture. The discussion of Weber’s

theorisation of these three spheres will help locate Weber's idea of politics within his diagnosis of modernity and then I will link it with my broader inquiry into Weber's alleged methodological nationalism.<sup>49</sup>

Religion's special status is based on its 'transcendental' point of view; Weber picked religion as the central value sphere for his analysis of culture precisely because, historically, the answers to the question of the meaning of the world have been primarily religious. It is religion's ultimate value to claim the unity of reason and world; this is religion's 'imperialism' in relation to the other cultural spheres. In Weber's (1970c: 271, 275-8) view, religion is primarily concerned with the meaning of the world in the light of good fortune and, specially, of suffering and injustice, so the tension between the 'other-worldly' and the 'inner-worldly' is at the basis of religion's relation to the mundane world. The main demand being made upon religion is that 'the world order in its totality is, could, and should somehow be a meaningful "cosmos"' (Weber 1970c: 281). In modernity, in an increasingly rationalised 'conception of the world', religion is moved 'into the realm of the irrational' (Weber 1970c: 281), in which the original 'unity of the primitive image of the world (...) has tended to split into rational cognition and mastery of nature, on the one hand, and into "mystic" experiences, on the other' (Weber 1970c: 282; also 1970e: 351). The tension between religion and other value spheres is based upon religion's rejection of 'its own perspectival character' and its claim of 'universal validity' (...) [w]ithin any salvation religion the opposition between religious ethics and the world presupposes that a

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<sup>49</sup> This thesis has also been understood as Weber's particular theory of social change in contradistinction to the thesis of the primacy of material factors in historical materialism (Weber 1970c: 269-70; Habermas 1984: 144-5; Mann 1986: 30; Schluchter 1981). Here, my point is only about the position of politics in Weber's diagnosis of modernity and Weber's *critique* of the thesis on the primacy of any one sphere above the others.

religious ethics is the only perspective from which the world's existence could be justified' (C. Turner 1992: 88 and 99). Weber's theses of the 'secularisation of culture' or the 'disenchantment of the world' are the result of the transformation in the religious sphere and its relation to other cultural spheres.

The 'intellectual' sphere (that includes both science and philosophy), secondly, stands on its claim of being able to *reflect* on the other value spheres; Weber (1970e: 350) recognises the fact that it is in relation to the intellectual sphere that religion faces its 'greatest and most principled' tension. Weber's thesis of the value spheres is indeed made with the tools that science and philosophy provide; this diagnostic is scientifically and philosophically based so the intellectual sphere's imperialism corresponds to its self-understanding as the sphere within which this representation of culture is drawn. Weber's idea of the 'cultural significance' of science is 'the question of what effects the methodically secured growth of theoretical knowledge has on the development of the human mind and the cultural context of life as a whole' (Habermas 1984: 146). Yet, this still leaves unresolved the problem of the position of science and scientific knowledge in modernity: '[i]f science is implicated in the polytheism it claims to be able to announce, where does it go to announce it?' (C. Turner 1992: 62).

Weber also understood that the intellectual sphere was itself differentiated: natural sciences, social sciences and philosophy all play different roles within the intellectual sphere. Natural sciences, firstly, give 'us an answer to the question of what we must do if we wish to master life technically' (Weber 1970a: 144); they respond to the need of technical control of the world. The social scientist, secondly, must state 'the internal structure of cultural values' (1970a: 146), that is, he must be able to describe the main trends of his own society and epoch. The philosopher, finally, must derive 'the inner



consistency, and hence integrity, from this or that ultimate *weltanschauliche* position'; the philosopher should tell how 'you serve this god and offend the other god' when people decide between different values; he must help the individual give 'himself an *account of the ultimate meaning of his own conduct*' (Weber 1970a: 151-2).

We can also see how, for Weber, scholars should claim to possess legitimate knowledge only on the basis of their field of expertise; scholars must refrain from answering 'the question of the *value* of culture (...) and the question of how one should act in the cultural community and in political associations' (Weber 1970a: 146). Weber's doctrine of the objectivity of science is thus not grounded in the belief in an idea of a 'neutral' position for the description of, and the intervention on, social relations. In the diagnosis of the differentiation of the value spheres, the idea of 'objectivity' becomes only the one value which should rule upon the procedures of the intellectual sphere.<sup>50</sup> The relationship between religion and the intellectual value sphere is different from the relations between religion and the other value spheres

For just as the religious sphere can take on an exceptional status by becoming the 'tincture' given to all others, so it is, in the end, through a rationalist, secular rhetoric that the other spheres are able to assume that same status. The challenge which the intellectual sphere offers to religion does not amount merely to a direct clash between science and religion, but it is also expressed through those [other value spheres] (C. Turner 1992: 118)

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<sup>50</sup> Thus Lepenies (1988: 256) reads Weber's theory of objectivity as 'the outcome of intellectual ascetism, not an expression of a devout belief in science'.

There is, thirdly, the sphere of politics that also makes its imperialist claims on controlling the other value spheres. The grounds for politics' imperialism are altogether different from those of science and religion as they are based on practical grounds rather than on transcendental or cognitive claims. Weber's (1994d) conception of politics is the struggle for domination, so the attempt to master culture and history, the quest for pushing things in a certain direction, would be politics' inner nature. Here, the question of whether Weber was really consistent in that politics has the same status as the other value spheres comes to the fore. The thesis that politics is characterised by the use of specific means (i.e. violence) instead of ultimate values implies also that no credo can take the place of politics' ultimate value (C. Turner 1992: 150). It is precisely here, in the idea that 'the political' has to be defined only by its means and never through its purposes or values that the problem of a methodologically nationalistic reading of Weber becomes particularly clear: 'the "ultimate value" of politics is a relationship between self, value and world, between validity and existence' (C. Turner 1992: 159). On the one hand, *politics is not the centre of Weber's conception of modernity and culture*: the thesis of the differentiation of value spheres runs explicitly against such a view of the 'centrality of politics'. On the other hand, *the nation is part but not the core of Weber's conception of politics*, which has to do with violence as the *means* of politics and not with particular cultural values – modern culture is 'a mosaic of domains of normativity' (C. Turner 1992: 147). The emphasis on violence in his idea of politics, plus the position of politics within Weber's broader diagnosis of modernity, should refrain us from understanding of his conceptualisation of nation-states in a methodologically nationalistic fashion.

In trying to come to terms with the tension between 'Weber the scholar' and 'Weber the political man', then, there are his own ideas of science and politics which must to

be taken into consideration. The crucial element in Weber's idea of politics would come from his awareness of the fact that 'the ideals of others are as sacred to them as ours are to us' (C. Turner 1992: 167); the core of his idea of politics would be precisely in the struggle that comes from the recognition and practical dealing with this problem. Weber is also aware of the powerful strains that a political personality must resist: 'to have a vocation for politics is to commit oneself to an activity defined not in terms of the validity of a value, but in terms of an understanding of the tragic relationship between values and the resistances life offers to their actualisation' (C. Turner 1992: 169). Had Weber granted a special status to politics in the context of his thesis of the value spheres, it would have to be here, in the specific nature of the relationship between politics and the world: in politics trying to *master* the world. Yet, we have seen that this imperialism is something shared by all value spheres and is not particular to politics.

At the same time, Weber's idea of the scholar is that of the person who is devoted 'solely to the work at hand'; a person who really develops 'an inner devotion to the task': only such a person deserves the name of scholar (Weber 1970a: 137, Jaspers 1989). Weber's health and political activism seem to have made him aware of the fact that he himself did not deserve such name, his life was not devoted 'only' to science. Weber had a clear idea of the limitations of science; his assertion on the objectivity of science is a statement in support of asking science only what it can really provide: a technical understanding of the best means to achieve an end (in natural sciences) and a scrutiny into the position of values within particular social contexts (for the social sciences). Conversely, his scholarly passion and lack of will for power prevented him from embracing a fuller political engagement. It is on the idea of *Beruf*, in its double meaning of 'calling' and 'profession', where the modern personality should find its

position in the world and it seems that Weber himself was never able to resolve the inner tension of wanting to be a true politician and as an exemplary scholar while knowing, tragically, of the impossibility and dangers of expecting to serve faithfully the two gods at the same time.

### **Conclusion.**

The more power is emphasised, the closer appears to be the link between nation and state. This pathetic pride in the power of one's own community...(Weber 1978: 398)

This quotation expresses for itself the main thesis of this chapter: Weber's complications and ambivalences, politically and sociologically, in coming to terms with nations – and their links with states. I have tried to link politics and scholarship in Weber's work and argue not only that he neither conflated the two nor made one instrumental to the other but also that his sociology of the nation-state can only be understood within the context of these tensions. In the first part of the chapter, I coupled some of Weber's political writings with his sociological work on the nation and drew some substantive lessons about his 'sociology of the nation-state'. Weber seemed to have understood well that several forms of social relations and identity had already been taken as the nation's core: physical appearance, culture, language and class claim to represent the nation but none of them was really adequate for a sociological account of the subject. The nation is for Weber a type of political community that is based on 'sentiments of prestige' and yet, even if nations need to be defined in relation to some form of political communities, Weber did not need the nation to conceptualise the modern state. Modern states are characterised by the fact

that the ‘staff is separated from the means of administration’ and also for the specific means states use to fulfil their tasks: violence. In addition to all these problems when trying to understand nation-states sociologically, Weber also asserted that the nation-state was quite a problematic image for the representation of the dynamics of power politics. When powerful and strong, states expand beyond the nation’s limits and they become multi-national *Empires*. When states are weak and ‘forsake power’, the peoples living within these states can hardly be conceived of as nations either.

In the second section, the central questions were that of Weber’s idea of ‘tragedy of the culture’, his thesis of the differentiation of value spheres and that of the role of politics in that diagnostic. There, I wanted to show that the question of the position of politics within Weber’s sociology must be considered carefully as one needs to link this with his broader diagnostic of the disenchantment and rationalisation of the world. At the same time, I argued that such a concept of politics does not coincide with the nation, but rather has to do with politics’ specific means: violence. In asserting the tension between scholarship and politics in Weber’s work it became clear that Weber struggled throughout his life to come to terms with the ultimate values and inner vocation that each of these two activities demanded from individuals immersed in them. The claim that either politics or science was instrumental to the ‘substantive’ ends of the other just does not do justice to Weber’s overall project. The two parts of the chapter come together in having traced some substantive contributions of Weber to a sociological understanding of nation-states that neither presuppose nor require regarding nation-states as the final stage of modernity and also in having discussed Weber’s idea of politics beyond the role nations and nation-states play in it. In so doing, there is no need to deny the importance of Weber’s political nationalism; Weber the scholar

would have been happy with it in so far as this does not undermine nor over-determine his work as sociologist.

#### **Chapter 4. Emile Durkheim: World patriotism and the nation-state.**

In the same way as Weber remained a nationalist throughout his life; Durkheim was a committed and proud Frenchman; his interest in the life and fate of the French Third Republic was academic as well as political. It seems interesting to understand, then, how Durkheim made that connection between scholarship and politics. A type of moral universalism – based on republicanism and individualism – was central in Durkheim's sociology of the nation-state and it is this moral universalism that turns his sociology into a *critique* of methodological nationalism.

In the first section of the chapter, by revisiting some influential interpretations of Durkheim's politics, I argue that an idea of crisis, 'a social and political malaise', is the bottom line of Durkheim's epochal diagnostic and also that such diagnostic is inextricably attached to Durkheim's reflection on the *moral* character of that crisis. His problem, as a sociologist, was to understand the sources of the crisis and try to find ways of overcoming it. This problem finds further expression in the second section of the chapter when analysing Durkheim's engagement with the major political events of his time – the Dreyfus Affair and the causes of the First World War. Here, the purpose is not only to expand on the question of the connections between politics and sociology in his work but also to address more directly one of the crucial aspects of his 'sociology of the nation-state': the subtleness of his attempt to combine normative and sociological arguments. I shall argue that, despite all shortcomings of his own nationalism, his anti-German chauvinism, and some naiveté in his ideas of 'humanity' and 'moral individualism', Durkheim never surrendered in his effort to make normative and sociological arguments work together. During the Great War, politics

and sociology come together in Durkheim through his argument that France's *national* role was that of pursuing a *universal* morality – an emergent 'global consciousness'.

Finally, in the third section, I shall come to terms directly with Durkheim's sociology of the nation-state; I try to draw some substantive lessons from Durkheim's writings on the subject which do not portray nation-states as the final representation of modernity. The core arguments here are the distinction between 'national' and 'world' patriotisms and the role of nation-states in the actualisation of 'universal' moral values. A major point in Durkheim's 'sociology of the nation-state' seems to be that abstract moral ideals such as 'world patriotism' have to be anchored in 'real' communities and states. In the same way as with the previous two chapters of this part on classical sociology, I shall combine two different levels: Durkheim's positive views on the development and main characteristics of nation-states *vis-à-vis* his critique of the thesis that nation-states are the necessary representation of 'society' in modernity.

#### **4. 1. Understanding Durkheim's politics: The question of the malaise.**

Durkheim devoted great efforts to the establishment of academic sociology. Not only was he crucial in the institutionalisation of sociology within the French university system and in the formation of a generation of young scholars who would embrace sociology (Durkheim 1964c: xlii; Burke 1990: 13-9; Thompson 1982: 17-8) but also, in so doing, he counted with the decided support of the government, his influence being at its peak just before the outbreak of the First World War (Lepenies 1988: 51-3, 64-5; Pickering and Martins 1994: 2). It was from this position of influence that he expected sociology to contribute to the design of the institutional reform of the French state (Durkheim 1964b: 33, 1973b; Clark 1968; Richter 1964: 172; Thompson 1982:



27).<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the life of the French Third Republic, between 1870 and 1914, was full of problems and contradictions as defeat and violence marked its beginning. The defeat against Prussia in 1870 and the violence of the Paris Commune had both led to a sense of decadence at that time, both economically (as compared to England) and in educational and military terms (in relation to Germany): there was a generalised sense of social and political malaise (Durkheim 1992: 96; Jones 1999: 32, 43-4; Llobera 1994a: 142-4).

Durkheim (1970: 37) felt very strongly about these problems; his idea of the *malaise* is not represented only in 'pathological' social phenomena such as the abnormal division of labour, anomie and the misery in the living conditions of the working class; he expressed it also in academic and political language. Sociologically, the central thesis of his *The Division of Labour in Society* has to do with understanding the 'moral crisis' that society is going through in the transition from one form of social solidarity to another (Durkheim 1964b: 34); politically, Durkheim (1959: 7) analyses socialism as 'a cry of grief, sometimes of anger, uttered by men who feel most keenly our collective *malaise*'. This crisis would be an expression of the deeper question of the dissolution of old forms of social bondage; and expression of the fact that this was a transitional period in human history. At the same time, the truly *moral* character of Durkheim's diagnostic of the malaise helps him transcend pure pessimism. Although it is true that there is an 'ambivalence between optimism and gloom' (Miller 1996: 9) in his diagnostic, Durkheim's belief in the inner moral condition of social life allows him space for hope as part of the diagnostic of the crisis (Jones 2001: 97-107).

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<sup>51</sup> According to Hobsbawm (1983b: 269-71), the French Third Republic was particularly active in the question of 'inventing traditions' and his references are clearly related to what we can call a 'Durkheimian agenda': a secular replacement for church symbolisms; organisation of primary education and public ceremonies and extensive erections of public monuments.

The understanding of Durkheim's politics has created many problems to scholars dealing with it. Already in the 1950s, in the introduction to the English edition of Durkheim's *Socialism and Saint-Simon*, A. Gouldner (1959) argued that Durkheim was a 'quasi-radical' intellectual due to his alleged commitment to a democratic version of socialism. In the 1960s, L. Coser (1964) and R. Nisbet (1965) made the opposite claim, namely, that Durkheim was a rather conservative thinker.<sup>52</sup> At one level, it looks as if part of that debate has to do with what is meant by 'radical' or 'conservative', and also with the dispute for Durkheim's status as a 'classic'. If, as Coser (1964: 214-5) argued, being a conservative were being against revolutionary or violent social change, then Durkheim would certainly be so. By the same token, if by radicalism one understands a commitment for social reform, a support for democratic institutions and the involvement of the state in the economy, as Bellah (1973), Giddens (1978, 1986) and Gouldner (1959) do, then Durkheim was a radical. In Durkheim's France, conservatism was associated with Catholicism and anti-Dreysfusardism, and Durkheim was neither. Durkheim was not a conservative for his plea for social reform was not based on any kind of restoration; rather the opposite, he believed in the need for *new* forms of morality (Bellah 1973: x; Tiryakan 1979: 188, 191). Durkheim's view of the current crisis was not based on any sort of regressive utopia; his idea of the transition was not already granted by any specific image of the society to be formed (Fenton: 1984: 8 and against Nisbet 1965: 18-28). The Third Republic saw itself as a continuation of the philosophical legacy of 1789, which is another reason not to put Durkheim in the conservative camp (Durkheim 1959: 66; 1973d; Cladis 1992: 2).

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<sup>52</sup> In this, they continued a trend that had begun in the 1930s in which Durkheim was conceived of as an extremist nationalist (Mitchell 1990 [1931]) and also as an ('unconscious') forerunner of fascism (Ranulf 1939).

Moreover, Durkheim believed in capitalist division of labour, the authority of the state, the rule of law and the necessity of social and moral integration, so he was hardly a radical. The fact that some of his students and friends were socialists (Mauss 1959: 2-3; Thompson 1982: 155-8), or his own support for social reform, does not seem to be enough to maintain his radicalism.

Indeed, the argument that we should not try locate Durkheim's politics along the lines of the conservative-radical axis has also been made (Bellah 1973: xviii; Jones 2001: 47; Thompson 1982: 22). An important part of the problem, it seems to me, is related to the question of the particular twofold sociological and political character of Durkheim's epochal diagnostic; the problem with this debate is above all that it places politics as the core of Durkheim's intellectual project (Poggi 2000: 122). Similar to the discussion on Weber's work in the previous chapter, I would like to argue that, in understanding Durkheim, we should not make sociology instrumental to politics: the mediations between politics and scholarship are not well captured by either conflating or strictly separating them.<sup>53</sup>

The argument of the 'centrality of politics' for understanding Durkheim's sociology falls permanently back to problem of 'radicalism v/s conservatism'; Durkheim's idea of the malaise does not fit into these terms debate because they imposes a politically

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<sup>53</sup> On the question of Durkheim's politics, all sorts of 'middle-ground' positions have been found. Concepts like liberalism, moral individualism, republicanism and democratic socialism have all been proposed to label the nature of Durkheim's political thought (Bach 1990; Cladis 1992; Clark 1968; Fenton 1984; Hearn 1985; Jones 2001; Llobera 1994; Lukes 1992; Miller 1996; Parsons 1967; Poggi 2000; Richter 1964; Seidman 1983; Thompson 1982; Tiryakan 1979; Turner 1992; Zeitlin 1990). Without trying to settle the dispute here, republicanism and moral individualism seem to me the most precise terms to describe Durkheim's politics as they emphasise his simultaneous concern with the state and individual freedom.

and methodologically nationalistic framework upon Durkheim's thought. On the contrary, I think that Durkheim's central thesis was that of the need to develop a framework with which to connect moral universalism with the nation-state. A recent book, R. A. Jones' *The development of Durkheim's social realism*, provides a good example of why I regard this question important and still relevant. In political terms, Jones' (1999: 13, 16) argument has gone back to the thesis of the conservatism of Durkheim's politics, but as he neither provides new arguments for this nor does he refute those who have claimed different views, there is no need to discuss this question again. More interesting is the way in which Jones claims Durkheim would have understood the relationship between politics and scholarship and the role of nation-states in framing such a relationship. Jones argues in favour of placing Durkheim back into context: the French milieu in which Durkheim's intellectual project intersects with the political concerns of his day. On this, Jones' (1999: 5) argument is that 'Durkheim's interests and purposes were at least as much *moral* and *political*' as they were academic. In the next page, however, he argues that 'sociology was less an end in itself than a means to the achievement of moral and political goals' (1999: 6). In my view, this explanation for the alleged 'instrumentalism' of Durkheim's sociology in terms of his politics has to do mostly with Jones' own methodological nationalism and this is the type of argument we need to avoid.<sup>54</sup>

Another way of pursuing this matter further is with the question of Durkheim's intellectual roots, although the agreement here falls similarly short as in the assessment of Durkheim's politics. Giddens (1986: 13), for instance, has argued that it is impossible to settle the dispute on whether Comte or Saint-Simon was more influential

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<sup>54</sup> I shall come back to this issue, and to the problems in Jones' reading of Durkheim, towards the end of the chapter.

on Durkheim. For others, Rousseau (Cladis 1992) or Kant (Layne 1973) should occupy the place of honour as Durkheim's greatest intellectual mentor. In one of the most recent interpretation of Durkheim, S. Jones (2001: 23-31) has also addressed this issue. She gives a thorough critique of those who link Durkheim to Comte and makes them responsible for the misunderstandings in the 'sociological reading' of Durkheim as a crude positivist, but she hardly mentions Saint-Simon – despite the fact that she argues that Durkheim was a 'socialist republican' (Jones 2001: 165) or a 'democratic republican' (Jones 2001: 178). Her central argument is, in fact, that the most important influence on Durkheim has not been discovered yet; it was actually French intellectual Charles Renouvier (1815-1903). To Jones it is Renouvier's 'sociologisation' of Kant, plus his political concern with a strong state, that shaped Durkheim's deepest intellectual orientation (Jones 2001: 227-9).

Indeed, as with the case of the assessment of Durkheim's politics, I cannot settle this dispute; still, some comments are worth making in the spirit of grasping the idea of crisis which is at the bottom of Durkheim's epochal diagnosis. On the one hand, it has been argued that it was Comte who shaped more importantly the *scientific* outlook through which Durkheim expected sociology to develop (Peyre 1964: 23); Comte would have made real an idea of science that was only a possibility in Saint-Simon, so Comte deserves to be considered the father of sociology: '[n]o doubt, in order to properly understand Comte, we must go back to Saint-Simon. But whatever Comte may owe to his master, he remains for us the master par excellence' (Durkheim 1973b: 10). On the other hand, Saint-Simon seems to have been more important in shaping Durkheim's *substantive* conception of social life: on this question Comte owed to

Saint-Simon ‘much more than he acknowledged’ (Durkheim 1959: 86).<sup>55</sup> Durkheim (1959: 104) was convinced of the ‘grandeur’ of Saint-Simon: ‘aside from Cartesianism, there is nothing more important in the entire history of French philosophy’, he said once. Durkheim (1959: 99) crucially attributed to Saint-Simon the discovery that there is a type of social reality ‘*sui generis* which has a distinct existence and a nature which is peculiar to it’, that social relations express ‘the vital mainspring’ of modern life, that one must study ‘the social’ as a separate realm because with industrialism ‘economic relations form the basis of communal life, and that social unity is above all the result of a solidarity of interests’ (Durkheim 1959: 148). Saint-Simon’s call for a new secular religion (the ‘New Christianity’) is at the roots of Durkheim’s conviction about the need for a new secular morality. This morality had to be in tune with the major transformations brought by industrialism; it had not only to fill the vacuum left by the decline of religious beliefs but also had to take its form and content from science. A ‘religious faith’ based on science was needed and had to be educated on to people: a thorough re-construction and re-organisation of social relations according to the principles of industrialism (Durkheim 1959: 92). Secondary associations were to play the crucial integrative role; they should fight egoism, reject utilitarianism and promote altruism. In their rejection of anarchy, in their view of the abnormal (transitory) character of conflict, in their somewhat

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<sup>55</sup> W. Lepenies argues that, during the Third Republic, there were two openly contradictory interpretations of Comte. There was the ‘early Comte’ – the positivist – whose works were well regarded by the Republicans (i.e. Durkheim) and also the Left, and the ‘late right-wing Comte’, who was read as a ‘protest against the French Revolution and its consequences’ and who was also one of ‘the heroes of the counter-revolution’ (Lepenies 1988: 42). This may explain Durkheim’s ambiguity in acknowledging too much influence from Comte as Durkheim himself was a player in the intellectual and political debate that was held via these contradictory interpretations of Comte. See Gouldner (1959: ix-xv) and Zeitlin (1990: 257-67) for a particularly helpful discussion of this question.

optimistic vision of the future (Durkheim 1959: 100-1), and in their pacifism (rooted in Kant's idea of perpetual peace, Layne 1973: 99), both Durkheim and Saint-Simon were also very much related. Last but not least, Durkheim (1959: 103) attributed to Saint-Simon's idea of 'social psychology' the achievement of having raised 'itself above the national viewpoint – which can be nothing but descriptive – and no longer consider this or that people, but all mankind, in its progress'. Saint-Simon's focus was not only or even primarily on France, but on 'European societies', where these societies are a plurality of forms of socio-political organisation and not necessarily or exclusively nation-states (Durkheim 1959: 96, 108, 121, 126; 139).

I can finish this section here as its central point has been made: the discussion on Durkheim's politics and Durkheim's intellectual roots has made apparent that the specificity of Durkheim's epochal diagnosis lies precisely in the ways in which he combines sociological and normative arguments. How and why this is the case shall become clearer as we look at some of Durkheim's more direct engagements in politics.

#### **4. 2. Durkheim's involvement in politics: The Dreyfus Affair and World War I.**

Durkheim did not take part in everyday-life politics; his concerns rather were with the major political issues of his time, mostly the Dreyfus Affair and World War One (Bellah 1973: liii; Jones 2001: 44-61; Llobera 1994a: 145; Lukes 1992: 47, 334-5; Thompson 1982: 16). The analysis of Durkheim's involvement in these two issues is the aim of this section. The Dreyfus Affair, firstly, has been seen as a crucial moment in the history of the Third Republic (Cobban 1965: 48-58; Jones: 1993: 154-8). In 1890s, there was in France a right-wing nationalist movement, which conceived of Germany as France's external foe; socialists and masons were taken as the 'internal'

enemies, with the Jews in their usually awkward position of being ‘truly’ neither French nor foreigners. In terms of its social composition, this French nationalism was mostly religious (Roman Catholic), middle-class, urban and involving a big portion of the officialdom in the Army. Intellectuals, on the other hand, were at that time mainly supporting the Republic and stood in opposition to these nationalist groups (B. Turner 1992: xv). Yet, the opposition to right-wing nationalism did not restrain intellectuals from linking their republicanism with strictly *patriotic* sentiments and this was Durkheim’s position (Fenton 1984: 12; Jones 2001: 111). On both sides, nationalists and republicans, however, the sense of defeat and disillusion seems to have been quite accentuated.

Durkheim’s ([1898] 1973e) paper *Individualism and the Intellectuals* was published during the Dreyfus Affair and on occasion of the case; it was a response to a previous article by anti-Dreyfusard Ferdinand Brunetière. The paper begins with a passionate defence for the rights of individuals to decide political and moral issues for themselves. Against Brunetière’s claim that individualism was the source of France’s moral crisis, Durkheim (1973e: 43) supported the argument that intellectuals defending Dreyfus must place ‘their reason above authority’. Durkheim’s view was that Brunetière’s critique of individualism would be flawed due to its lack of differentiation between individualism and utilitarianism; Durkheim argued that it is mistaken to conflate the two doctrines into one; utilitarianism was individualism reduced to economism, a position to be strongly rejected. True individualism would be the tradition rooted in the philosophies of Kant and Rousseau, it was the framework that provided inspiration to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the form of individualism that ‘has become the basis of our moral catechism’ (Durkheim 1973e: 45). In attacking individualism without distinguishing it from utilitarianism, the



conservatives perpetrate both a mistake and a fallacy: the mistake of conflating both philosophies; the fallacy of trying to undermine the *philosophical* version of individualism by criticising only its *economic* version. Durkheim (1973e: 48-9) argued that moral individualism and utilitarianism are opposite doctrines; ‘duty’ and not ‘desire’ is what prevails in true individualism; the foundations of individualism are in feelings such as sympathy, pity and thirst for justice. Durkheim believed that the affirmation of the autonomy of reason is not only compatible with, but also a precondition of, the respect of authority. The key issue is that authority itself must be rationally constituted. Moral individualism forms the rational grounds on which authority can be established and only morally autonomous individuals can form a healthy society based on a virtuous relationship between individual freedom and the due respect for authority.

Durkheim (1973e: 51) also stated that, for the foundation of a legitimate authority, a moral common ground is needed. This would be represented in his concept of a ‘religion of humanity’, which was based on the principles of moral individualism: ‘traditional’ religions such as Catholicism could no longer provide the minimum of moral consensus that contemporary societies require (Tiryakian 1979: 195). The argument is that the authority of this new secular religion must be attached to, and supported by, the *moral* authority of state (Durkheim 1973e: 51). The article ends with Durkheim arguing for the relationship between moral individualism and the national project he believes France represents; as the country of the Revolution and the Rights of Man, the risk of opposing this individualism is to threaten France’s own national existence (Durkheim 1973d). The feeling of transgression of these sentiments would undermine social cohesion, which would thus erode the authority of the state. France is the country where the cause of the individual coincides with the national one: ‘if there

is a country among all others where the cause of individualism is truly national, it is our own; for there is no other which has created such rigorous solidarity between its fate and the fate of these ideas' (Durkheim 1973e: 54).

Indeed, the question here is where the analytical emphasis must be placed, and I think that what Durkheim values and intends to protect is the substantive conception of freedom that is at the root of the versions of individualism, republicanism and humanism for which he advocated. Even recognising the problems this formulation contains as a form of *political nationalism*, the argument is that the worth of these values is based on their 'universality' and not in their being 'particularly' French; what makes the French national project valuable would be the fact of the state having embraced these values as its own. Durkheim's moral individualism refers to humankind in general, not to the citizens of any specific nation; the state has to respect both the internal morality of the civil society and the external mores of foreign peoples (Giddens 1986: 21-3): France's worth would be based on having adopted these universal values, and not that these values had to be defended because they expressed a particular national character (nor, for this matter, that the French are the only nation that can represent these values). In a rather paradoxical way, then, the more *politically* nationalistic Durkheim's arguments became, the less *methodologically* nationalistic his sociological insight was.

These issues are given further expression in Durkheim's (1915) *Germany above all*, a little pamphlet that was written to explicate the causes of the First World War to the French public. As with the case of the paper on the Dreyfus Affair, this book can be read not only as a *political* treatise – now in support of France's war effort – but also as a *sociological* treatise against methodological nationalism. Politically, Durkheim

(1915: 44-5) takes the work of Heinrich Treitschke as the ultimate representation of the development of the German mentality in which ‘a morbid hypertrophy of the will’ expresses itself as an ‘attempt to rise “above all human forces” to master them and exercise full and absolute sovereignty over them’. With this, Durkheim (1915: 4) says, Germany has departed from ‘the great family of civilized peoples’ and therefore it would be not only in France’s interest, but in the interest of civilisation itself, to oppose the expansion of Germany. As a book on the sociology of the nation-state, however, Durkheim’s argument is an explicit rejection of the idea of nation-states as self-contained units and as the final representation of modernity. Indeed, Treitschke represents for Durkheim (1915: 7-8) a ‘way of conceiving of the State’ in which ‘it must be completely self-sufficient’. Treitschke’s assertion on the self-sufficiency of the state was pragmatic –the ‘State is power’ (Durkheim 1915: 19) – as well as normative: ‘the State is not under the jurisdiction of the moral conscience, and should recognise no law but its own interest’ (Durkheim 1915: 18).

Durkheim thoroughly opposed Treitschke’s conception of the state on the basis that no genuinely universalist conception of morality can be grounded on state or national premises. Morality, Durkheim (1915: 23) argues, is based on ‘the realisation of humanity, its liberation from the servitudes that belittle it’. Durkheim (1915: 24) understands that the core to the Christian tradition is the fact that ‘there are hardly any great divinities who are not to some extent international’. The religion of humanity in which Durkheim is interested does not fuse with the state nor with the nation. Rather, all efforts must be made to transcend the possible – but by no means inevitable – paradox between a commitment towards human values and patriotism towards one’s own nation (I shall come back to this point in the next section).

Durkheim's pacifism and internationalism, then, were based on both sociological and normative arguments (Wallace 1990). For the former, the industrial revolution played a major role; pacifism has to be pursued in order to avoid the “wasteful” expenditure of war’ (Layne 1973: 99): industrial development, technological improvements and prosperity have arisen together and require the pacific reorganisation of Europe (Durkheim 1959: 130-1). On the normative side, there is the ‘perpetual-peace’ type of pacifism: ‘the evolution of modern society has produced a wider horizon for human consciousness as human beings become conscious of their involvement in ‘humanity’ on a global scale (...) Durkheim anticipated the idea of political globalization on the basis of a universalistic notion of humanity’ (B. Turner 1992: xxxv). Nation-states should turn away from old tendencies to imperialist expansion and focus on social justice and the full development of their citizens (Jones 2001: 60, 181; Thompson 1982: 153-4); Durkheim believed in the compatibility between a republican state and international harmony (Giddens 1986: 21). Yet, as we have clearly seen, Durkheim thoroughly supported France's war effort on the ground of defending these same historical developments and moral principles.

Indeed, Durkheim's formulation contains its own problems, some of which Durkheim could have seen at his time and did not solve satisfactorily (for instance, his naivety in dealing with the relationships between ‘altruist’ patriotism and ‘fanatic’ nationalism) and certainly others which were just beyond his historical time (such as post-modern critiques of universalist concepts). Moreover, Durkheim seems to have become more nationalistic as he grew older; the destiny of France and its Republic came to be the same as the destiny of civilisation and thus has the chauvinism of this formulation been criticised (Joas 2003: 69-71). Yet, as I see it, the crucial argument is that, in spite of this chauvinism, no conflation was made between political and methodological

nationalism; we have seen that even in his writings on the causes of the war Durkheim did not use the nation-state as the universal or necessary representation of society in modernity. For my purposes, Durkheim's crucial thesis is that the nation-state takes its normative value in relation and only in relation to the principles and ideals that have to be conceived of independently from the national framework. Yet, and this makes his argument even more interesting, a major feature of Durkheim's sociology of the nation-state is that he emphasised the need for these values to be actualised *through* particular forms of social and political organisation.

#### **4.3. The concept of the nation-state: The question of the patrie.**

The set of lectures edited in English as *Professional Ethics and Civil Morals* (Durkheim 1992) is probably the closest we can get to Durkheim's political sociology. Although these notes were not thought of as a book – they were published posthumously in French (but in Turkey) just in 1950 – the fact that they were given at different moments during Durkheim's career can be taken as a sign of his satisfaction with the main theses being exposed there.<sup>56</sup> The book has two aims. Firstly, it provides a sociological account of several of the main concepts of political theory; Durkheim defines and discusses there core notions such as the state, the nation, political society and democracy. Secondly, the text sets what we can refer to as Durkheim's political agenda as it deals, sociologically *and* normatively, with the question of the political organisation of complex societies. In terms of structure, the book contains a first section that introduces the concept of 'professional ethics' and the process by which

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<sup>56</sup> The lectures were given three times: in 1889-90 (while Durkheim was a young scholar in Bordeaux), in 1904 (when he had just arrived in Paris from Bordeaux and was still without the professorship) and in 1912 at the peak of his career (Llobera 1994a: 136).

they are transformed into laws for the regulation of particular forms of social and economic relations. In that section, Durkheim gives an account of what secondary associations are and of the functions they are expected to fulfil. The second section is focused on the 'civic morals', which can be defined as Durkheim's version of the secular state religion. Finally, the last section deals with the rights of property where Durkheim puts forward his argument against the right of inheritance and also his thesis on the non-contractual elements of contract. For my purposes here, I shall concentrate on the first two sections of the book.

Durkheim's (1992: 2) starting point is his query into how sanctions are created and why they are respected in society; sanctions, he says, place moral ideals into the social context. In fact, sociologically, the morality of social facts has to do with the way in which society enforces sanctions on those who transgress the norm. The core distinction of the book, the one between professional ethics and civil morals, draws upon this understanding of sanctions. Individuals, as fellow citizens in a political society governed by a state, are attached to two sets of rules, the one abstract and defined by their general condition as citizens (the 'civic morals'); the other particular and related to their economic role in society (the 'professional ethics'). In relation to professional ethics Durkheim (1992: 9-10) argues that not every secondary group can produce the regulations it requires. While the professions closely linked to the administration of the state can do so (lawyers, the army and civil servants in general), those activities within the realm of the economy, namely industry and trade, are hardly able to define these norms in the level and form that is required. As competition is the natural form of interactions in the economy, professional ethics do not naturally arise there; yet, they still have the need for 'a moral power capable of containing individual egos, of maintaining a spirited sentiment of common solidarity in the consciousness of

all the workers, of preventing the law of the strongest from being brutally applied to industrial and commercial relations' (Durkheim 1964a: 10). The argument is that at earlier times in history economic functions had been subordinated to politics, military or religion, so they were more or less automatically regulated from these other fields. In modernity, however, due to the primacy of the division of labour, no regulation can be externally imposed on the economy (Durkheim 1959: 109-10). The system of norms that is functional to the requirements of complex social relations cannot be imposed by the state from above; rather it has to be created from within, by the very organisations that participate in everyday economic activities. Professional associations are the only groups that can do so, on the condition that they are re-created differently from the medieval guilds; the moral drive that was now needed is not found in their old form of organisation (Durkheim 1959: 67, 1992: 14-20).<sup>57</sup> The primary function of these reformed professional groups was moral instead of economic; they would no longer be private institutions but would become public; the state must provide the framework for all professional groups. Overall, the main expectation on these secondary groups is that they would help close the gap between the state and the individual. At the same time, the public status of the professional associations is located beyond local or municipal districts; rather, they have to link to the country as a whole. Durkheim (1964a: 27-8) refers to them as 'national corporate bodies'

Society, instead of remaining what it is today, an aggregate of juxtaposed territorial districts, would become a vast system of national corporations (...) it

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<sup>57</sup> This is consistent with the better known 'sociological' version of the same argument: organic solidarity is the specific form of moral regulation that arises from people performing similar economic functions (Jones 2001: 90-1).

will be seen, indeed, how, as advances are made in history, the organization which has territorial groups as its base (village or city, district, province, etc.) steadily becomes effaced (...) These geographical divisions are, for the most part, artificial and no longer awaken in us profound sentiments, the provincial spirit has disappeared never to return; the patriotism of the parish has become an archaism that cannot be restored at will

The second part of the book, centred on the civic morals, begins with the distinction between the state and political society; the differentiation between governing and governed is the core of their difference: '[w]e should then define the political society as one formed by the coming together of a rather large number of secondary social groups, subject to the same one authority which is not in itself subject to any other superior authority duly constituted' (Durkheim 1992: 44-5). The definition reinforces the role of secondary associations in the organisation of the state, which is defined as 'the organising centre of the secondary groups themselves' (Durkheim 1992: 49). Durkheim stresses that, although decisions taken by the state involve political society; the specificity of the state lies in its capacity of volition and deliberation. Executive tasks are the responsibility of the different officials within the state's organisation.<sup>58</sup>

The question of the balance between the state and the individual reappears here as the crucial normative tension in Durkheim's political sociology. On the one hand, the rise of professional ethics makes clear that the division of labour increases the gap between the individual and the state and professional groups have to fill that gap. On the other hand, individual rights can only arise and be granted by the state: 'the stronger the

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<sup>58</sup> In the language of Durkheim's (1992: 30, 50-1) body metaphors, the state would be the 'social brain' while these officials would represent the 'nervous system'.



State, the more the individual is respected' (Durkheim: (1992: 57). The thesis is that there are no natural rights of the individual at the moment of birth, these rights arise and are held only by the state

[T]here was no exaggeration in saying that our moral individuality, far from being antagonistic to the State, has on the contrary been a product of it (...) the fundamental duty of the State is laid down in this very fact: it is to preserve in calling the individual to a moral way of life (Durkheim 1992: 68-9).

Above all, it is the moral character of the state that Durkheim emphasises; the constitution of the *modern* state produces a specific kind of morality that takes the individual as its highest value. The state 'is above all, supremely the organ of moral discipline' (Durkheim 1992: 72).<sup>59</sup> In fact, the centrality of the question of the relationship between the collective and the individual is permanent in Durkheim's work as it is explicitly stated in the introductions of both *The Division of Labour in Society* – 'this work has its origins in the question of the relations of the individual to social solidarity' (Durkheim 1964b: 37) – and *Suicide* 'there can be no sociology unless societies exist, and that societies cannot exist if there are only individuals' (Durkheim 1970: 38). His particular form of collectivism is represented in his positive lean towards the relationship between individuals and the state. He recognised the tension between individualism and collectivism that is at the core of the constitution of modern societies: the 'two fundamental principles' of the French Revolution are those

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<sup>59</sup> Durkheim was permanently looking for 'healthy' ways of mediating between individuals and the state. It seems to me that he expected state officials – state bureaucracy – to mediate in that relation from the point of view of the state, whereas secondary groups should also mediate between individuals and the state but from the individuals' side.

of ‘individualism’ and ‘statism’ (Durkheim 1959: 66). Durkheim’s republicanism led him to see no evil in the *normal* development of the state.

This question of the connection between individualism and collectivism has been marked as one crucial tension in Durkheim’s understanding of modern social life and here again the question of Durkheim’s potential methodological nationalism arises. The dual character of the problem is well expressed, for instance, in the claim that Durkheim would have been looking for ‘a religion without God (...) [i]t is society which, for him, incarnates the highest good, the principle of individualism’ (Richter 1964: 203, also Davy 1992: lxvi). In this argument, society can be god because it gives birth to individual rights. To Bellah (1965: 174), the argument is also that ‘society equals God’: ‘[w]hat would be the referent to which sacred symbols refer? Durkheim replied “society”, and as the most comprehensive functioning society “the nation”’. The problem here would be the methodologically nationalistic tone of the argument, although Bellah recognises that this equation between ‘society-god’ and ‘the nation’ would be only half of the story: ‘Durkheim was keenly aware of the danger of demonic nationalism. And his “social” includes (...) more than the concrete existing society: it included ideals. Thus Durkheim held that which is sacred for us is the nation *insofar as* it embodies the ideal of humanity’ (Bellah 1965: 174). To Bach (1990: 191-4), however, the emphasis is more directly on individualism; moral individualism would be at the roots of the legitimation of the state, which has to guarantee individual rights to freedom. Individual rights play a key role in social integration so the type of legitimisation that is needed in modern societies is to be achieved through a quasi-religious institutionalisation of moral individualism, the roots of which would be in the revolution of 1789 (Tiryakan 1979: 190-1). The real duty of a democratic state would be to promote the ‘individuals’ self-realization’ (Giddens 1986: 9); Durkheim’s view

was that state intervention in social life should *increase* individual freedom (Thompson 1982: 153). In fact, it comes as no surprise that in some recent literature this tension between collectivism and individualism has been expressed as the thesis of Durkhiem's communitarian defence of 'liberalism' (Cladis 1992) or 'individualism' (Miller 1996). On this question, it seems that Durkheim came up with a thesis on the *co-originality* between modern 'states' and modern 'individuals' in which the combination of moral and sociological arguments produces an understanding of nation-states that transcends methodological nationalism.

We can now move on to the question of the historical formation of nation-states and Durkheim's (1959: 43) view here is forcefully modernist: '[i]t is only when the great European peoples were formed and centralized that one saw the state simultaneously administer multitudes of peoples and diverse services'. 'Peoples' do not precede their states; they are themselves formed along with the process of state centralisation. A nationality, thus, is defined as a group sharing a worldview but without a political bond. A main characteristic of this principle of nationality would be its orientation towards the constitution of a state; it is when the nationality overlaps with the state, the moment of the birth of the nation.<sup>60</sup> A *patrie*, comes into existence when *moral sentiments* are incorporated into the equation. Historically speaking, Durkheim sees the process of the constitution of *patries* as a constant enlargement of political units since the medieval times; and he also maintained that the *patrie* was not a community of culture, but rather it was based on a political bond. Although common culture is a factor that might help in the constitution of the nation, Durkheim saw it as an auxiliary condition. He rejected the notion of a community of culture or an ethnic principle in

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<sup>60</sup> 'A nation does not constitute a true political association unless it has a common goal for activity' (Durkheim 1959: 128).

the constitution of the nation; the question was to avoid chauvinism and to stay away from the doctrine of aggressiveness among states: '[n]ational exclusivism has to be excised from patriotism' (Llobera 1994a: 152; Peyre 1964: 29).

To Durkheim, sentiments towards one's own nation and towards humanity are 'equally high-minded kind of sentiments' and he refers positively to both of them as 'patriotism' and 'world patriotism' (Durkheim 1992: 72). Durkheim also (1964b: 33) claimed that our current 'cosmopolitanism' lies precisely in having understood that there is no opposition between the nation and humanity. Yet, competition among states has created and still creates difficulties; the feelings towards one's own nationality and state can enter into conflict with the sentiments towards the human species as such. Durkheim's crucial argument, however, is that there is no automatic opposition between nationalism and internationalism: 'neither anti-patriotism nor nationalism are defensible positions, in my opinion' (Durkheim quoted in Layne 1973: 101). Pacifism will only be achieved through an equilibrated relation between both the *patrie* and internationalism. Normatively, *human* values are at the highest point of the moral hierarchy; these are the most general, unchangeable and even sublime (Durkheim 1992: 72-3; Fenton 1984: 41; Lukes 1992: 339). Yet, as a sociologist, Durkheim's arguments were not exclusively normative; Durkheim faced equally the problem of grounding these abstract moral values in social, political and cultural practices. The reproduction of social life is based in the fact that individuals have to 'live together' and the abstract notion of humanity is not strong enough to create the *social* sources of morality. Durkheim's argument is twofold here. On the one hand, modern social life requires the creation of a bond that must be based on the idea of the *patrie*. On the other hand, if the idea of humanity is missing, the result will be chauvinistic nationalism instead of *patriotism*. Universal values must be anchored in 'really-

existing' communities, and Durkheim thought that nation-states were indeed one very important form of social and political community: social practices, norms and values are the result and are reproduced *only* through 'concrete' social relations. To be practical and useful, the regulation of social life has to be carried out within a certain scale and range, and, so far, that scale has been provided by the nation-state. Yet again, the 'identity' of the state – national patriotism – must be centred on emphasising the worth of human values. In Durkheim's (1992: 74-5) own words

If each State had as its chief aim, not to expand, or to lengthen its borders, but to set its own house in order and to make the widest appeal to its members for a moral life on an ever higher level, then all discrepancy between national and human morals would be excluded. If the State had no other purpose than making men of its citizens, in the widest sense of the term, the civic duties would be only a particular form of the general obligations of humanity. It is this course that evolution takes, as we have already seen. The more societies concentrate their energies inwards, on the interior life, the more they will be diverted from the disputes that bring a clash between cosmopolitanism —or world patriotism, and patriotism; as they grow in size and get greater complexity, so will they concentrate more and more on themselves (...) societies can have their pride, not in being the greatest or the wealthiest, but in being the most just, the best organized and in possessing the best moral constitution

Whilst it has been argued that Durkheim was against a philosophy of history (Davy 1992: lxi), this last quotation could be read in the sense of a 'soft teleology' in the confluence between national patriotism and world patriotism. Yet, there is also no

agreement in the secondary literature on the question of Durkheim's views on the future of nation-states. To some, the bonds of the individual towards the nation are weak and will become even weaker in the future. In this view, the nation-state loses ground with the social changes that industrial society is experiencing (Bach 1990: 190-1). There would also be an increasing importance of supra-national spheres of action; it is foreseeable an evolution towards the decline of national differences, and the expansion of the division of labour in the international context will eventually lead to the formation of some form of a supra-national community (Fenton 1984: 41). Llobera (1994a: 150), for instance, argues that Durkheim could anticipate a 'European or even the human *patrie*', although Durkheim would have not resolved the tension of whether 'we should strive to achieve these *patries* in formation, or rather, try to preserve jealously the independence of the *patrie* to which we belong'. In the opposite camp, Thomposon (1982: 154) argues that Durkheim was sceptic of any sort of 'European Union' and even more of a unique world state; Durkheim's idea of national patriotism remained firm as long as it is one internally oriented and not focused on war and rivalry.

In his reconstruction of this same problem, R. Jones (1999: 93) attaches 'Durkheim's constant preoccupation with the idea of society' to 'the most concrete, well-defined group of which we are members – i.e., the modern nation-state' (Jones 1999: 94). Normatively, Jones attributes to Durkheim the thesis that society, that is, the nation-state, is 'both a necessary and a sufficient moral entity' (Jones 1999: 93): a rather crude version of methodological nationalism indeed. Throughout this chapter, however, I have maintained precisely the opposite: that Durkheim's idea of moral universalism is an attempt to transcend the idea of society as this 'necessary and sufficient moral entity', to move beyond the idea of the nation-state as the ultimate

representation of society in modernity. Durkheim recognises the tension between the national and the international arena; his idea of the secular substitute for the traditional church is not uncritically attached to the nation-state but to a normatively based conception of humanity which, based on individual freedom, can take the form of world patriotism. Normatively as well as sociologically, he stresses the emptiness of a project of building common sentiments and values if not anchored in really existing communities and endorses the project of a *national* identity that takes humanity as its final aim – the *patrie*. Durkheim's argument on the integration of world and national patriotism is made on sociological grounds; Durkheim (1992: 75) was aware of the fact that the process could fail as it is not known 'when this kind of [world] patriotism could prevail without dissent, if indeed a time could ever come'. To my purposes here, the crucial question is that Durkheim attempts to understand how moral universalism can be expressed *through* national particularisms.

## **Conclusion**

Durkheim's crucial problem seems to have been the foundation of a new social order in which neither the past (religion, tradition) nor the future (socialism, a single 'world' society) could take the role of orientating politics. There is no doubt that Durkheim was truly concerned with the social and political crisis of the French society, but he was also well aware of the fact that both the diagnostic and possible remedies to that crisis were to be found in questions such as industrialism, republicanism, moral individualism and science, none of which took the nation-state as its core. Regardless of how concerned he was for the fate of France, the philosophical and sociological roots of Durkheim's scholarly inquiry were not dependent on a methodologically nationalistic framework. Durkheim's argument of France being the representation of

humanity – the more so in the context of his idea of Germany's departure from the family of 'civilised nations' – is problematic in its own right. Yet, this does not lead Durkheim into a position where nation-states are taken as the final and necessary representation of modern socio-political relations; rather the opposite, it shows the complexities in the mediations between political and methodological nationalism that have accompanied us through all this second part of the thesis on classical sociology.

The first argument of the chapter is that part of the problem in labelling his politics conservative or radical has to do with his idea of the 'moral' causes of the current crisis: Durkheim realised that the problems the French society was experiencing were both national and 'global' and therefore the understanding of the crisis had also to be national and global. A second argument is the distinction between national and world patriotism; again, Durkheim's idea being that there was no conflict in holding these two perspectives at the same time as long as states were organised under principles such as republicanism and individualism. In Durkheim's view, the state's major duty was in defending and pursuing individual freedom and, for so doing, clear moral standards as well as legally constituted 'societies' were equally needed. Thirdly, there is Durkheim's insight into the ways in which these universal values have to be anchored in political institutions, nation-states or others, to take shape in social life: there are no automatisms in the ways in which general values become implemented in concrete communities. It did not seem to matter to Durkheim whether people were living in nation-states or not, what really mattered to him was how moral values and socio-political arrangements could *together* promote individual freedoms and peaceful international relations.



### **Part III. Modernist sociology. Re-assessing the alleged solidity of nation-states.**

The period of ‘modernist sociology’ was a time of consolidation in sociology based on the idea of a synthesis of the works of classical sociology (indeed, the very idea of a ‘classical’ sociology comes from this period). More than the actual content of particular reconstructions of classical sociology – they could be more or less explicit, more or less systematic, more or less politically oriented – the issue to emphasise here is that there was confidence in the possibility, plausibility and relevance of such synthetic efforts. This period encompasses, roughly, writings from World War II to the end of the Cold War; although some works from the early 1990s will also be reviewed.

If Talcott Parsons were to be taken as the highest exponent of this period, it must be remembered that modernist sociology’s synthetic vocation was also core to Parsons’ fiercest critics. R. Dahrendorf (1958), C. W. Mills (1959) and A. Gouldner (1970), to mention only well-known cases, were all as committed as Parsons to rescue and improve upon the tradition of the classics.<sup>61</sup> This agenda of synthesis is also found in another branch of the discipline that is less directly focused on sociology’s theoretical development and analytical unity: historical sociology. There is at least one sense in which historical sociologists can claim to have remained close to the original vocation of the classics: their effort in keeping historical and sociological concerns tightly together. Last but not least, as we have already seen, it is this synthetic project of modernist sociology that the current sociological mainstream has placed at the core of

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<sup>61</sup> These critics of Parsons also based their arguments on some image of the ‘good sociology’ and the fact that their ideas on this good sociology were different from Parsons’ does not affect the argument of the synthetic vocation of modernist sociology.

their critique: for the sociology's new orthodoxy, the crisis of the synthetic project has become as conceptually crucial as historically self-evident.

We must also notice that it was in this period that the critique of sociology's methodological nationalism first arose – in the mid-1970s – so we need to explore some of the reasons that could possibly explain its emergence at that particular time. The critique of methodological nationalism may be seen as one of the first fissures in modernist sociology's synthetic project as it pointed out the limitations of at least some versions of sociology's mainstream at the time; more concretely, the critique of methodological nationalism opened up the debate on sociology's underlying assumptions on the relationships between nation-states and the idea of society, on the one hand and the position of nation-states in modernity, on the other. I have also said that this early critique of methodological nationalism took the form of an assessment of previous sociology from *within* sociology itself and in that sense it was consistent with the reflective vocation of sociology: criticisms were, above all, self-criticisms. Indeed, it is important for the argument of my thesis that the new orthodoxy's critique of methodological nationalism differs from the modernist one in that the former has lost that self-critical edge.

In the introduction to Part II on classical sociology, I presented some arguments that might have participated in the rise of this image of methodological nationalism in sociology; not least, the fact that the role of Empires in the formation of modernity has been actually more important in other intellectual traditions than in sociology. If Empire was presented as 'the other' of the nation-state for classical sociology, it can be argued that totalitarianism is the other of the nation-state for modernist sociology; sociologists' (in)ability to address the problem of totalitarianism may be another

reason for the rise of methodological nationalism. Indeed, totalitarianism has been an important topic as a particular field of sociology but it has remained largely marginal for the sociological mainstream (Baehr 2002) so the relative absence of ‘a sociology of totalitarianism’ in the disciplinary mainstream may be another factor that contributed to the claim that sociology has taken the nation-state as the necessary representation of society in modernity. An exception to this trend is certainly Zygmunt Bauman’s (1991) *Modernity and the Holocaust* where he explicitly made the connection between sociology’s mainstream and the problem of the Holocaust and criticised the fact that phenomena like the holocaust and totalitarianism play such a minor role in the self-portraits of the sociological canon. Yet, Bauman’s account seems one-sided as he reduced sociology to its scientific self-comprehension and therefore downplays the critical and normative aspects of the development of sociology; the fact that sociology has always been more than a positive science (Seidman 1983: 11-3).

At the same time, several different concepts were coined to address the problem of ‘society’ during the period of modernist sociology: social system, modern society and industrial society were all categories that were more developed in sociology than the concept of the nation-state. The notions of social system and modern society are particularly relevant for understanding Parsonian sociology so I shall discuss their role in the next chapter. Here, I can very briefly point out how the idea of industrial society can be made correspondent to the nation-state only if one (mis)represents some of its core aspects in a methodologically nationalistic way. As concepts, industrialism and (post) industrial society are at the centre of some influential epochal diagnoses of modernist sociology (Aron 1967; Bell 1974; Dahrendorf 1976; Touraine 1971) and at

this level ‘industrial society’ is not the same as the nation-state.<sup>62</sup> The concept of industrial society differs from the nation-state because it refers to the characterisation of both a particular age and a particular form of material reproduction of social relations; the concept of industrial society takes in this way a *regulative* role in sociology as it refers more to a general framework for the abstract understanding of the reproduction of social relations and less to any particular geographical unit. Moreover, the concept of industrial society tried to grasp those issues in which ‘socialism’ and ‘capitalism’ mirrored each other and, by the same token, the concept was also expected to highlight those elements in which the ‘industrial world’ – both socialist and capitalist – differed from the developing one. In this second argument there is a *referential* use of the concept of industrial society as it is used in relation to geographical units, although these units were of course the ‘first’, ‘second’ and ‘third’ worlds and not nation-states. The equation of the concepts of industrial society and nation-state can take place only by distorting its historical and analytical specificity.<sup>63</sup>

In terms of structure, this third part on modernist sociology is divided into two chapters. Chapter 5 centres on the work of Talcott Parsons, who developed a particular understanding of the historical situation of the early post-war period so his comparison and contrast between ‘democratic nation-states’ and ‘totalitarian regimes’ can shed some light on to the question of whether he saw the nation-state as a general and

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<sup>62</sup> For R. Aron (1967: 3), industrial society is an analytical concept; he begins his presentation of the concept by stating that ‘no one national society is *the* industrial society as such, and all the industrial societies together do not compose *one* industrial society’ (italics in the original).

<sup>63</sup> It goes without saying that these remarks on industrial society and totalitarianism are incomplete and too general; they are still worth making, I hope, as they point in the direction of understanding how and why the view of sociology’s methodological nationalism could arise in the first place.

necessary container of modern socio-political relations. I shall show that the experiences of Nazi Germany left an important trace on Parsonian sociology; his emphasis on social and cultural integration, exaggerated as it is, can also be read as an argument about the instability and vulnerability of nation-states.<sup>64</sup> Similar to what we have said already in the part on classical sociology, Parsons seems to have struggled to combine political and methodological nationalism and, beyond the true shortcomings of his idea of the nation-state, I argue that he realised that one should neither conflate political and methodological nationalism nor split them totally apart. This is made apparent in Parsons' high hopes for the 'stabilising effect' of nationally organised democracy, for the argument that 'societies' become more pacific, stable and somehow also 'rational' if national institutions are preferred; this view has less to do with the actual results of his research than with his already formed normative presuppositions. In the context of his effort for providing sociology with an elaborated theoretical apparatus, moreover, Parsons addressed the question of the different roles that the idea of society can play in sociology. I shall reconstruct Parsons' definition of society that includes the concepts of social system, modern society and nation-state and show how he understood society's role as a regulative ideal.

Chapter 6 focuses on historical sociology as one particular field within the discipline that has addressed directly the question of the development and main characteristics of nation-states. Here, I discuss a sample of authors that, coming from different intellectual backgrounds, have researched into the historical formation of nation-states.

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<sup>64</sup> The issue of Parsons' views on totalitarianism was forcefully raised only around ten years ago by German sociologist Uta Gerhardt (1993, 2002) so the general implications of this question on the understanding of Parsons' sociology remain to be seen. This chapter expects to contribute to that ongoing debate.

Works by Michael Mann, Eric Hobsbawm and Miroslav Hroch are first introduced; then, writings by Barrington Moore, Reinhardt Bendix and Charles Tilly are also discussed. For the first three writers, the question of the linkage between classes and nations is highlighted as they have understood the formation of nation-states in the context of the relationships between classes and nation in modernity. Nations and classes belong to one another; they are two cornerstones of the representation of modern societies and we must study them relationally. If both nation and class are imagined communities, they are also as real as one another and as grounded in the material conditions of modern life: this is what I have called the co-originality of class and nation. This co-originality thesis is further used, in the second part of the chapter, to underscore the thesis of the *historicity* of nation-states. What the tradition of historical sociology accounts for is that nation-states are more an unfinished project than a monolithic form of socio-political organisation, are the result of a variety of historical trajectories and are an end product but not the necessary product of modernity. The ambivalent position of nation-states in modernity is the central lesson to be drawn from this body of literature: historical sociology has addressed the problem of the formation of nation-states by trying to find a balance between historical contingency and teleology; between linear evolution and revolutionary change; between autonomy and structural constraints.

On the whole, a central issue in modernist sociology's understanding of nation-states seems to be that most of these writers wanted nation-states to do well as they tended to associate them with democracy – against totalitarianism – and economic development – against economic stagnation. In a world full of violence and misery, they thought that 'successful' nation-states could be preferred at least for those reasons. Whether this political preference led modernist sociology to maintain that nation-states had

necessarily to be formed; whether these hopes on the role of nation-states resulted in methodological nationalism is something that, as we have seen already in the case of classical sociology, should not be presupposed.

**Chapter 5. Talcott Parsons: The threat of Totalitarianism and the three definitions of society.**

Talcott Parsons' understanding of nation-states and of the idea of society is especially relevant in my reconstruction of sociology's methodological nationalism. As argued in Chapter 1, the first arguments on sociology's methodological nationalism arose in the context of the decline of Parsonian sociology; the critique of methodological nationalism was developed, at least to a certain extent, also as a critique of Parsonianism. We may need to review, then, whether this view of Parsonian sociology is sustainable.

The first, historical section of this chapter argues that Parsons' understanding of nation-states is that of a specifically modern yet quite unstable form of social and political order. He conceived of nation-states from a modernist point of view, that is, nation-states were part of the institutional developments of the western world and at the same time Parsons regarded nation-states as a form of social order whose existence could not be taken for granted; nor did he think that their permanence was teleologically secured. I shall discuss some claims in recent secondary literature that show the reasons why Parsons' reflections on the main characteristics of the nation-state have to be placed in the context of his understanding of the rise of totalitarianism before as well as after World War II. Parsons' early awareness of the threat fascism posed to the rest of the world had a long-lasting effect on his sociology. The common criticism of his work that he overstated the level of social and normative integration in nation-states, and that in so doing he underestimated the actuality of conflicts that nation-states have to face, can thus be seen in a different way. Although Parson's idealisation of the nation-state is truly problematic, these difficulties seem to be also an



expression of his awareness about how potentially ‘unstable’ nation-states can be and what role sociology should play in their development.

The second more analytical section of the chapter deals with Parsons’ conceptualisation of ‘society’. The main claim there is that Parsons hinted towards a use of society as a regulative ideal, although he had not formulated this in clear terms. He seems to have realised that society performs not only the *empirical* role of framing a geographical reference for sociological analysis, and in that sense society could be equated with the nation-state, but it also played a *theoretical* role, which is made evident in his reflections on the links between society and social systems. Parsons explicitly tried to translate the abstract idea of society into three more clearly defined concepts: social system, modern society and nation-state. At the critical level, the chapter argues that Parsons did not conflate nation-states and society in historical terms – since he recognised that the nation-state has co-existed with other forms of socio-political organisation – nor in theoretical terms – since he never understood society only as the nation-state. At the positive level, Parsons understood that nationalisation was one variation within the more general process of territorialisation; he had a clear understanding that blocs and not nation-states were the major actors of power politics during the Cold War and he grasped that a double ‘referential’ and ‘regulative’ role of society is core to sociology. In this reading, Parsons’ work can then be seen as a critique of methodological nationalism despite the fact that the origins of methodological nationalism have been attributed to modernist (i.e. Parsonian) sociology.

## 5. 1. The nation-state, fascism and the relationships between politics and scholarship.

The ‘modernist’ period with which we are now concerned is usually taken to represent a ‘golden-age’ for the discipline and, allegedly at least, for nation-states as well. This is the time when sociology grew institutionally and produced the first explicit versions of its own canon along with systematic evaluations of the epochal diagnoses made by the previous generation.<sup>65</sup> Parsons’ epochal diagnosis, however, is different from those of the classics. More than the rise of a modern social order from the breakdown of traditional forms of social life, which were the subjects that had captured the imagination of the previous generation of sociologists, Parsons sought to understand and intervene in the functioning of capitalist, ‘liberal’ and ‘democratic’ nation-states. To Parsons, the ‘American New Deal’ would be taken as a desirable form of *existing* social order, whereas fascism and totalitarianism in general were the major threats posed to the social and political form of nation-states. In fact, over the last two decades or so there have been two interpretations of Parsons’ work that have made an important contribution to the understanding of Parsons’ political concerns, those of Canadian political economist William Buxton (1985) and German sociologist Uta Gerhardt (1993, 1999, 2001, 2002; Gerhardt and Barber 1999). Both writers have suggested that Parsons’ sociology has to be understood within the framework of the clash of values between capitalistic-democratic nation-states and totalitarianism. Their claim, which I shall discuss and broadly endorse here, is that it makes little sense to try

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<sup>65</sup> It is probably true that Parsons’ *The Structure of Social Action* inaugurated quite a characteristic mode of enquiry within sociology, the reflective vocation of sociology on which my thesis is based: ‘[i]f contemporary sociology is a language game, albeit one with rational and scientific aspirations, it is *Structure* that gave to this language some of its most important words’ (Alexander 1988: 97).

to grasp the deepest intellectual concerns of Parsons' sociology without the consideration of the world-politics in which the development of his thinking took place. Also, they argue that in order to understand the way in which Parsons chose to get involved in political debates we have to look at how Parsons defined, within Weber's footsteps, the relationship between scholarship and politics.

From different standpoints, both Buxton and Gerhardt have argued that secondary sources on Parsons had mainly ignored the connection between Parsons' politics and the rest of his work. According to Gerhardt (1999: 95-104), even sympathetic commentators have assumed that the evolution of Parsons' thought is a question of scholarly decisions and therefore has little to do with the politics of his time (J. Alexander's position as seen by Gerhardt); or they also argue that the evolution of Parsons' intellectual concerns was the result of conscious decisions to forge an academic reputation for sociology – and thus for himself – at Harvard University in the 1930s (Camic 1991: xlv). Gerhardt's claim mirrors W. Mommsen's (1992a) argument in relation to M. Weber: to clarify the relationships between politics and scholarship in Parsons' work. In fact, this connection with Weber is not at all accidental: 'Similar to Weber, his lifelong mentor in many respects, Parsons's politics were, at the same time, his credo for social theory and the impetus to personal engagement' (Gerhardt 1999: 159; Gerhardt 1993: 90, and Buxton and Rehorick 2001). From the mid-1930s, according to Gerhardt (1999: 109), Parsons sought to produce a

[S]ociological analysis of Nazi society in terms of breakdown of institutional integration, authoritarianism, force as well as regression from universalism to particularism and specificity to diffuseness. Such policies, elucidating what Parsons himself endorsed when he supported New Deal liberalism in the 1930s,

expressed (...) that social change through democratic modernization was the road forward in advanced industrial society

Gerhardt's argument is that this awareness of the threat that Nazism posed to democratic nation-states proved to be long-lasting for Parsons, so that he remained concerned with the potential instability of democratic forms of social order and the ethical duty of social scientists to participate actively in strengthening democracy. Nazism was a radical threat to modernity; the more radical as it arose from within modernity itself. This challenge imposed a moral duty upon the citizenry and indeed a specific ethical demand upon social scientists. The role of the sociologist in this situation is to contribute to the strengthening of those institutions that are central for democracy and can prevent the rise of totalitarianism (Parsons 1993c: 106, 124). The analysis of fascism in general, and Nazi Germany in particular, moreover, posed a major challenge to the abstract comprehension of modernity Parsons sought to achieve and this would have left an indelible trace in Parsons' sociology.

Buxton (1985: 4), for his part, explains the neglect of the relationships between Parsons' politics and scholarship in the secondary literature on the basis of the mistaken view of Parsons as a 'descriptive theorist who sought nothing more than to portray reality on social-scientific canvas'. The idea of Parsons as a pure theorist would also be true for those critical commentators that have argued for the conservative political bias of his sociology; in labelling Parsons as a conservative they would have failed to comprehend the complex nature of the relationship between scholarship and politics in his work. According to Buxton, they fell short of grasping the 'political activism' that is found beneath Parsons' obscure language: far from being a thinker unconcerned with the events outside the ivory tower, Parsons would have

been 'aware of the inherent limitations of capitalism's ability to create the conditions necessary for social stability, his efforts were directed towards elaborating how a more integrated social order – one preserving capitalist social relations, yet providing them with stability – could be constituted' (Buxton 1985: 4). The social sciences were seen in this scenario as crucially important for the formation of such a social order. In analysing Parsons' opinions and actions on World War Two and the Cold War, Buxton substantiates the thesis that the social sciences and nation-states co-evolved, so that in the second half of the twentieth century they have reinforced each other. In fact, the question of the relationship of nation-states in opposition to alternative forms of social order was at the core of Parsons' conceptualisation of what a desirable social order was supposed to mean. Buxton (1985: 112) maintains that Parsons' goal was to propose an alternative to socialism by 'overcoming the anomie and atomism of the market economy, while still preserving capitalist social relations'. The dangers of socialist totalitarianism would represent the background of Parsons' political interests from the 1950s onwards; this would be just the complement of Parsons' earlier concern with the threats of fascism.

For the purposes of this chapter, these arguments are interesting because they show that Parsons' understanding of nation-states is not that of a solid and static unit; nation-states are neither a necessary moment in the culmination of the development of Western civilisation nor a self-contained unit. A major claim here is that when Parsons refers to the moral and social integration of democratic nations-states, this has to be seen in the context of the 'precariousness' of these same nation-states. Both Buxton's and Gerhardt's arguments underscore how Parsons' reflections on the main characteristics of nation-states have the problem of totalitarianism as their background. Based on a number of papers of the late 1930s and 1940s (which were put together by

Gerhardt herself, see Parsons 1993a - n) I would like to review Parsons' sociology of the nation-states.

Following what Parsons wrote in the first (unpublished) draft of the preface to *The Structure of Social Action*, in September 1937, Gerhardt (1999: 139) argues that Parsons' 'original interest was in understanding the empirical society of his time, which, in the 1930s, comprised a dual reality between the totalitarian *Führerstaat* in Nazi Germany and the democratic welfare state of the New Deal in the US'.<sup>66</sup> In one sense, this quotation encapsulates the argument that Parsons had this dual socio-political context clearly in mind; his idea about the radical differences between a totalitarian regime and a liberal-democratic nation-state. The passage also presents how this is a contrast between different forms of *modern society* and that Parsons did not take for granted the prevalence (or success) of one above the other. Parsons had a clear sense during the 1930s and 1940s of the threat that Nazi Germany in particular, and fascism in general, posed to liberal-democratic societies; that this was a serious question becomes clear as he defined it as one about the survival of western values and civilisation (Parsons 1993m: 309). This had an important effect on him, as can be seen from Parsons' later emphasis on social and moral integration being a response to the ever-present possibility of these threats arising again. In that sense, Parsons' understanding of nation-states is permanently besieged by his concerns about the possibility of pathological developments that can prevent the appearance of 'healthy'

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<sup>66</sup> In the introduction to the new edition to *Structure*, Parsons (1968 Vol. 2: vi) still held a similar view: 'It is important to the story of the book that it dealt *empirically* with some of the broadest questions of the nature of modern industrial society – notably with the nature of capitalism. Moreover, it did so at a time when the Russian Revolution, the Great Depression, the Fascist movements, and the approach of World War II were events and phenomena that raised many fundamental questions' (emphasis added).

(i.e. liberal and democratic) nation-states. Nation-states are defined less by their lack of conflict, extended moral consensus, and harmonious social integration and more by their commitment towards the institutionalisation of democracy and the ‘rule of law’.

Parsons’ conceptualisation of fascism and Nazi Germany is that of a radically different social formation from that of the liberal and democratic nation-state and it seems fair to argue that Parsons had in mind that the two *societies* would better be studied in contrast, and in relation, to one another (Gerhardt 1999: 108-9; 136). In Parsons’ (1993f: 174) words: ‘in certain essential respects the still rather vague and imperfectly crystallized system of ideas of the National Socialist movement, stands in drastic conflict with those which have held the dominant position in the Western world and become institutionalized as part of its social structure’. The challenge posed by fascism is not only against democracy, at least democracy understood as a specific political regime, but to ‘the broader type of rational-legal authority’ (Parsons 1993g: 201). Both these two types of social order are necessary to describe the actual historical crossroads that the world faced at the time. The ‘societies’ of that time, then, could at least be conceived of as ‘liberal-democratic nation-states’ and totalitarian regimes. In this simple empirical sense, then, the nation-state and society were not the same for Parsons.

Nazi Germany could only be adequately understood as ‘a radically new type of society which, if not interfered with, promises to depart progressively more radically from the main line of Western social development since the Renaissance’ (Parsons 1993j: 235); the Nazis were ‘the most formidable threat to many of the institutional fundamentals of western civilization as a whole which has been seen for many centuries’ (Parsons 1993a: 81). Furthermore, a correct understanding of fascism has to consider it as an

*internal* development of Western civilisation; this is the reason why Nazism was so seriously threatening the core values and institutions of the West; fascism ‘is deeply rooted in the structure of Western society as a whole’ (Parsons 1993h: 203, 215). That this was a moment of time with dramatic epochal tones is due, for Parsons, to the fact that the Nazis were the most radical movement since the Middle Ages (Parsons 1993d: 153). It is a radicalism of the right, but still a form of radicalism, because of ‘the existence of a popular mass movement in which large masses of the “common people” have become imbued with highly emotional, indeed often fanatical, zeal for a cause’ (Parsons 1993h: 204). The whole picture is that of a differentiated development – either the nation-state or a fascist regime – that has occurred *inside* the boundaries of the Western world: fascism could produce the internal explosion of Western *society*. Fascism arose from the interaction between ‘institutional structures’, ‘ideological definitions’ and ‘psychological reaction patterns’ that have been occurring everywhere in the West over the last century or so before Hitler came to power (Parsons 1993h: 215). Parsons’ real anxiety in trying to understand fascism is shown in that he is unable to produce a coherent argument as to *why* fascism has arisen; writing in the middle of the war – in a piece from 1942 – he is unable to move further than an unarticulated list of different aspects that have contributed to the rise of fascism and all the features he mentions there are also part of the most conventional sociological understanding of modernity: industrialisation based on technology and science, rapid economic change, elite groups with vested interests, mass education and political movements, ‘debunking’ of traditional values, changes in consumer patterns, growing individualism, nationalism and so on. No real explanation of the rise of fascism is eventually given, although the analysis does reach quite an astonishing finale. From a comparative and conceptual point of view, he says, there is no clear ground on which



to distinguish between healthy and self-destructive developments in the West. Parsons' (1993h: 207) dispirited and painfully honest conclusion is simply that

The state of anomie in Western society is not primarily a consequence of the impingement on it of structurally fortuitous disorganizing forces (...) [i]t has, rather, involved a very central dynamic process of its own about which a crucially important complex of factors of change may be grouped, what, following Max Weber, may be called the "process of rationalisation"

This discussion raises the question of the types of societies that were possible to distinguish at that moment in history; Parsons compared and differentiated totalitarianism (Nazi Germany) and nation-states (such as the US and the UK) as two alternative forms of social orders none of which was to be ruled out.<sup>67</sup> In Parsons' (1993c: 110-4) view, most of the elements that were at the base of Nazism as a political movement were also present, in one way or another, in the US; indeed, his diagnosis of the US situation in the late 1930s and early 1940s was rather grim. More than a qualitative difference between the US and Germany, wrote Parsons (1993c: 117) in 1940, '[w]e may say that the United States is perhaps half-way to the instability of the German situation before 1933'. Some of the elements that the two countries shared were rapid social change (industrialisation), a sense of economic malaise, migration, the increasing pace in the change of cultural orientations, a specific form of 'socialist' appeal to the masses and an anti-intellectualism, that is, a 'negative orientation' to the 'maturing modern social order', in the form of a critique of

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<sup>67</sup> On this, Parsons seems to have followed a view already settled in the US. By World War I there was a view between American scholars that the US involvement in the war was 'a struggle between democracy and autocracy' (Joas 2003: 73).

‘bourgeois values’ (Parsons 1993h: 206-12). The differences between Germany and the US can equally be accounted for as a threat to the stability of the democratic order in the US. Germany seemed to be a culturally homogeneous country, its weak and belated unification as a nation-state proved to be a fertile soil for non-democratic developments. The idea of *Volksgeist* was being used idealistically; some cultural images were being exaggerated because of the absence of a political organisation to which Germans could make collective reference (Parsons 1993i: 222). In this analysis of the rise of Nazism Parsons explicitly combined aspects of the internal situation and the international context, both of which participated in the collapse of Weimar Germany (Parsons 1993j: 240-1). In the case of the US, on the other hand, he described it as a culturally heterogeneous country that had not achieved a stable and consensual level of normative and cultural integration. The liberal values that constitute a core part of the normative outlook of the US were, for Parsons, only very imperfectly integrated in society: ‘the American nation constitutes, as a result of various strains and circumstances of its past, a relatively badly integrated social system with an unstable orientation on the part of large numbers of individuals, and many internal differences and conflicts’ (Parsons 1993c: 120, 1993b: 93). Again in the comparison between Germany and the US Parsons’ view was that there are little structural grounds on which to differentiate the rise of liberal and democratic nation-states from totalitarian regimes.

The major argument so far then has been about the connections Parsons conceived of between totalitarianism and liberal-democratic nation-states. The consequence I would like to draw from this discussion is that Parsons’ epochal diagnosis included these two types of societies, and that he remained cautious about which option would prevail in the future: his political preference was indeed clear, but that is a different question. In

terms of the language I have chosen for my thesis, the argument is that Parsons' idea of society does not equate with the nation-state, Parsons saw Nazi Germany also as a type of society, one that is radically different from the nation-state. Still using the term society for the definition of a geographical unit, the question of the empirical definition of society was not answered in a single and necessary form. Even after the Allies had succeeded in defeating the Nazis, the danger of regression, of how to avoid that not only Germany but the rest of the world as well would follow the totalitarian route remained a major theme of concern for Parsons (1993m: 309-14): the types of threats that fascism posed to the world went beyond the particular question of the defeat of the Nazis.

Parsons' view about the co-existence of nation-states with other forms of social and political organisation did not fade away in his mature theoretical framework. By the time his paradigm of the four functions was well in place, Parsons (1969b) devoted a paper to the development and main characteristics of the 'international social system'; the paper revolves around the thesis that nation-states are just one, albeit an important one, among other forms of organisation of social relations on territorial basis. Parsons (1969b: 296) argued that the

[O]rganisation of order with regard to territorial jurisdiction is a common element of all societal organization. But the nation-state (or something like it), as seen in comparative perspective, is not an isolated and unique phenomenon. Organization of order on a territorial basis clearly continues to be important for many subunits of a politically organized society, including, of course, many units not ordinarily thought of as political

The ‘territorialisation’ of social relations is a process reinforced by the development of nation-state institutions, but at the same time this territorialisation is far from absolute, both practically – the nation-state’s actual capacity to control its territory – and normatively – the values and principles involved in claims such as ‘democratisation’ and the ‘rule of law’. This territorial organisation of social relations is a general problem that has to be solved at different levels, the national being only one. In fact, Parsons (1969b: 300) maintained that the nation-state ‘is by no means such a monolithic either-or unit as it has often been held to be. Just as there are many internal private groups with interests which cut across national lines, so the idea of the absolute sovereignty of governments is at best only an approximation of the truth.’ This higher territorialisation achieved in the development of nation-states institutions has not changed the nature of modern social relations. Thus, at the analytical level Parsons (1969b: 297) argued that

[T]he national state represents a social system characterized by a relatively high level of integration in one respect, namely, the capacity to control activity within a territorial area and to react concertedly as an ‘interest group’ *vis-à-vis* other territorial units. But there is no implication either that its existence is incompatible with other elements of normative control over territorial areas, transcending those of its ‘sovereignty’ (though the nature of such controls is, of course problematic), or that elements of order that have other than primarily territorial-political references are negligible

These abstract arguments can also be rehearsed at the empirical/historical level. Parsons’ understanding on the functioning of world-politics during the Cold War can

now be introduced and, consistently with the argument I have made so far, he sees the international arena as a field of complex and multi-layered relationships

Whether by formal contractual agreement or in various other ways, the international system is clearly not simply an aggregate of atomistic sovereign units; rather, these units are organized in complex ways into various kinds of ‘communities of interests’ and the like. The British Commonwealth, the West European combinations (...) NATO, SEATO, and – by no means least – the Communist bloc, are familiar examples (Parsons 1969b: 301)

Parsons’ argument is that at the practical level the blocs in which the world was divided during the Cold War were, at the very least, as important ‘sovereign units’ as nation-states were. The question that comes to mind in this context is how the idea of the nation-state as a solid and necessary unit emerged. Interestingly, Parsons’ answer to this question has to do with nation-states having created a mythical image of their own. This, I think, is Parsons’ particular explanation of the rise, and also a *critique*, of methodological nationalism in sociology: ‘[s]ince nationalism has been so prominent in the immediate historical background, there has been a strong ideological, and perhaps somewhat less a practical, sensitivity to any suggestion of surrendering elements of sovereignty’ (Parsons 1969b: 300-1).

At this stage of the discussion the major elements that compose Parsons’ picture of the world situation have been introduced. Parsons’ image of the modern world is composed by different possible forms of social order; he was aware of the complex, unstable and up to a certain point unpredictable development of the ‘international social system’. For him, then, it would have been historically inaccurate, analytically

untenable and politically erroneous and dangerous to consider ‘democratic-liberal’ nation-states as the necessary result in the development of modernity. Nation-states, as the specific form of social order that Parsons saw as desirable, have to be purposefully formed, cared for, defended and permanently re-invented. In using the labels of the contemporary debate, then, Parsons held a modernist view on the historical development of nation-states, as they are seen as coeval to the evolutionary process of modern institutions and values. Yet, this is a qualified form of modernism. On the one hand, Parsons did not equate nation-state with modernity: nation-states are not the final representation of modern institutions. In fact, the core of Parsons’ theory of the functional differentiation of social systems, that is, the structural ‘separation’ of social institutions, is independent of the historical developments of nation-states (Parsons 1969b: 297). If the idea of ‘evolutionary universals’ represents the most abstract formulation of Parsons’ (1967d) theory of evolution, it can be argued that at the highest level of generality his theory of modernity is independent from the nation-state: it requires the nation-state neither as the starting point nor as the final stage of modernity.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, Parsons’ modernist view of the nation-state is that of a potentially unstable form of social and political organisation. Nation-states have co-existed with different forms of socio-political organisation and they represent only one

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<sup>68</sup> Parsons’ (1967d) four evolutionary universals are differentiation, adaptive upgrading, inclusion and value generalisation. N. Mouzelis (1999: 149) has indeed argued that, in modernity, these four evolutionary universals become bounded to the nation-state, which then becomes ‘the prototypical institutional embodiment of political modernity’. Yet, in what otherwise seems to me an excellent discussion of Parsons’ theory of evolution, this link between the evolutionary universals and the nation-state is one aspect in which Mouzelis is complementing Parsons from the wrong end. This interpretation misses Parsons’ historical uncertainty in relation to totalitarianism and fails to notice that these four evolutionary universals are successfully achieved in modernity only when *the* ‘modern society’ is seen as one single historical formation. I come back to this issue in the next section of the chapter.

possible trajectory of social development, one among other actual formations or possible developments. Yet, this does not prevent him from idealising the stabilising effect that liberally and democratically organised nation-states may have on their populations. Even without teleology in his argument, Parsons' politics did lead him to regard the nation-state in a somewhat unrealistic and idyllic fashion.

I would like to close this section with a reflection that can also act as an introduction to the next: Parsons' use of the term society in his 'political writings' during the wartime. See, for instance, Parsons' (1993m: 309) explanation of the crossroad the modern world faces: 'if Western civilization is to survive at all, it must be as a relatively mobile, "individualistic," industrial society where such universalistic values as those of science, modern technology, and the rights of the individual citizen play a prominent part'. There can be no exceptions to this development, he continues, as 'no major unit like Germany in this "Great Society" can be successfully insulated from these patterns' (Parsons 1993m: 309). This reference to the 'Great Society' is of interest here. In a sense, Parsons seems to have been quite consistent in his double use of the idea of society in the plural and the singular. For the former, the idea of society seems to point to individual nation-states or regimes such as Nazi Germany, so in that sense they are referred to as plurality of units *within* 'the international social system'. When the idea of society is used in this form Parsons can make comparisons among nation-states, for instance, when he takes the alleged highly cultural homogeneity of Britain as a positive asset to resist the fascist threat as compared with the cultural heterogeneity of the US (Parsons 1993c: 108); or as he tries to compare structural conditions of Nazi Germany and the US, as we already saw. Here, the 'societies' are to be defined geographically in what I have called a referential use of the term.

When Parsons talks about ‘society’ in the singular, however, the reference point is not the nation-state or any other socio-political unit; here he does not link the idea of society to a geographical reference. Parsons uses, widely and loosely in these early writings, concepts such as ‘Western civilisation’ (1993a: 81), ‘Western world’ (1993f: 174), ‘Western culture’ (1993h: 215-6), ‘Western society’ (1993n: 329, 335), ‘modern Western society’ (1993e: 138; 1993k: 259), ‘modern Western social world’ (1993g: 194); ‘Western society as a whole’ (1993h: 203); ‘modern Western world as a whole’ (1993j: 225), and, as just seen, also ‘Great Society’. What we seem to witness here is the embryo of the thesis of the regulative function of society; that is, a society that is not dependent upon the definition of a politically organised geographical reference – a society to which one can only refer in the singular. This is the use of society that can only be related to sociological research through other, analytically more precise, concepts. My argument here is that the more sociologically accurate concept of ‘modern society’, as developed by Parsons in the late 1950s and 1960s, is a *result* of this rather general reference to the ‘Western world’ during his early period. It seems to be the case that Parsons’ general framework is set up as an analysis *between* nation-states but *within* the confines of the Western world as one single civilisational development; for Parsons the development of fascism has meant the rise of an alternative form of social order, different from nation-states but still within the West. Parsons’ (1993n: 329) thesis that: “‘Western society’ is a very complex entity with many different variations on national, regional, cultural, class and other bases’ is a long-lasting one in his thought, and a crucial one for a critique of methodological nationalism.

As I have tried to reconstruct it here, Parsons can use the idea of society in more than one sense, positively as Western society and as ‘democratic-liberal’ nation-state, and



also negatively, as the dystopia represented by fascism and Nazism. Indeed, it may be argued that, in contrasting ‘democratic-liberal’ nation-states to totalitarian regimes, Parsons downplayed some internal problems of these nation-states that did not have much to do with totalitarianism, for instance, the history of racial problems in the US (Parsons 1969a). From a normative point of view, then, he seems to have idealised those states that can organise themselves in national terms and have hoped that they will peacefully evolve towards liberal and democratic institutional arrangements; this, is in addition to the *Eurocentric* bias of his evolutionary understanding of modernity (Mouzelis 1999). Yet, no direct translation between political and methodological nationalism is found in his sociology: Parsons’ clear preference for liberal nation-states does not lead him to a methodologically nationalistic position. On this, I believe, Parsonian sociology follows a similar pattern to what we reviewed in the chapters on Weber and Durkheim: their political preferences for particular forms of social organisation, even their explicit commitment to nationalism, do not lead or translate automatically into methodological nationalism. In order to show this more adequately, a more systematic discussion of Parsons’ use of society is needed. The analysis of the three systematic definitions of society in Parsons’ sociology is the aim of the next section of this chapter.

## **5.2. Parsons’ threefold definition of society: social system, nation-state and modern society.**

In this second part of the chapter, I argue that Parsonian sociology is responsible for the rise of technical concepts of society. It is Parsons who seems to have produced the transition from a loosely defined idea of society to more clearly defined concepts of society. In scrutinising how a more formal definition of society took form, it is

necessary to look at sociology's attempts at theorising nation-states *vis-à-vis* the abstract concepts that Parsonian sociology developed to refer to societies, those of 'modern society' and 'social system'. The argument, then, is that these are the three concepts with which sociology has made its more formal representation of society since the 1950s. Each of these terms has had its own emphasis, proved its adequacy for different theoretical and empirical tasks and developed a history of its own within (and outside) the discipline. A straightforward definition of society can help to clarify some of the issues at stake. To Parsons (1969b: 295), the concept of society

[H]as tended to refer to the highest-order social system, one which fulfills the prerequisites of a level of order that permits a relatively complete and stable development, within its boundaries, of *all* the important types of structure and process with which the analyst of social systems is concerned. Perhaps the Aristotelian concept of self-sufficiency has served as the fundamental model

Later in the same page, Parsons argues that in this understanding of the idea of society what is especially relevant is the question of

[T]he relation between a pattern of normative order and the effective control of action within a territorial area. In terms of the structure of complex societies, this refers to the relation between political organization, on the one hand, and a legal system, on the other (...) there can be no certainty of implementation of a normative order, unless the employment of physical force can be controlled – and controlled within a territorial area – because force must be applied to the object in the *place* where it is located

This definition, being relatively similar to some others (Parsons 1961: 33 and 43; 1966: 9-10; 1977a: 156; 1977b: 182), has a number of points that deserve comment. First, it begins by relating the term society to the concept of social system, and more specifically to the 'highest-order' type of social system. This means that the idea of society is to be reserved for those special forms of social relations that possess the quality of being stable and clearly bounded. Second, in that sense, it is made clear that for the purposes of sociology as a scientific discipline, the idea of society has to be related to other less abstract and more manageable concepts. It is not only the concept of social system that is explicitly mentioned in the quotation, but also, with the emphasis on the control of a territorial area, there is reference to the nation-state: society to be 'operationalised' into these more 'scientific' concepts. Third, it is argued that a *territory* is an important dimension to consider for any idea of society, although by no means the most important one. In fact, that reference to the territory is specific to the capacity of *exercising power upon that territory* (the political dimension) and to some form of legitimacy through which that capacity is actually implemented (the legal system). Fourth, the quotation also refers to the functional differentiation that is at the base of this relationship between the political and the legal systems, so in this sense society is also connected with the concept of modern society. The consequence to be drawn from this is that Parsons was consistent in using the idea of society *through* more clearly defined and, he also thought, empirically more profitable concepts.

My admittedly unconventional reading of Parsons in this part of the chapter is that he could not and did not mean *only* the nation-state when he used the idea of society. He could not do so because the level of abstraction at which 'society' operates made that connection a too narrow one; it curtailed some of the dimensions of the idea of society

I just introduced in the last two quotations. An exact equation between society and the nation-state was also inadequate in what refers to the actual conditions of social integration of nation-states – as we saw in the previous section of the chapter. My argument here is that Parsons used the idea of society *via* the concepts of social system, nation-state and modern society.<sup>69</sup> As a comprehensive reconstruction of these three concepts is beyond the limits of my thesis, in what follows I would like to explore the connection between Parsons' use of society and each of these three concepts.

The concept of 'social system' is probably the key concept in Parsonian sociology. Social systems are not merely an addition of individual perspectives, but rather an emergent field of enquiry (Parsons 1977b: 196).<sup>70</sup> Social systems are, for Parsons (1977a, 1961: 43), systems of interaction, of which the society is the one that comprises the highest complexity in its internal and external relations, historical specificity and self-sufficiency. Systems were thought of as the most abstract analytical tool with which sociology defines not only its object of enquiry but also the dimensions to be studied within that object. The concept of social system also refers to the dimensions on which social analyses have to be focused; through the concept of the social system a unit for sociological analysis becomes clearly defined so it allows the sociologist to compare different but analogous units. In fact, as just said, Parsons argues explicitly that for sociology the concepts of society and social system have to

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<sup>69</sup> This way of referring the definition of one category to others, in order to create a close theoretical system, is quite consistent with the way in which Parsons thought a science must proceed to progress (Parsons 1962: 320-3; Münch 1987; Alexander 1978).

<sup>70</sup> Parsons' (1967b, c, 1977c) definitive conceptualisation of the social system is based on his theory of generalised symbolic media. For an interpretation of Parsons' AGIL model beyond the idea of the nation-state see Chernilo (2002).

be defined in relation to one another; ‘society’ being a very special case of social system.

The issue of self-sufficiency deserves some further comments because surely it is one that can be interpreted in a methodologically nationalistic way. By self-sufficiency, Parsons understands ‘the capacity of the system, gained through both its internal organization and resources and its access to inputs from its environments, to function autonomously in implementing its normative culture, particularly its values, but also its norms and collective goals’ (Parsons 1977b: 182). More concretely, Parsons’ (1971: 8-10) conceptualisation of self-sufficiency comprises the institutionalisation of: [1] a level solidarity upon which membership can be found; [2] an adequate control over the economic-technological relations; [3] ‘roles’ as standardised forms of collective organisation; [4] a generalised cultural system that can legitimate a normative order and satisfy all different functional requirements; and [5] an adequate control over the motivational forces of the members of society. It seems to me that this list reflects that Parsons’ idea of self-sufficiency takes the nation-state as its reference point only to a certain extent, particularly in dimensions 1, 2 and 3. At the same time, however, dimensions 4 and 5 correspond to a cultural level which can only take ‘the West’ as its appropriate framework; the values and normative orientations that Parsons has in mind here – moral universalism, democracy, the rule of law – are independent from the nation-state. Furthermore, we can place these reflections into their historical context. In relation to the economy, the question of trying to achieve some form of ‘economic autarchy’ was already a key preoccupation during the inter-war period and later the Cold War (Aron 1967: 100-5; Hall 2003: 13; Hobsbawm 1995: 94-102). At the ideological level, the opposition between ‘liberalism’ and ‘fascism’, or between ‘capitalism’ and ‘socialism’, regarded the values of these different ‘cultural systems’

as though fully self-contained. We need to remember, again, that Parsons' geopolitical understanding of the Cold War was one in which blocs, rather than individual states, were the major actors. If his self-sufficiency argument were to find empirical application either economically or normatively, then, it could perfectly do so in relation to these bigger units.

Nation-states are a more 'concrete' representation of the idea of society, and it is here that Parsons' arguments give space to a methodologically nationalistic interpretation of his sociology. Indeed, Parsons (1961: 46; Parsons and Smelser 1956: 8-9) was explicit in that the nation-state is the most important historical representation of modern societies. Parsons (1969a: 254-8) regarded the rise of the nation as evolutionary achievement because it provides the basis for constructing a modern idea of community. Also, from the 1950s onwards, the analogy between society and nation-state started to coincide with a number of important historical processes in which the idea of national society was indeed reinforced: the expansion of the nation-state form throughout the world (Africa); the implementation of the Marshall and strong welfare-state programmes in Western Europe; a major expansion of the internal market in the US; the successful cycle of the 'developmental states' in the Asian Tigers, and the implementation of modernisation programmes in Latin America. Moreover, the national organisation of sociology also grew during this time: the number of sociologists and of sociology programs grew massively in the context of the state's demand for sociologists (Buxton 1985: 97-164). Yet, we need to keep in mind the arguments that were introduced in the previous section of this chapter. On the one hand, the fact that the early Parsons saw nation-states in contrast to totalitarian regimes; on the other hand, the question that Parsons' interest on nation-states took the form of a critique of methodological nationalism.

‘Modern society’ is the third form with which Parsons (1966, 1971) refers to the idea of society. As argued in the previous section, Parsons original concept of modern society corresponds broadly to the idea of ‘the West’. The question is complicated further, however, by the use of the term in the singular and the plural. This is clearly presented in the very first page of Parsons’ work devoted to these issues

The thesis underlying this volume (...) is that the modern type of society has emerged in a single evolutionary arena, the West, which is essentially the area of Europe that fell heir to the western half of the Roman Empire north of the Mediterranean. The society of Western Christendom, then provided the base from which what we shall call the “system” of modern societies “took off”. Whether or not there is justification for treating medieval Western Christendom as a single society, the succeeding territorial states – and the cultural heritages that we call national – developed to such an extent that, for the modern period, the whole complex can be viewed only as a *system of societies* (Parsons 1971: 1)

As we have said already, there is one sense in which Parsons preferred the use of the term in the singular and with the definitive article, ‘the modern society’, so that he could stress its meaning as the most abstract cultural and social framework that surrounds the development of the West. But there is also the use of term in the plural, which is in fact not far from the nation-state. In this second employment, I think, the aim was to highlight the differences that can be found *within* the area of ‘Western Christendom’. ‘Modern societies’ would then be those that have followed the route of the Western development, societies whose differences represent only historical

variations within a single civilisational trajectory and it is in this sense that Parsons talks about ‘the system of modern societies’. If one takes Parsons’ connection between the idea of Western civilisation and modern society seriously, and therefore society is used in this sense to describe the long-term development of the West, ‘modern societies’ and ‘the system of modern societies’ would certainly include nation-states but it would also have to incorporate other forms of socio-political organisation like, Empires, colonies, city-states and indeed totalitarian regimes.

There is still another sense in which Parsons defines his concept of modern society, now in relation to the thesis of the functional differentiation. In Parsons’ *theoretical* description of the *historical* development of the modern society there are three successive revolutions through which the societal community, which is responsible for the processes of integration in the system (Parsons 1977b: 201), becomes differentiated from other societal subsystems. The Greek concept of ‘Polis’, and also the nation, would be historical representations of this concept of societal community. As concerned with the problem of integration, the question of ‘solidarity’ turns to be crucial: it is solidarity which holds the societal community together (Parsons 1961: 56), the modern form of this solidarity being attached to T.H Marshall’s concept of citizenship (Parsons 1977b: 182, Mayhew 1982: 47-8).<sup>71</sup> The differentiation of the societal community was first related to an ‘economic revolution’ that occurred in Britain in the late eighteenth century and that differentiated the societal community from a truly capitalist economy. There was also a second ‘political revolution’, which took place in the US and France at roughly the same time, which meant the transition

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<sup>71</sup> This is why Parsons named this subsystem as a form of *community*, which is so crucial a term in the sociological tradition (Parsons 1967a; 1967c; Cohen and Arato 1993: 117 – 139; Gerhardt 2001).



from absolutist states to some form of democratic regimes; this political revolution differentiates the political system from the societal community. Finally, there was a third ‘educational revolution’, which consisted in successive ways of alphabetisation, expansion of general education and above all the growth of tertiary education. This last revolution was first completed in the US, by about the mid-twentieth century (Parsons and Platt 1973: Introduction).

We can see that these three revolutions are the major evolutionary achievement of the modern society. Here, again, the tension between the use of the term in the singular and in the plural comes to the fore as the idea of modern *societies* can only make sense within the framework of *the* modern society as one single civilisational development. Theoretically, modern societies are an abstract representation of what core Western European societies tend to highlight of themselves and also of what novel or peripheral societies were expected to achieve. *Normatively*, the concept of modern society emphasises the desirability and necessity of social integration, and it implies a relatively high degree of moral and cultural consensus and homogeneity. *Historically*, the modern society is a long-term process that began with the cultural changes brought about by the Renaissance. The modern society has proved to be one core concept for theoretically oriented sociology, as many of the subsequent sociological formulations about the defining characteristics of social change have had to relate, positively or critically, to the idea of modern society.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> What remains true is that conceptualisations such as ‘Post-industrial society’ (Bell 1974, Touraine 1971), ‘Post-modern society’ (Kumar 1995), ‘Risk society’ (Beck 1992), ‘Information society’ (Castells 1996-8), ‘Global society’ (Albrow 1996) and ‘World society’ (Luhmann 1977) all must come to terms, explicitly or implicitly, with the concept of modern society. P. Wagner (2001a) has recently argued that the decline in the use of the concept of ‘modern society’ has to do with the fact that it lacks a more critical insight into the functioning

In terms of the connections between the three definitions of society, it seems to me that, analytically, the concept of social system prevails over the other two, as in understanding the formation of modern societies and nation-states Parsons had to make reference to the functional differentiation of social systems. Modern society, on the contrary, is more open a category for historical analysis as it focuses on general criteria to understand the most abstract features of the development of the West and its expansion since the fifteenth century. The nation-state, finally, has little theoretical value and analytical role in Parsons' sociology; his sociology of the nation-state requires the other two definitions of society because 'the nation' – through the idea of citizenship – was only used to represent a modern form of community. My argument here, then, is not that Parsons did not use the concept of society in relation to the nation-state, obviously he did, but that this connection was always subordinate to the other uses of society as social system and modern society. The connections between society and these latter two notions, plus the fact that Parsons' sociology of the nation-state was subordinated to his more general theoretical developments should prevent us from reading Parsons' reflections on society and nation-states in a methodologically nationalistic fashion.

## **Conclusion**

Institutionally as well as theoretically, Parsons is the central figure of sociology's modernist period, so the analysis of his work should tell us something of the broader tendencies in the sociology of that time. The thesis that nation-state is equated to

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of these societies as it idealises the trajectory by which they have arrived to their current stage of development.

society in Parsonian sociology has proved to be, at best, only partly true; that argument overstates its case by neglecting alternative uses of society that neither coincide with the nation-state nor are geographically based. Yet, it can certainly be seen that Parsons is partly responsible for a methodologically nationalistic reading of his work as he held high hopes on nationally organised democracies. Indeed, Parsons' political agenda was strongly in favour of 'liberal-democratic' nation-states. But, in the same way as I argued throughout the part on classical sociology, I do not think that Parsons' political nationalism translates into methodological nationalism; the mediations between his political views and sociological work are more complex and subtle than any suggestion of instrumental utilisation of sociology from politics. The seriousness of Parsons' political preference for nation-states led him to take nation-states also very seriously. Parsons needed to produce a complex understanding of the position of nation-states in modernity but methodological nationalism, on the contrary, simplifies and distorts the historical development and main features of nation-states.

I think I can now spell out the major arguments of Parsons' sociology of the nation-state. Firstly, there is the *co-existence* argument. I have shown that Parsons compared and contrasted the nation-state with totalitarian regimes, especially Nazi Germany, and that he saw these two as different, but equally real, types of 'society'. Secondly, there is the argument of the *opposition* between the nation-state and totalitarianism; there was no peaceful coexistence between nation-states and totalitarian regimes but rather they were in a fierce fight which in the case of Nazi Germany amounted to total war. Thirdly, I have tried to convey the argument of the *uncertainty* of nation-states; they were not teleologically secured. Parsons' view was that the nation-state could be dissolved from within (the Weimar Republic being turned into Nazism), or indeed of external defeat (the Nazis taking over Europe). In his view, there was no guarantee that

the nation-state would prevail at the end, the victory of the ‘liberal-democratic’ nation-state was a political project to fight for. Fourthly, there is the *territorialisation* argument. Parsons’ more direct critique of methodological nationalism was that territorialisation does not necessarily coincide with nationalisation; the nation-state is not unique in its quest for ‘territorial jurisdiction’; the territorialisation of social relations is something immanent to ‘all societal organisations’. The novelty that the nation-state brings about is not territorialisation but precisely the specific project that social relations have to be organised in national and *only* national terms, a claim that Parsons thought of as empirically inadequate. Internally, the nation-state shares power with what he calls the many ‘subunits’ of society. Externally, in relation to the international arena, Parsons thought that the *Realpolitik* of the Cold War period has taught us that the Western and Communist blocs were as ‘sovereign’ units as individual nation-states. Fifthly, I have used Parsons’ mature work to convey the idea that he worked with a threefold definition of society. Parsons translated this abstract ideal into technically defined concepts that could and did fulfil different roles within his sociology depending on the level of abstraction at which he was operating. Although he did not provide a consistent reflection upon the roles of society within his own theoretical framework, and his use of society is not free of problems, I have argued that the threefold use of society is a major achievement in Parsons’ sociology in so far as it demonstrates the inner connections between referential and regulative uses of society. Despite how widely accepted the methodologically nationalistic reading of Parsons has historically been, and all the arguments that can be found within his own work for this interpretation, I have suggested that Parsons’ engagement with totalitarianism, as well as his threefold definition of society, provide us with a rather different and more interesting image of nation-states at the time.

**Chapter 6. Historical Sociology: the co-originality of classes and nations and the historicity of the nation-state.**

In 1948, in the introduction to his book on historical sociology, American scholar Harry Barnes (1984: 3) expected not only to explain what he regarded as the ‘relative decline of historical sociology’ since the turn of the twentieth century but also to ‘indicate reasons for expecting its revival’, which he associated with the rise of a ‘promising method and a more reliable body of fact and doctrine’. It seems fair to say that historical sociology did experience a revival, although it was not due to convergence in theoretical or methodological terms. Over the last twenty years, there have been a number of surveys, critical introductions and assessments of these advances in historical sociology so some general arguments can be used as introductory remarks for this chapter.

Firstly, and despite Barnes’ prediction, the picture of historical sociology is one of plurality at every level. Commentators have praised the heterogeneity of themes, theories, methods and sources being used in historical sociology as a major strength of this tradition (Calhoun 1998; Crow 1997; Delanty and Isin 2003; Mann 1994; Mouzelis 1994; Smith 1991). Indeed, some authors persist in claiming that *only* some theories (such as rational choice, Kiser and Hechter 1991, 1998) and methodological principles (such as the use of primary sources, Goldthorpe 1991, 1994, Skocpol 1984a, b) must be adopted across the board, but this is an ongoing debate that is unlikely to be settled once and for all.<sup>73</sup> Secondly, it has been noted that this is a tradition that has

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<sup>73</sup> Debates on this issue have been carried out in the *British Journal of Sociology* (Bryan 1994; Hart 1994; Mann 1994; Mouzelis 1994) and the *American Journal of Sociology* (Boudon 1998; Calhoun 1998; and Somers 1998).

transcended the disciplinary limits of sociology. In some accounts, in fact, the *raison d'être* of historical sociology is the unity of history and sociology (Abrams 1982; Braudel 1980; Tilly 1981; Wallerstein 2000). Works in this field are not the monopoly of any single discipline; they have permeated into different subject areas such as International Relations (Hobden 1998), 'Latin American studies' (Centeno and López-Alves 2001), and Political Science (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003). Thirdly, and closely related to the focus of my thesis, the question of 'nation-states as societies' has already been the subject of criticisms in historical sociology (Calhoun 1999: 218-21; Crow 1997: 9-19; Giddens 1985: 1-17, 52-3; Hall 1986: 147; Mann 1986: 1-32; Tilly 1984: 20-6).

This chapter is different from all the others in the thesis. Firstly, because here I do not concentrate on a single author but rather discuss a number of works that use different theoretical and methodological presuppositions. Secondly, because there is an explicit effort in historical sociology for understanding the development and main characteristics of nation-states; the focus of the chapter is directly on the ambivalent legacy and position of nation-states in modernity. The early tradition of historical sociology arose, in the nineteenth century, precisely to advance the idea of a global understanding of 'the formation of modernity' and thus to oppose the view of the "natural" histories of nations' (Delanty and Isin 2003: 2). To be sure, 'dispelling the illusions of false necessity' (Calhoun 2003: 384) has remained one of historical sociology's major strengths and this is exactly what we need to move beyond sociology's methodological nationalism.

In terms of its organisation, the chapter is divided into two parts. In the first, I discuss the works of Michael Mann, Eric Hobsbawm and Czech historian Miroslav Hroch.

Whereas Mann and Hobsbawm are two of the authors who have most explicitly made the link between classes and nations with their claim that a historical understanding of the formation of modernity cannot be advanced without paying attention to the connections between classes and nations, the focus of Hroch's research is also the connection between classes and nations but now for 'small European nations'. The linkage between classes and nations highlights one very important characteristic of nation-states: it discloses the *conflictive* history and character of nation-states. From the different forms of collective identity and consciousness that have troubled the nation-state's ideal of 'moral consensus' class identity has been especially important, due to its connection with internationalism and its 'threats' to the 'unity of the nation'.

The second section takes this link between classes and nations further via the works of three historical sociologists that have tried explicitly to understand the problem of the 'historicity of nation-states'; the nation-state's position in modernity. Barrington Moore, Reinhardt Bendix and Charles Tilly have all addressed the central ambivalence that nation-states are a modern form of social and political organisation, on the one hand, but they are not the final, necessary or ultimate representation of modernity, on the other: modern societies have taken different socio-political forms and evolved through different historical trajectories. Historical sociology portrays the nation-states through an intriguing mixture of stability and instability; nation-states constantly re-creating themselves so that they can appear as if they have never changed and have always been there. On the whole, all the works reviewed in this chapter paint quite an ambivalent picture of the historical, sociological and normative position of nation-states in modernity.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> The decision of what authors needed to be discussed in this chapter was difficult as works by P. Anderson, N. Elias, A. Giddens and I. Wallerstein could have certainly been part of my

## 6. 1. Classes and Nations: Weberian and Marxist perspectives.

The concepts of class and nation are central in the social sciences' understanding of the modern world. Historically, they are crucial for the interrogations into the long-term shaping of modernity. Theoretically, they have been used to try to grasp the constitution and meaning of the modern worldview. Politically, these concepts represent major sources in the struggle for political legitimation; both classes and nations can make their claims on the basis of principles of representation that become actualised through particular groups of people: actors themselves have made sense of their identities through these concepts. Historical sociology is one tradition within the social sciences that has systematically recognised the pivotal role played by classes and nations in the shaping of the modern world. A crucial argument in modernist historical sociology is that neither nations nor classes can be understood except in relation to one another; or, to put this proposition affirmatively, that nations and classes are conjoined both as forms of *social organisation* of modern societies and as *imaginary communities* that arose together in the same historical processes and period; it is a strength of historical sociology to bring together two concepts that arguably should never have been separated out in the first place. A central argument of this chapter is then what can be called the *co-originality* of classes and nations.<sup>75</sup>

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discussion. I have covered the main theses of Giddens' (1985) *The nation-state and violence*, at least, because questions on war, military power and state centralisation are all dealt with by M. Mann and C. Tilly.

<sup>75</sup> This link between classes and nations is not understood here as a representation of the more abstract thesis of the relationship between 'nationalism' and 'capitalism'. A number of criticisms have been made against the latter, especially that both terms are too general to sustain a clear explanatory relation (Orridge 1981a, 1981b; Stokes 1986; Llobera 1994b: 95-105).



The argument on the link between classes and nations has been given by Michael Mann for whom classes and nations arose together because they both call for an abstract sense of community in an analogous universalistic way, which includes the diffusion of similar patterns of social practices, identities and sentiments (Mann 1986: 530). Classes and nations are thus co-original and coeval; they both must produce some kind of link to the political authority, that is, to frame their identity in relation to the state (Mann 1986: 435). So, Mann's approach reminds us of B. Anderson's (1991) thesis of the nation as an imagined community, as he argues that the major institutional setting for the expansion of both class and national consciousness was the expansion of literacy which went hand-in-hand with the development of better means of communication: 'if the nation was an imagined community, its main ideological competitor, class consciousness, might seem to have been even more metaphorical, an "imaginary community" (...) the two imagined or imaginary communities arose together, conjoined, in the same process of modernisation' (Mann 1992: 141).

Mann's explanation of the rise of nations and classes is twofold. On the one hand, Mann's (1992: 146) thesis is that 'high' literacy, that is, the literary taste of the upper classes, was more open to ideological innovations than the lower-classes literacy. Elites were ready to receive new influences in which national *and* class-consciousness could arise.<sup>76</sup> In that sense, 'nationalism – like class ideology, the other great ideology of modern times – was capable of spreading across large social and geographic spaces

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<sup>76</sup> In fact, according to Mann (1986: 525-6), the first manifestations of class-consciousness can be traced back to the Greek landed classes by about 700-300 AD. The crucial issue in the rise of the *modern* class-consciousness is, on the one hand, the link between class and national consciousness, and, on the other, the expansion of class identity and consciousness to all the classes.

only from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day' (Mann 1992: 138). On the other, he also argues that the rise of the modern state in Europe is related to the increasing costs of warfare. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the state's main function was, by far, warfare and most of the state expenditures (as much as 90%) were related to the costs of war. Even though it is true that armies were actually used internally against the poor, the main reason for having strong armies was the external relations with other states. The state's main functions were not primarily class-related as during the medieval and early modern times the state had an 'infrastructural inability to penetrate civil society' (Mann 1986: 482). The formation of truly modern *nation-states* means a change in terms of the state's main function: the shaping of *class* relations within the nation. The modernity of the relationship between classes and nations is represented by what Mann calls the rising of the English 'class-nation'. The installation of Parliament in Westminster by the end of the seventeenth century produces a class (composed by the gentlemen of the counties, lords, bishops and merchants) which starts to see itself as the nation, the content of its class ideology was *to be* the nation (Mann 1986: 378-495, 1992: 152-5, 1993a: 96-132).<sup>77</sup> From that moment, the social background of the membership to the nation starts a process of differentiation in which eventually all classes in society would be able to see themselves as bearers of the nation.

The relationship between the elite and the masses turns out to be crucial in the explanation of how national movements turned to widen their support. There was a differentiated creation of national images, a differentiation that followed the lines of class division. Yet, this tendency had its counterbalance in the way in which all classes

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<sup>77</sup> This is indeed a rather standard view of the evolution of modern Britain. See along the same lines: Bendix (1964: 47); Canadine (1998); Colley (1986: 100); Hechter and Brunstein (1980: 1074-7); Kohn (1940: 80); Llobera (1994b: 32-41) Mommsen (1990: 214-7); Moore (1967: 22); Münch (2001: 10).

started to develop their own class identity by the very same process by which they built their national identification

After being early dominated by religion, discursive literacy then expanded in a first phase in two distinct ways, as a response either to the spread of commercial (not at first industrial) capitalism or to the expansion of states. Both routes encouraged the diffusion of broader, more universalistic ideologies. One centred on class consciousness and/or class collaboration through political reform; the other centred on state modernisation. Through the 18<sup>th</sup> century both were then affected in a second phase by the intensification of geopolitical rivalry between the Great Powers. As states vastly increased their rates of extraction of taxes and military manpower, they politicised emerging ideologies. Over matters of political representation and state reform, class and national consciousness developed and fused (Mann 1992: 142)

In his second volume of *The Sources of Social Power*, Mann (1993a: 17-20; 214-26; 722-8) further develops this explanation of the relation between states, classes and nations in the context of his overall theoretical framework. He now links the rise of classes and nations to changes that occurred in what are for him the four sources of social power: *economic* (expansion of capitalism), *military* (state-militarism), *ideological* (secularism and literacy) and *political* (fiscal crises and the call for democracy). Classes and nations arose as a combined result of the transformations experienced in all four forms of social organisation. As a result, the question to be explained turns now to the rise of *classes* and *nation-states* as two major containers in which modern social life crystallised. Mann (1993a: 225) argues that nations were formed, that is, they surpassed the proto-national threshold, only when a cross-class

self-consciousness was achieved, and that classes, as emergent social actors, therefore arose before nations. The latter were only created with the processes of naturalisation pursued by states: ‘As states transformed first into national states, then into nation-states, classes became caged, unintentionally “naturalized” and politicized’ (Mann 1993a: 20).

The second author who has pursued the nation-class relationship is Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (1994: 3), who locates the idea of the nation firmly in the context of modern politics: ‘nations, we now know (...) are not as old as history’. In spite of repeated claims that this way of classifying groups of human beings is in some way primary or fundamental for the social existence of its members, Hobsbawm (1994: 5) regards the nation as a ‘very recent newcomer in human history’ and even today as competing with many other forms of social identification: ‘Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men (...) are a myth; nationalism which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: *that* is a reality’ (Hobsbawm 1994: 10). This is the sense in which the ‘creation’ of the nation is a part of the wider nineteenth-century movement of inventing traditions (Hobsbawm: 1983a: 7-14).

For Hobsbawm, the nation is the product on the one hand of modern nationalisms which seek to make national identity supreme, on the other of the development of modern territorial states which asserted their own political unity and independence by organising the people who inhabited their territories as a singular nation. Once the idea of the nation came into being, its reference was the thoroughly modernist unification of otherwise heterogeneous collectivities across traditional divisions based on ethnicity, language, religion, culture, history, destiny, etc, and in this regard the idea of the

nation was anything but conservative or traditional. Only later was it used in a more derivative and archaic sense to convey the primordial unity of the nation itself. Hobsbawm (1983b: 263-7) also points out that during a good part of the nineteenth century political appeals to the masses were made by combining national and class rhetoric, and he goes so far as to say that at the time one could hardly build a distinction between them. Hobsbawm (1994: 124-5) argues that scholars on the subject have generally been unable to notice ‘the vast overlap between the appeals of national and social discontent’, and maintains that, in the Marxist tradition, Lenin was the first to make the combined national-class platform the core issue of the agenda of communist parties

The well-known international Marxist debates on “the national question” are not merely about the appeal of nationalist slogans to workers who ought to listen only to the call of internationalism and class. They were also, and perhaps more immediately, about how to treat working-class parties which simultaneously supported nationalist and socialist demands. (...) [I]t is now evident that there were initially socialist parties which were or became the main vehicles of their people’s national movement (...) One might go further. The combination of social and national demands, on the whole, proved very much more effective as a mobilizer of independence than the pure appeal of nationalism, whose appeal was limited to the discontented lower middle classes, for whom alone it replaced – or appeared to replace – both a social and a political programme. (Hobsbawm 1994: 124-5)

Hobsbawm frames as strongly as possible the ‘non-contradiction’ upon which class and national consciousness operated during a long period of the nineteenth century,

and he also maintains that we cannot understand modern political processes if we oppose class to nation. Thus if we take into account that the number of candidate nations for building a nation-state was far greater than those which eventually arrived at this stage, and that the process of nation-building was therefore far from automatic, Hobsbawm (1994: 77-8) relates the achievement of this goal to the twofold character of a class *and* national platform. He demonstrates that proto-nationalist movements had to broaden their base of support along class lines if they wanted to be successful in building fully formed national movements, let alone a nation-state. Hobsbawm has forcefully tried to understand the frequent fusion of class and national politics in mass protests. He writes, for instance

The very act of democratising politics, i.e. of turning subjects into citizens, tends to produce a populist consciousness which, seen in some lights, is hard to distinguish from a national, even a chauvinist, patriotism (...) [t]he class-consciousness which working classes in numerous countries were acquiring in the last decade before 1914 implied, nay asserted, a claim to the Rights of Man and Citizen, and thus a potential patriotism. Mass political consciousness implied a concept the “*patrie*” or “fatherland”, as the history both of Jacobinism and of movements like Chartism demonstrates (Hobsbawm 1994: 88-9)

In his discussion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire Hobsbawm writes that ‘nationality appears most often as an aspect of the conflict between rich and poor, especially where the two belong to different nationalities’, and that even where we find the strongest national tones — as among Czech, Serbian and Italian nationalists — we also find ‘an overwhelming wish for social transformation’ (Hobsbawm 1994: 128). Further, he

writes that ‘the new mass political movements, nationalist, socialist, confessional or whatever, were often in competition for the same masses, suggests that their potential constituency was prepared to entertain all their various appeals’ (Hobsbawm 1994: 124).

One of the strengths of Hobsbawm’s work is to recognise that the links between nations and classes are far from historically static. He argues that up to the end of the first half of the nineteenth century nationalists and socialists tended to share both the same mass constituency, the peasantry and urban proletariat, and the same political issues, including the widening of the franchise and the redistribution of taxation burdens. He grants that in this period ideas of French and British nationhood were shaped by feelings against other nations, but their respective nationalisms were relatively ‘civic’, albeit in a superior ‘civilising’ mode; they incorporated some enlightened, liberal and cosmopolitan elements.<sup>78</sup> Hobsbawm (1994: 130) argues that ‘the acquisition of national consciousness cannot be separated from the acquisition of other forms of social and political consciousness’ and identifies a major change in the nature of European nationalism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and in the period leading up to the First World War. He characterises this change in terms of a movement from ‘state (civic) nationalism’ to ‘cultural (racial) nationalism’. His contention is that state / civic nationalism prevailed for the fifty years following the French Revolution, but that with the defeat of the popular movements of 1848-9 cultural / racial ideas of the nation began to achieve supremacy. Henceforth an exclusive nationalism emerged which substituted itself for all other forms of political

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<sup>78</sup> On the British case, see the previous note in this chapter. On the class character of the French idea of the nation at the time of the revolution: Hobsbawm (1996: 101-26); Jenkins (1990: 17-20, 47); Lefebvre (2001: 87-9, 98-111); Mann (1992: 150-5; 1993a: 167-208); Moore (1967: 56-69, 84, 104); Münch (2001: 28-47); Palmer (1940: 103-7).

and social identification and explicitly rejected socialism for its internationalism. Concurrently, a new wave of socialist movements arose that had little understanding of the meaning of national ideals. Even so, Hobsbawm argues that one thing that did not change is that nationalists and socialists were still aiming at and proclaiming the interests of the same groups of rural and urban poor and that a conglomerate national-social consciousness still formed the soil in which all political sentiments grew: indeed, 'the radicalisation of the working class in the first post-war Europe may have reinforced their potential national consciousness' (Hobsbawm 1994: 145). Even in this context nation and class are not readily separable: '[i]f we accept that class consciousness in practice had a civic-national dimension, and civic-national or ethnic consciousness had social dimensions, then it is likely that the radicalisation of the working class in the first post-war Europe may have reinforced their potential national consciousness' (Hobsbawm 1994: 145).

The relevance of studying processes of nation-state formation in the core Western countries relies on the obvious fact of their influence on world history, but what marks them apart is that with certain exceptions like that of the USA, they tend not to have a history of external domination. By contrast, one of the main issues in the work of Miroslav Hroch (1986) is on understanding how peoples or nationalities which have traditionally lived under political domination became fully formed nations and / or independent nation-states. His focus is on how 'small European nations' for which subjection seems to have been just as much the norm as independence and the principle of national self-determination has been the platform upon which previously dominated nations have created 'their own' states.



Most of modern nations were once parts of empires: some emerged in Latin America out of the collapse of Portuguese and Spanish empires in the early nineteenth century; some emerged in Europe out of the collapse of the German, Austro-Hungarian, Turkish and Russian empires in central and eastern Europe at the end of the First World War (the focus of Hroch's work); some emerged out of the collapse of the European empires in Africa, the Middle East and Asia after the Second World War. The condition of prior domination is, then, far from being a historical exception and the expansion of nation-states throughout the world has as its central feature that it has been carried on by peoples struggling to get rid of foreign oppressors (Hroch 1993). From the point of view of the actors involved in these processes, nation-building takes place in the struggles for national liberation. While in the core countries the processes of nation-building coincided with nation-state formation, this was generally not the case for small countries where people started to look at themselves as nations in the absence of independent political institutions.

What distinguishes Hroch's work is not only his focus on small nations but his understanding of class structures at the national level. He argues that small nations were generally characterised by an 'incomplete' class structure in the sense that they lacked 'their own' ruling classes. While in the core nations the struggle against the ruling classes was located internally within the boundaries of the nation, and hence was not different from the constitution of modern class relations, in the small nations the struggle against the ruling classes was focused on the *creation* of a fully developed *national* class structure, that is, on the constitution of the subject nation's own ruling class in its struggle against foreign domination. In this case the constitution of a complete class structure within the subject nation may be separated in time and is

analytically distinct from the formation of mass national movements. In Hroch's (1986: 26) own words

The fundamental yardstick of the completeness of a nation's formation is the development of the class structure of the national community. Small nations were formed with an incomplete class structure. We can therefore say that small nations were fully formed when they displayed a class structure typical of capitalist society and their national movement had taken on a mass character. The achievement of political independence is not necessarily an indication that the small nation is completely formed; and conversely the struggle to achieve independence may continue even after the nation has completed its formation

For Hroch, what is crucial for the development of national movements is the entry of the peasantry and urban proletariat. As classes, both make claims for their participation in political life and for the constitution of the national arena as the place in which claims for political participation and the defence of interests have to be made (Hroch 1986: 154). The 'completeness of a nation's formation', however, is intrinsically related to the development of capitalist social relations and the class institutions that accompany it (Hroch 1986: 179). So the argument is complete only by considering both the differences that can exist within national bourgeoisies and the ways in which other classes in society make their own use of the idea of the nation. The implication seems to be that neither nations nor classes can be established as stable entities independently of one another, and that the institutional framework of a nation-state as constructed through national revolutions – which includes national sovereignty within the international system of states, an internal division of powers, rule of law and representative political institutions – is the form in which the structures of class and

nation are consolidated. When such a framework breaks down, under the weight not only of political crises of legitimacy but also of economic depression, social decline and popular distress, forces may be set in motion that are disintegrative of both class and nation.<sup>79</sup> His central argument seems to be that different classes have made use of the rising national imagination to frame their specific demands *as classes* and in many cases it is difficult to say that any one class definitively wins the struggle for hegemony over what is the nation (Hroch 1993).

What Mann, Hobsbawm and Hroch show us is that a historical understanding of the formation of modernity has to be made with the linkages between class and nations, and that such linkages are to be made both as forms of organisation and as cultural and political identities. The first images of the nation were built upon an equally emergent class identity in the elites, under the principle that one's own class *is* the nation. At the same time, for the lower classes, that idea of class had to be attached to some form of political community. Classes and nations have certainly competed for gaining the support of the masses, but such competition does not take the form of having to choose between one of them; on the contrary, the historical record that these authors have reconstructed shows that relationships between classes and nations have been more complex than this. Apart from competition, they have also co-existed, reinforced and accommodated one another. Different classes within a political community 'in the making' make use of the idea of nation as a way of putting forward other kinds of

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<sup>79</sup> Hroch's recent reflections about the similarities between the national movements of the nineteenth century and the new wave of national movements in Central and East Europe, emphasise how much 'the new nationalisms recapitulate the old' in the sense that they develop the same kind of national aspirations, the same calls for 'their own' states, the same claims for ethnic independence, and the same attempts 'to complete the social structure of the nation by creating a capitalist class corresponding to that of Western states' (Hroch 1993: 15).

collective identities and this was the way in which they participated in the process of nation-building. If nation-states were to emerge, each class had to be able, at some point, to 'create' what to be member of the nation means, and thus to fight materially as well as symbolically for the participation in the political battles so constituted.

This understanding of the link between class and nations is also the basis for the claim that national and class politics are mass politics (Eley and Suny 1996: 3-13; Llobera 1994b: 96; Poggi 1978: 121-2). Hobsbawm's argument is precisely that, at the time of the rise of the nation as a political ideal, the widening of the franchise and the claim for more participation were crucial in the success of both national and class movements. The idea of the nation becomes equally suitable for different classes precisely because it allows differentiated claims for different bearers; the experiences and symbols related to the nation are increasingly suitable for different class conditions. At the same time, the claim that the nation is appealing for all classes in society as well as the claim that national politics is mass politics does not say anything about who were the actual groups who pushed for bringing the nation to the core of the political agenda; not all classes and groups in society had the same influence; nor were all classes equally committed to make their specific demands coincide with the national rhetoric. The building of a national community and a modern nation-state required an increasing resolution for the elites in terms of achieving mass support to the national idea, and that gap was not closed either rapidly or smoothly. The claim is that different classes could and indeed did make use of the rising national imagination to frame their specifically modern demands as classes. In that sense, a subsidiary claim is that no class wins definitively the struggle for the hegemony of what is the nation. The competition and co-existence of different national images result in nation-states periodically re-inventing themselves in order to face new challenges. A major strength

of the national idea is precisely its ambiguity, the idea of nation can have different meanings that have to converge just minimally and this incredible suitability of the nation may also account for the sense of solidity and strength of nation-states.<sup>80</sup> Nation-states, however, have also failed to emerge and they are not the only *modern* form of socio-political organisation and these are precisely the questions on which we are going to concentrate now.

## **6.2. Variability, necessity and the historicity of nation-states.**

One of the most radical claims of Barrington Moore in his classic *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1967) has to do with the revolutionary and violent quality of the processes in the transition to the modern world. He shows that nowhere was this transition achieved peacefully; on the contrary, violence and uprisings were its major characteristic, and, crucially for us, Moore sees this transition in class terms. Whilst in absolutist states the landed classes played the key political role and the peasantry was the class from which the economic surplus was largely taken; in modern societies there is an increment in the importance of the relative positions of the bourgeoisie and working class. More concretely, Moore argues that the shape of class relations is the main factor to elucidate the subsequent social and political forms in the constitution of modern societies. Thus his three routes to modernity (democratic,

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<sup>80</sup> In an excellent formulation, M. Canovan (1996: 2) says: '[N]ations are extraordinarily complex political phenomena, highly resistant to theoretical analysis. The features that make them politically effective also render them intellectually opaque, repelling philosophers who come to them in search of clear and distinct ideas. But those same obscurities not only enable nationhood to generate powerful political communities; even more momentously, they make those communities seem natural, so that the task of generating collective power is made to look deceptively easy'.

communist and fascist) are expressions of particular trajectories of class struggles, and while democracy and fascism may both be forms of bourgeois rule, the relation of the ruling class to the other classes in society are quite distinct. One thing that is at stake in Moore's analysis concerns the way in which bourgeoisies were able, in the course of bourgeois revolutions, to build class alliances upward as well as downward.<sup>81</sup> Upwardly, they faced the problem of how to limit the power of the landed classes and place themselves as the decisive actors in the introduction of *new* political arrangements. Downwardly, the core issues they faced were how to limit demands from below and integrate both the peasantry and the working classes into capitalist social relations; the ability of some sections of the bourgeoisie to build class alliances downward played a major role in containing radical social and political demands.

Indeed, later research has shown that there are problems with the empirical adequacy of Moore's model in the sense that the class alliances and struggles he described have not necessarily resulted in the political regimes one might expect from Moore's model (Mahoney 2003; Skocpol 1994; Valenzuela 2001). More analytically, T. Skocpol (1984b: 379) has argued that Moore's comparative analysis tends to operate through a method of agreement: the occurrence of one factor seems enough to explain the development of a general pattern regardless of previous differences. When bourgeois revolutions were successful, a democratic nation state was built (England/Britain 1688, France 1789 and the USA 1861-5); when they were defeated either by strong landed classes (as in Japan and Germany) or by a strong peasantry (as in Russia and China), the state assumed quite different and more authoritarian political forms. This understanding of Moore's work, however, misses the point that his 'generalisations through comparative analysis' are in fact subordinated to 'his vision of the tidal flow

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<sup>81</sup> On the concept of 'bourgeois revolution', P. Anderson (1992).

of history' (Smith 1984: 333). Moore intertwines narrative history and comparative analysis, and although he uses his 'comparative analysis as a means of (...) testing (as opposed to illustrating) his own or others' arguments' (Smith 1948: 350), this does not automatically mean that Moore's comparative work deploys a 'general-law' type of argument in which the cases he describes represent an example of a general pattern. Thus, for instance, Moore talks of 'origins' and not of 'causes' of democracy and dictatorship (Smith 1984: 316-20, 329).

There are still two problems in Moore's work that are worth mentioning, one which is internal to his argument; another that arises from the change in historical and political circumstances since the publication of the book. The first question is Moore's lack of a clear concept of the nation-state and the potential consequences of this for a methodologically nationalistic interpretation of his work. One possible reading of Moore's book would be that despite their differences in class history and political regimes the US, Germany and China – for instance – were in fact only different forms of nation-state. As Bourgeois, Fascist and Communist regimes are all *modern* forms of society the question remains as to what is the common element that makes all of them modern and the nation-state can certainly provide that common ground. In this forcefully methodologically nationalistic version, nation-states become the final and necessary moment of modernity precisely because they are the underlying logic behind the modernity's differentiated historical trajectories: all differences apart, nation-states are the embodiment of modern societies.

The plausibility of this interpretation is based on a reconstruction of Moore's argument via what he did not say in the book: as Moore hardly used the term nation-state his argument could be read as though he was conceptualising the three different routes to

modernity as nation-states all along. The major problem with this possible reading, and this is the second point I wanted to raise, is that it violates Moore's historical and conceptual concerns at the time. Moore's argument is quite subtle here. On the one hand, he argued that the three routes to modern society only 'to a very limited extent (...) may constitute alternatives routes and choices. They are much more clearly successive historical stages' (Moore 1967: 413-4). On the other, however, this is an evolutionary tale without a necessary final stage, as the case of India clearly shows. In Moore's (1967: 413) own words

By the middle of the 1960s, India had no more than haltingly entered upon this process of becoming a modern industrial society. That country had experienced neither a bourgeois revolution, nor a conservative revolution from above, not so far a communist one. Whether India will be able to avoid the appalling costs of these three forms to discover some new variant, as it was trying to do under Nehru, or succumb in some way to the equally appalling costs of stagnation, remains the ghastly problem faced by Nehru's successors

Moore's actual concern at the time was to find the connection between the class structure of different political regimes, on the one hand, and industrialisation, on the other. Moore's idea of modern society was not the nation-state but rather – as I argued in the introduction to this third part of the thesis– industrial society. The ambivalent picture of modernity that Moore depicts should not be emptied of its uncertainty with an argument in which modernity is normalised as 'a world of nation-states'. Moore's thesis, which is not far from Parsons', is that totalitarian regimes were a different type of societies from 'democratic' nation-states and the actors at that time had of course no



certainty on whether these totalitarian regimes would remain or eventually evolve into some alternative route.

The first question addressed by Reinhardt Bendix in his *Citizenship and Nation-Building* (1964) is that of the changes in the way in which authority relations work in the process of nation-state formation. Bendix reconstructs these changes through the transformation of the previous forms of bonds and linkages *among* classes as well as *between* classes and the state; he wants to understand the constitution of new types of regulations for social relations: 'The common referent of the following studies is the formation and transformation of political communities which today we call nation-states. The central fact of nation-building is the orderly exercise of a nationwide, public authority' (Bendix 1964: 18-9). Bendix's idea of nations was that of 'complex mosaics of beliefs and tendencies produced by past conflicts and the domination of successive elites. Integration and consensus were always incomplete' (Smith 1991: 34) and in that sense nation-building does not refer to 'societies' understood as self-contained and 'clearly defined units' (Rueschemeyer 1984: 135). A novel form of centralised public authority takes a communitarian flavour through specifically national terms, and he sees that these changing relations become structured specifically as class relations. These two issues were directly intertwined for Bendix, since he held that there could not be social classes in the modern sense of the term without the political changes that made a new legal framework possible. It was on this basis that he explained the absence of classes in the Middle Ages

Classes in the modern sense do not exist, for the coalescence of interests among the individuals in an estate is based on a collective liability. That is, joint actions result from the rights and duties shared by virtue of the laws or edicts

pertaining to a group, rather than only from a shared experience of similar economic pressures and social demands' (Bendix 1964: 38)

The crucial factor here is not the mere fact of sharing some kind of experiences but rather the constitution of a new (legal, symbolical) framework in which it becomes possible to give sense to these experiences. Historically, he suggests, Western Europe experienced two major political transitions: 'from the estate societies of the Middle Ages to the absolutist regimes of the eighteenth century, and hence to the class societies of plebiscitarian democracy in the nation-states of the twentieth century' (Bendix 1964: 2). For Bendix, the emergence of modern classes cannot be separated from the extension of national citizenship to all classes that occurred as a reflection of changing authority relations, which was both a response to protests from below and a result of the bureaucratisation of state structures from above (Bendix 1964: 3). There emerged new forms of political authority (the state), new forms of production (capitalism) and new forms of social relations (civil society) and in all three cases the nation provided the framework in which social re-construction could take place: as nation-state, as national political economy (which the Germans tended to call *Nationalökonomie* or *Volkswirtschaft*), and as national public sphere.<sup>82</sup> Bendix argues that a striking characteristic of the newly created structures is that they contained a relatively high degree of internal consensus, despite the proliferation of conflicting

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<sup>82</sup> 'A nation-wide market economy emerged, based on the capacity of individuals to enter into legally binding agreements. This legal and economic development occurred at a time when public affairs were in the hands of a privileged few – a restriction which was reduced and eventually eliminated through the extension of the franchise. Both the growth of a market economy and the gradual extension of the franchise gave rise to interest groups and political parties which mobilized people for collective action in the economic and political spheres, thus transforming the social structure of modern society' (Bendix 1964: 23).

class-interests. Crucially, certain functions of the nation-state were rarely contested: taxation, law enforcement, public works and the direction of foreign affairs (Bendix 1964: 137). Historically, industrialisation and democratisation, class and nation-states belong together; the rise of the nation-state challenges religious and patrimonial sources of social solidarity and the argument is that both class and national identities were there to try to fill that gap (Bendix 1964: 61-2; 106-17). Bendix concludes his analysis by conceiving of the '[n]ation-state and citizenship as end products of a century-long development' in the West (Bendix 1964: 300). The position of nation-states in modernity is what is at stake here, and it is not difficult to see that this claim of nation-states being 'end products' of western development can be charged with methodological nationalism; the nation-state as the embodiment of the project of modernity. To argue why I do not think this is the case, however, I need to locate this claim within the context of Bendix's understanding of the nature of sociological and historical knowledge.

The type of comparative analysis Bendix (1963: 532) proposes is one in which universally applicable concepts can be combined with historically circumscribed analysis: '[c]omparative sociological studies represent an attempt to develop concepts and generalisations at a level between what is true of all societies and what is true of one society at one point in time and space'. In Bendix's view, this is to be achieved through the descriptions of 'dual tendencies' in which the actors' motives and interests keep playing a central role despite structural constraints; a 'simultaneous attention to the social and the individual aspects of behaviour in society' must be given (Bendix and Berger 1959: 95). In sociology, these dual tendencies have usually taken the form of 'paired concepts' such as status and contract, primary and secondary relations and so on: 'the empirical foundation of this perspective lies in the fact that concrete human

relationships are ambiguous, and that this ambiguity is manifest in social action and its consequences' (Bendix and Berger 1959: 99). The fact that nation-states were regarded as an end product of modernity did not lead Bendix to consider them as the necessary product of modernity; the difference is subtle, but none the less dearest for Bendix: universal concepts do not imply evolutionary or teleological explanations.<sup>83</sup> Bendix's historical sociology tries to find a third way between *contingency* – nation-states may or may not be formed in modernity as only particular explanations are possible – and *necessity* – modernity's structural tendencies fully account for the formation and development of nation-states as they incarnate the project of political modernity.

Charles Tilly's (1992) recent work on *Coercion, Capital and European States* takes up the discussion of national-state formation that he himself initiated in his own pioneer work on the subject in the mid-1970s (Tilly 1975a, 1975b). He criticises his early work for proposing a developmental orthodoxy in which processes of national-state formation all respond to the same cycle of 'extraction, repression, state formation' (Tilly 1992: 12). In his later work, he argues that we have to be open to the variability of patterns of nation building which eventually imposed themselves on previous forms

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<sup>83</sup> It is widely documented that Bendix's intellectual project explicitly rejected evolutionary arguments such as those he attributed to Parsons (Bendix 1967: 313-8, 1988: 133-43; Rueschemeyer 1984: 133-8). Interestingly, however, their concepts were quite close at times. For instance, when Bendix (1963: 535) argued that 'sociological universals' – 'the range of "solutions" that men have found for a given problem in different societies' – were a methodological device for the type of comparative analysis in which he was interested, he immediately recognised the kinship between these 'sociological universals' and some of Parsons' formulations. Bendix (1963: 535) emphasises, however, that he was not interested in these universals 'as if they were logical attributes of all societies conceived as "systems"'. Although my interpretation of Parsons is different from Bendix's the argument remains that the latter rejected evolutionary explanations.

of political community, and that convergence towards the form of the national state was produced both out of an original divergence, including empires and city-states, and out of differential class structures that made a difference to state formation

The class structure of the population that fell under the jurisdiction of a particular state significantly affected the organization of that state, and variations in class structure from one part of Europe to another produced systematic geographic differences in the character of states (Tilly 1992: 27).

He emphasises that a 'war-making advantage' fell to those states that could field great standing armies because they had 'a combination of large rural populations, capitalists and relatively commercialized economies' (Tilly 1992: 58). Tilly (1992: 3) writes of *national* states rather than *nation*-states to highlight the myth that states are composed of just one nation. He uses the idea of nationalisation to demonstrate that the modern national state was the result of a combination of originally different 'nationalities' and to refer to those actions by means of which state sought to homogenise their subject populations. He focuses on the functions of homogenisation for the rulers

In one of their more self-conscious attempts to engineer state power, rulers frequently sought to homogenize their populations in the course of installing direct rule. From a ruler's point of view, a linguistically, religiously and ideologically homogeneous population presented the risk of a common front against royal demands; homogenization made a policy of divide and rule more costly. But homogeneity had many compensating advantages: within a homogeneous population, ordinary people were more likely to identify with their rulers, communication could run more effectively, and an administrative

innovation that worked in one segment was likely to work elsewhere as well. People who sensed a common origin, furthermore, were more likely to unite against external threats (Tilly: 1992 106-7)

Tilly goes on to explain the rise of national states mainly in terms of their military advantages for rulers

Why national states? National states won out in the world as a whole because they first won out in Europe, whose states then acted to reproduce themselves. They won out in Europe because the most powerful states – France and Spain before all others – adopted forms of warfare that temporarily crushed their neighbors (...) Those states took that step in the late fifteenth century both because they had recently completed the expulsion of rival powers from their territories and because they had access to capitalists who could help them finance wars (...) eventually only those countries that combined significant sources of capital with substantial populations yielding large domestic military forces did well in the new European style of warfare. Those countries were, or became, national states (Tilly 1992: 183)

Tilly dates the emergence of the national-state not only before the revolutions of the late eighteenth century but even before the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 or the Thirty Years War to which the Peace of Westphalia put an end. He writes that a European system of national states was already in the making by 1490: its participants, he writes, were ‘increasingly not city-states, leagues or empires, but national states: relatively autonomous, centralized, and differentiated organizations exerting close control over

population within several sharply-bounded contiguous regions' (Tilly 1992: 164).<sup>84</sup> He does not directly address the heterogeneity of nationalities that preceded state-homogenisation (Tilly 1992: 28-30; 103; 185-6), and more crucially seems to overstate the case of historical stability. In the same way that I have criticised the idea of a sudden epochal change in the new orthodoxy, the opposite thesis of a linear and unbroken historical evolution since before Westphalia seems an overstatement. One central ambivalence in Tilly's work is therefore how to combine the thesis that 'nationalities' pre-exist modernity with his conceptualisation of the modern national state, which presupposes a major rupture between the traditional and modern forms of political community. Interestingly, however, Tilly also argues that nation-states in this 'nation-state system in the making' were not to be regarded as *societies*. Tilly (1984: 23) makes the case that, for the last two centuries, one just cannot talk about 'a continuous German society'. Although, I do not agree with his claim that we are 'better off in abandoning the notion of "society" and "societies"' (Tilly 1984: 25) I can see his argument there as a critique of a purely referential use of society; it is a warning against overstating homogeneity, self-sufficiency and teleology in the historical study of nation-states. Thus, Tilly's major insight remains in relation to both the different trajectories and internal heterogeneity of nation-states.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate that historical sociology has opened the relation of classes to nations in ways that are invisible if taking a stand on behalf of one or the other. Nations and classes belong to one another in the sense that they are

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<sup>84</sup> 'The Europe of 1500 included some five hundred more or less independent political units, the Europe of 1900 about twenty-five' (Tilly 1975a: 15).

mutually entwined forms in which the self-consciousness of modern society is expressed; they are two cornerstones of the representation of modern societies and we must study them relationally. If both nation and class are imagined communities they are also equally real and grounded in the material conditions of modern life. A major strength of historical sociology is to relate their 'imaginary' existence to empirical and historical ways in which these concepts are actualised; this is what I have called the co-originality of class and nation. One explanation to the image of solidity of nation-states may be, then, that in combining class and nation nation-states have found ways of resisting the tendencies that threat to pull them apart. For the argument to be balanced, however, the image of the solidity and strength of nation-states must be complemented with the thesis of the 'historicity of nation-states'. The modernity of nation-states does not imply that they are the final or necessary result of modernity: this is historical sociology's particular contribution to moving beyond methodological nationalism. As said in the introduction of the chapter, it can be no coincidence that historical sociologists have been so severe in their critique of the equation between society and the nation-state; above all, the equation is problematic because it leaves no space for 'dispelling the illusions of false necessity' and the introduction of historical variability.

The reconstruction of the changes in the *conceptual* understanding of nation-states, however, is one major weakness of historical sociology. Historical sociology seems to have isolated its historical reconstructions from the history of political thought (Wagner 2003); we are still in need of a 'historical sociology of the *concept* of the nation-state' in which normative claims are more systematically linked with the social processes that are their base. To an extent, the lack of these studies may have helped to reinforce the idea of the unity and necessity of the nation-state that is widely present in



the current debate. As we have seen, one crucial way in which the argument and the critique of sociology's methodological nationalism have made their way into the contemporary mainstream is precisely by simplifying both the histories *and* concepts of nation-states. In their failure to address the link between history and concepts, historical sociologists have somehow prevented the best of their own contributions to be more widely and clearly understood. In a way, the reflective vocation that is the basis of my reconstruction of the history of the sociology of the nation-state has to do with trying to connect both dimensions. This is why I depart equally from methodological nationalism as from its critique and try to move *beyond* methodological nationalism. The link between historical and conceptual reconstructions will surely open up our understanding of nation-states to complicated trajectories and legacies, to uncertain forms and variations.

The final result of the chapter is a mixture. Sociologically, historical sociology makes apparent the force and power of nation-states to control – both peacefully and violently – their populations and also indicates that nation-states have co-existed with other forms of socio-political organisations. Normatively, the arguments we have reviewed are equally ambivalent as there is no one-sided 'for-or-against' position on the role of nation-states. Historically, there has been the question of the 'third way' between necessity and contingency in the explanation of the historical formation of nation-states. Historical sociologists seem to have captured the fact that these ambiguities and uncertainties are part of what nation-states are and that we should learn to face and live with them. M. Mann has nicely put this when he says that nation-states are 'diversifying, developing, not dying': [t]he nation-state is not hegemonic, nor is it obsolete, either as a reality or as an ideal' (Mann 1993b: 129). These remarks are

surely a good way of summarising the major themes that were reviewed in this chapter.

#### **Part IV. Cosmopolitan sociology. Understanding the ‘definitive’ decline of the nation-state.**

This fourth and last part of the thesis is also the point at which my whole argument started. As said in the introduction and Chapter 1, the current sociological mainstream has re-introduced the arguments of methodological nationalism, which were first developed in the 1970s, at the levels of both its epochal diagnoses and its reconstructions of the disciplinary canon. The main difference between the early and the current version of methodological nationalism, however, is that while the original argument was conceived of as an *internal* critique of the discipline in terms of the prominence that was attributed to nation-states; we now witness a reification of the sociological canon in which the convergence between society and the nation-state seems to prevent sociology from understanding our current times. This is a substantive difference because what was originally thought of as a form of self-criticism is now being retrieved as a declaration of historical and intellectual obsolescence. Parts two and three of the thesis, on classical and modernist sociology, were thus devoted to a re-reading of a rather conventional version of the canon of sociology in relation to the equation between society and the nation-state. I have tried to show that key figures in the sociological pantheon have been aware of the challenges that nation-states face at different historical crossroads.

In one crucial way, however, one must welcome the contemporary re-emergence of the critique of sociology’s methodological nationalism. Current attempts to ‘de-nature’ the nation-state seem increasingly conclusive: contemporary sociology is in this particular sense *explicitly* cosmopolitan and this differentiates it from previous sociology. Without necessarily endorsing the claim that the end of the nation-state is in sight, one

must recognise the need to face seriously the questions of how nation-states' are being re-shaped at all sorts of levels. Yet, it seems to me that the new orthodoxy's critique of methodological nationalism has misrepresented the 'historicity of the nation-state'; it has gone one step too many. In losing the critical impetus of the original formulation of methodological nationalism its current proponents have created a mythical image of the nation-state: the 'nation-state solidity', or, as U. Beck puts it, the 'nation-state society'. The arguments on the current dissolution of nation-states are backed up by exaggerating the alleged solidity of the nation-state's recent past, so that we end up with the worst of both worlds: the more solid the image of the past of the nation-state the more spectacular its path towards extinction.

In trying to avoid both arguments – the past solidity and the current obsolescence – I have tried to deploy not only a critique of sociology's methodological nationalism but also some propositions as to how to understand nation-states *within* sociology but *beyond* methodological nationalism. The critique of sociology's new orthodoxy that is advanced in the following two chapters can be read as a defence of the relevance of the nation-state in the shaping of the modern world and, not without caution, of its current relevance as well. This is certainly not to undo what we have already achieved as a critique of methodological nationalism. Rather, I try to reach a position that can depart from both competing views: that of the nation-state as the necessary container of modern socio-political relations and that of the nation-state, finally and luckily, fading away. In other words, I search for a position that is certainly not methodological nationalism but neither a critique of methodological nationalism as defended by sociology's new orthodoxy.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> This may be the right moment to repeat that the term 'orthodoxy' is used here only to underline the overall influence of this particular understanding of the current epochal condition

This part includes two chapters centred on the works of Manuel Castells (Chapter 8) and Ulrich Beck (Chapter 9). Both authors are major representatives of sociology's new orthodoxy so these 'monographic' chapters expand and illustrate further on my critique of sociology's new orthodoxy. Whilst Castells' three volumes on the *Information Age* are probably the most subtle and interesting expression of sociology's new orthodoxy, Beck's theory of second modernity and his most recent critique of methodological nationalism are, arguably, its best-known and most problematic example. Beyond all criticisms, however, the fact remains that these writers are already part and parcel of the history of the sociology of the nation-state in which I am interested here and thus their works have to be taken seriously.

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and sociology but this is certainly not the only sociology being currently taught and practised in relation to these questions (See Part One for further references).

**Chapter 7. Manuel Castells: A new form of (network) society for a new (information) age.**

In this chapter, I shall discuss what seems to me the most attractive project within sociology's new orthodoxy. Manuel Castells' (1996-8) three-volumes on the *Information Age* are interesting as they refer to the rise of the network society *vis-à-vis* the thesis on decline of the nation-state, so I use this chapter to explore further the question of the new orthodoxy's critique of sociology's methodological nationalism. At one level, the empirical basis of Castells' research is somehow the reverse from the one of historical sociology as this is a work focused on the present. While historical materials are marginal to its central argument, the analysis of empirical research done all over the globe, and on different subject matters, constitutes the bulk of the materials discussed in the book. I would also like to scrutinise Castells' understanding of the role of theory in relation to the tasks that he himself sets up for his work; I shall discuss whether his conception 'disposable theory' stands up to the challenges of mapping our current historical condition. There is, finally, the question of the role of technology and of the technological revolution of 'informationalism' in our changing times. On this, Castells' views contrast heavily with those of U. Beck: while for Castells technology is the hub of the current trend of social change, and on technology he relies in his hopes for a more equal and fair world, we will see that Beck's view of technology is much gloomier and sceptical.

The chapter is structured as follows. The first section explores Castells' idea of epochal change and assesses the arguments with which he makes such claim. The second section deals directly with Castells' view on the nation-state and its current crisis; I shall discuss whether, and to what extent, there is a methodologically

nationalistic understanding of the nation-state in his work. The chapter closes with a brief excursus on the use of the term ‘society’ in *The Information Age*. There, the argument about the regulative role of society in society receives further support.

### **7. 1. Understanding an epochal change. Empirical and theoretical considerations.**

According to Castells, the last three decades of the twentieth century mark an epochal change in which social life is being dramatically re-shaped; the rise of the information age is centrally associated to how quickly the world has been changing and, as the current technological revolution has been much faster than any previous trend of technologically-driven social change, a core aspect of it is precisely the pace at which that change has occurred (Castells 1: 33-4).<sup>86</sup> This epochal change is also expressed in the rise of new types of social relations and social structures that Castells refers to as the *Network Society*

A new society emerges when and if a structural transformation can be observed in the relationship of production, in the relationships of power, and in the relationships of experience. These transformations lead to an equally substantial modification of social forms of space and time, and to the emergence of a new culture (Castells 3: 340)

Castells’ characterisation of this new historical scenario operates with two different arguments. The central question of whether we live in a ‘new age’ – and how we learn about its novelty – is measured against two different co-ordinates: one sociological and

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<sup>86</sup> For this chapter I make reference to Castells’ (1996-8) three volumes on *The Information Age* only with Volume and page numbers.

one historical. Sociologically, there is Castells' comprehensive depiction of how 'the logic of the network' transforms and pervades all realms of social life. He has travelled and researched throughout the world and from the results of these experiences he expects to persuade the reader about the truly *global* condition of these changes. Although differently implemented around the globe, all these changes would respond to similar principles: an increasing 'informationalism' and the 'tensions between the self and the net'. On the historical side, however, one finds that Castells' analyses are rather short-term as his historical reconstruction has to do with the technologically-driven revolution of the last few decades. In this sense, whilst it may be right to argue that the theory of the network society is indeed yet another form of 'theory of modern society' (Stehr 2000: 83), one would also have to say that Castells himself fails to see this connection and does not locate his thesis of the rise of the *information age* within the long-standing social sciences' tradition of understanding epochal changes (Smart 2000: 52).

For the purposes of my thesis, the most substantive result of this double – sociological and historical – argument is that Castells reproduces the new orthodoxy's idealised image of the past in which the post World War European world, dominated by nation-states, would be now simply fading away. Although the reading of the three volumes of *The Information Age* is indeed profitable and interesting, the unhappy mixture between extensive sociological descriptions and narrow historical accounts contaminates Castells' general argument on the epochal change and the rise of a new type of society: the thinner the description of the past, the more radical its break with the present appears.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Commentators are not impressed by Castells' emphasis on historical discontinuity; they have agreed on the fact that he overstates the 'newness' of the concepts of 'information age' and



The difference between sociological and historical levels in Castells' work is further expressed in the fact that, whereas his comparison uses materials from all corners of the world (for instance, Japan, Bolivia, France, the US, China and Rwanda); Castells rarely goes 'back' in history, that is, before the rise of the *Information Age*. One of these occasions is his account of Catalonian history as an example of nations that do not seek to form a state of their own (Castells 2: Ch 1); the second and more important when he compares the recent technological revolution with the late eighteenth-century industrial revolution and to this I shall dedicate some attention now. In fact, the starting point of the book – i.e. the thesis of the relevance of technology for social change – is built upon the comparison between the industrial and the informational revolutions (Castells 1: 46). Castells' (1: 37) argument is that both revolutions show a similar tendency: 'the closer the relationship between the sites of innovation, production, and the use of new technologies, the faster the transformation of societies, and the greater the positive feedback from social conditions on the general conditions for further transformation'. A further analogy between the two technological revolutions would be that in the same way as the expansion of trains triggered the British economy during the nineteenth century, information technologies during the late 1970s and the 1980s have made possible the recent transformation of capitalism; from the US and Japan to the global scene (Castells 1: 80-8).

Yet, what differentiates the two technological revolutions is more important than these similarities. As said, Castells highlights the fact that the period of time in which the new informational technologies have expanded around the world has been much

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'network society' (Boli 1999: 1843; Halci and Webster 2000: 73; Melucci 2000: 522; Smart 2000: 59; Stehr 2000: 83; Webster 2002: 95).

shorter than what occurred during the industrial revolution. Furthermore, the novelty of the current informational revolution has to do less with the use of knowledge and more with ‘the application of knowledge and information to knowledge generation and information processing / communication devices, in a cumulative feedback loop between innovation and the uses of innovation’ (Castells 1: 32). The crucial difference between the two revolutions would be that the conscious use of knowledge as an informational economy has the capacity to generate, process and apply efficiently knowledge-based information (Castells 1: 36). The rise of this new economy comprises two major characteristics: it is both *informational* and *global*. In relation to the former

[T]he shift from industrialism to informationalism is not the historical equivalent of the transition from agricultural to industrial economies, and cannot be equated to the emergence of service economy (...) what has changed is not the kind of activities humankind is engaged on, but its technological ability to use as a direct productive force what distinguishes our species as a biological oddity: its superior capacity to process symbols (Castells 1: 92)

It is also a *global* economy because its core activities and components would be globally organised (Castells 1: 66); this would make it different from the *world* economy that authors like Braudel and Wallerstein had already described: ‘[a] global economy (...) is an economy with the capacity to work as a unit in real time on planetary scale’ (Castells 1: 92). What joins these two characteristics (informationalism and globality) together is the rise of new social structures and relations to which Castells gives the name of ‘network’. Although this does not mean that ‘all dimensions and institutions of society follow the logic of the network society’,

it does mean that the ‘pervasive logic of the network society’ would gradually encompass all the processes and contradictions of the network society (Castells 3: 350). The consequences of these transformations, as we shall see in the next section, are most acutely felt by nation-states.

The rise of the *Information Age* implies also a change in the geographical composition of the most economically developed regions of the world: Asia Pacific countries join now North America (the NAFTA zone) and the EU (Castells 1: 99). ‘The emergence of Asian Pacific fast-growth capitalism is, with the end of the Soviet Empire and the process of European unification, one of the most important structural changes taking place in the world at the turn of the century’ (Castells 1: 112). The economic development of these countries (especially South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan), is important for two reasons. First, because they represent a successful case of developmental state (successful in comparison to similar strategies in Communist countries, Latin America and Africa – more on this in the next section). Second, this marks the beginning of the *Pacific Era* although there is still no *Pacific Area* of centralised authority. This is important as it marks the truly multicultural condition of the new global economy at the highest level of its functioning: Europe and the US would no longer be at the centre of capitalism and modernity; this is yet another expression of the novelty of the *Information Age* (Castells 3: 308).

Further comments on this characterisation of the epochal change can be introduced in relation to how they are justified theoretically. Towards the end of the third volume of his book, Castells (3: 336) declares that although his work attempts to make sense of the current epochal change, he is not primarily concerned with proving this thesis. He argues that each of his empirical analyses stands regardless of whether one shares with

him the assessment of how dramatically the world has actually changed. Castells' argument is that although his book points towards making sense of the major tendencies of the world, this abstract question is subordinated to the accuracy of his empirical descriptions. In my view, however, this is contradictory with the major aims the book itself sets up right from the start: that this is a book on epochal change (Castells 1: 1-4).<sup>88</sup> Indeed, the thesis of the current epochal change is what has given the book its reputation as one of the most comprehensive sociological attempts of the last decades to chart the current world. The book covers many different subjects and geographical areas but as a whole its merits do not stand in relation to its factual detail in dealing with one or another topic; this book was written in the conviction that a thorough and coherent explanation of this emergent age was as possible as needed. The claim that it is not really crucial whether or not we live in a new epoch does not do justice to the book's own intentions and major arguments.

Why, then, does Castells make this note of caution? An answer may be found, I believe, if we look at how he theorises the current epochal change in relation to the two levels of analyses –the sociological and the historical – that were introduced at the beginning of the chapter. The downplay of the thesis of the epochal change that is made towards the end of the third volume can be interpreted as if Castells would have realised that a more general theory of society and social change was needed for making those strong claims. As I argued in Chapter 1, Castells echoes the new orthodoxy's claim that the categories we have inherited from previous generations of social

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<sup>88</sup> See, for instance, '[i]n a broader historical perspective, the network society represents a qualitative change in the human experience. If we refer to an old sociological tradition according to which social action at the most fundamental level can be understood as the changing pattern of relationships between Nature and Culture, we are indeed in a new era' (Castells 1: 477)

thinkers ‘have proved to be completely obsolete’ (Castells quoted in Smart 2000: 53) so they are of no use to depict the current age; and he has equally made the claim that he is not a social theorist and that – for the research purposes of the book – he is not even interested in social theory (Castells 2001: 543). He has repeated many times that he sees theories only as ‘tools’ for doing empirical research (Castells 2: 3) and believes in a ‘disposable’ type of theory: a theory that can be discarded as soon as it stops fitting with empirical data; a theory that implies no further commitment for the researcher (Castells 2000: 6). Also in Chapter 1, I argued that this *weak* idea of theory is not up to the task of making sense of an epochal change and the characterisation of a new type of society. These ‘tools theories’ can tell us that this or that social phenomenon relates to this or that other one, but they do not make the case for the much bolder thesis of an epochal change: the study of epochal changes has more to do with interpretative frameworks than with specific events (Webster 2002: 121-3).<sup>89</sup> The conception of theory that informs Castells’ work is unable to set up the framework to uphold the thesis of the *Information Age* as an epochal diagnosis.

The question of the role of technology in Castells’ argument is interesting here for two reasons. First, external to Castells’ work, this may help highlighting some of the differences that can be found within the sociology’s new orthodoxy. As we will see in the next chapter, Beck’s view of technology in the theory of the world risk society is sceptical; the faith in technology would be at the core of the ideology of ‘progress’ that characterised first modernity and central to Beck’s idea of risk is precisely the question

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<sup>89</sup> Along similar lines, commentators have criticised Castells’ work for only stating the empirical link between certain phenomena but failing to propose, theoretically, the ‘causal mechanism’ to prove the actual relation between them (Boli 1999: 1844; Tilly 1998: 1732). For a critique of the thesis on ‘time-space compression’ in the new orthodoxy, see Rosenberg (2000).

that, in the second modernity, technology – and the faith in technology – create as many difficulties as they allegedly solve.<sup>90</sup> Castells' (1: 16-8) view on this issue is rather that technological developments are changing the world and new types of technology open new opportunities to solve old problems.<sup>91</sup> Second, and internal to Castells' work, the theses of the epochal change and the rise of a new type of society are both related to the changes that information technologies bring with them: Castells' argument is that the informational revolution has changed the material basis of current society (Castells 1: 1-21; 3: 336). He rejects, however, that his book could be read from the perspective of technological determinism. His position is that there is a dialectics between society and technology; in fact, for him, 'the dilemma of technological determinism is probably a false problem' (Castells 1: 5).

Yet, a closer look at the actual structure of Castells' arguments does not seem to hold his intended rejection of technological determinism, nor does it the evaluation of those reviewers who have addressed the issue.<sup>92</sup> The book studies the emergence of a new

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<sup>90</sup> It is interesting to note how Beck and Castells, for whom the categories and debates of previous social sciences are increasingly obsolete, clearly resemble the 'old' dispute about the role of technology in modernity. See, recently, Misa (2003) and Schot (2003).

<sup>91</sup> In fact, what Castells (3: 346) describes as the 'truly fundamental social cleavages of the Information Age' are similar to a rather conventional understanding of the social consequences of capitalism: [1] fragmentation of labour markets – now on the basis of the ability to use information technologies; [2] social exclusion of significant segments of individuals and [3] 'the separation between the market logic of global networks (...) and the human experience of workers' lives'. These 'old' social problems adopt a new face in the information age but there are now 'new' chances of resolving them with the help of technological developments.

<sup>92</sup> Thus Stehr (2000: 85): '[a]lthough Castells is not a strict proponent of technological determinism, a number of theses in his study tend to resonate unavoidably with the paradigm of technological determinism that stresses context-insensitive consequences of technology products rather than the social processes of innovation and deployment'. Smart (2000: 56) and

social structure – networks – that is the result of a new mode of technological development – informationalism. That is, the substantive analyses put forward in the book require – at the very least for the sake of the simplification of a very complex empirical scenario – an understanding of social relations based on the ways in which technological developments reconfigure social relations. The spread of technology in society provides the crucial feedback to improve technology itself, and it is this ‘feedback’ between technology and society that Castells uses in the defence against the charge of technological determinism. The problem arises when he presents the more general statement about the rise of the network society as the result of the ‘development of new information technologies, and the old society’s attempt to retool itself by using the power of technology to serve the technology of power’ (Castells 1: 52). And also, in relation to the transformation of nation-states: ‘the nation-state confronts three major, interrelated challenges: globalization and interlocking of ownership, flexibility and pervasiveness of technology; autonomy and diversity of the media (...) Everything has changed in a decade. The change was technology driven’ (Castells 2: 254; 310-1). Whereas the idea of informationalism would be placed at the general level of the epochal diagnosis – *The Information Age* – and networks would be the form to describe the new social structures and social relations, the *Network Society*, in both cases technology plays the crucial role in determining their major features.

This problem of technological determinism can be further illustrated with an argument that, in different context, Habermas has made in relation to Marx’s alleged positivism. According to Habermas, there is a crucial indecision in Marx’s theoretical approach

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Webster (2002: 261-72) make similar remarks on the relationships between technology and the concept of the ‘information’ age.

For the analysis of the development of economic formations of society he [Marx] adopts a concept of the system of social labor that contains more elements than are admitted to in the idea of a species that produces itself through social labor. Self-constitution through social labor is conceived *at the categorical level* as a process of production, and instrumental action, labor in the sense of material activity, or work, designates the dimension in which natural history moves. *At the level of his material investigations*, on the other hand, Marx always takes account of social practice that encompasses both work and interaction (Habermas 1972: 52-3)

Habermas' argument is that Marx's general conceptualisation of labour is too narrow to cope with the substantive results of his research. At a formal level, Marx would have defined 'social labour' only as instrumental action but in his substantive (e.g. historical, economic) research social praxis would be understood as both labour *and* interaction, so the results of Marx's substantive research are richer than his own epistemological presuppositions. Following a similar line of reasoning, I think that Castells' explicit rejection of technological determinism is too formal to control the results of his substantive empirical research. It seems, as it happens with the thesis of the epochal change, that this has to do with his idea of theory; the conception of 'theories as tools' cannot control the more general implications that are derived from the empirical research: Castells' work results in a type of technological determinism 'in spite of itself'.



## 7. 2. States and nations in the Information Age.

I shall change the focus now and move on to what Castells has to say about nations and states in the Information Age. At a first level, his discussion of the subject is made within boundaries of the so-called ‘theories of nationalism’. Against Gellner’s and Hobsbawm’s modernism, Castells argues that nations have a life of their own, the history of the nation is linked to, but it is independent from, the development of states. Castells’ understanding of nation is closer to Tilly’s *soft* essentialism: while maintaining that nations and states are to be differentiated, he argues that as the increasing power of states is the issue to be explained, nations are taken for granted as the main *explanans* for this rise of state power (Castells 2: 51). In his view, nations are neither *invented* nor *imaginary* nor *natural* (Castells 2: 28-9). Castells argues that it is language (and not territory, ethnicity or religion), which is the main factor to which any understanding of the nation should be linked; language ‘and particularly a fully developed language, is a fundamental attribute of self-recognition, and of the establishment of an invisible national boundary less arbitrary than territoriality, and less exclusive than ethnicity’ (Castells 2: 52). According to this argument, language has the main advantage that it can link the private to the public sphere as well as the past, present and future dimensions of a community.

In the *Information Age*, nation-states are weakened as nationalism becomes only one possibility in the formation of social identities. Following Touraine’s conceptualisation of social movements, Castells argues that identities would be no longer built upon the ‘structural differentiation’ of the ‘old’ (i.e. modern) civil society; rather, the idea of a ‘commune’ is where new forms of ‘project identities’ are being formed (Castells 2: 65-7). In the network society, a plurality of identities is the norm more than the exception,

and this would represent the most important threat to the nation-state's claim of indivisible loyalty (Castells 2: 271). This would be another 'legitimation crisis' for the state: 'what started as a process of re-legitimizing the state by shifting power from national to local level, may end up deepening the legitimation crisis of the nation-state, and the tribalization of society in communities built around primary identities' (Castells 2: 275).

Castells' (2: 27-32) understanding of nations in the *Information Age* can be summarised in two claims. First, that the expansion of nation-states around the world has not been a repetition of the early processes of nation-state formation which followed the French Revolution. Second, contemporary nationalisms are not necessarily oriented towards constructing a sovereign state; they are more reactive than proactive, more cultural than political. Indeed, these points provide the basis for quite a rich and subtle understanding of nation-states. As we shall see, Castells endorses the view that nation-states have followed different historical trajectories and that historical variability has to be accounted for. On both grounds, Castells transcends some core principles of methodological nationalism and thus he departs from some of the shortcomings of the new orthodoxy. Yet, Castells follows the new orthodoxy in the idea that the current epochal change represents the final crisis of the nation-state and, consequently, of the sociology that is attached to it. As already argued, this seems to be related to the lack of historical depth of his account. For the case of Europe and the US, he takes too quickly for granted this image of the solidity of nation-states that seems to correspond to the period before the rise of the informational revolution. On this, he seems to assumptions that do not really do justice to his own more interesting insights.

Also, Castells argues that nation-states have currently lost a great deal of their power, although not their influence; nation-states have seen their economic autonomy diminished but they still hold important political control over their populations (Castells 2: 243-54). Castells' argument is that while there is no such thing as the definitive demise of the nation-state

[T]he price paid by nation-states for their precarious survival (...) is that of their decreasing relevance, thus undermining their legitimacy, and ultimately furthering their powerlessness (...) [s]o, while nation-states do continue to exist, and they will continue to do so in the foreseeable future, they are, and they will increasingly be, *nodes of a broader network of power* (Castells 2: 269 and 304)

Based on this diagnosis of the 'precarious survival' of nation-states, Castells introduces what he regards are the new forms of states that become increasingly important in the *Information Age*: the 'developmental state' and 'network state'. The concept of developmental states focuses on those nation-states that have achieved a high economic development over the last three or so decades on the basis of their position on the informational revolution – the 'Asian Tigers'. His analysis of the success of the new developmental states in Asia is done *vis-à-vis* the collapse of the Soviet Union, their bleak success and later decay in Latin America, and their failure in Africa.<sup>93</sup> The network state, on the other hand, embodied in the European Union, would represent the adaptation of European nation-states to the challenges of the *Information Age*. In what follows, I shall deal with the two concepts separately.

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<sup>93</sup> In relation to the crisis of the Latin American nation-state, see Cardoso and Faletto (1979); Centeno (2002) and Mann (2002)

Castells argues that states are crucial in the *Information Age* because they have the biggest role in promoting technological and economic development (Castells 1: 7). The major difference between the new (Castells') and the old theories on the developmental state would be in that the recent technological revolution in the US and Japan shows that in order to foster development the state has to ally with, instead of trying to replace, market-driven institutions

It is indeed by this interface between macro-research programs and large markets developed by the state, on the one hand, and decentralized innovation stimulated by a culture of technological creativity and the role models of fast personal success, on the other, that new information technologies came to blossom (Castells 1: 60)

Castells maintains that we witness the rise of a new developmental state that enhances technological development in industries and infrastructure 'as a way of fostering productivity and helping "its" forms to compete in the world market' (Castells 1: 89). The crucial question for new developmental states is that the set of policies to be implemented were related less to the strengthening of national markets and more to these markets' engagement with the global economy (Castells 1: 90)

A state is developmental when it establishes, as its principle of legitimacy its ability to promote and sustain development, understanding by development the combination of steady high economic growth and structural change in the productive system, both domestically and in its relationship to the international economy (Castells 3: 270-1)

With his analysis of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Castells makes the point of how states can fail during the early stages of the informational revolution. While the state, and the state alone, would have been enough to enhance the transition to *industrialism*, state action alone proved unable to elicit the transition from industrialism to *informationalism*. If states fail to find a good relation with their civil society (which Castells equates here with free-market capitalism), the transition to informationalism just does not occur. The Communist experience would be an example of the ways in which the state can suffocate developmental experiences; it shows that state action needs to be matched with incentives towards innovation, the promotion of an autonomous civil society and market institutions. Industrialist states, such as the Soviet Union, ‘become powerless in a world where society’s capacity to constantly renew information and information-embodiment technology are the fundamental sources of economy and military power. And statism is also weakened, and ultimately destroyed, by its incapacity to generate legitimacy on the basis of identity’ (Castells 3: 67). This, Castells expects, would explain a great deal of its sudden collapse.<sup>94</sup>

According to Castells, Asian developmental states have dealt with their populations by combining state repression with free-market institutions (Castells 3: 266). In analysing the particularities in the experience of Asian developmental states, Castells argues that the first characteristic of these states is the question of their *survival*. They emerged, in the post-war period, in a situation of emergency; survival was their most important

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<sup>94</sup> To Castells (2: 39) ‘the Soviet experience belies the theory according to which the state can construct a national identity by itself’. Despite the fact of having used its state apparatus for seven decades against nationalism, the Soviet Union would prove the case of ‘the durability of nations beyond, and despite, the state’ (Castells 2: 41). This begs the question, however, of whether one should regard the Soviet Union as a nation-state.

task and, only then, came nation-building: '[t]he first reflex of state apparatuses (...) was to ensure the physical, social, and institutional viability of the societies they came to be in charge of. In the process, they constructed and consolidated their own identity as political apparatuses' (Castells 3: 273). This question of survival was posed on different planes that were closely related: the internal (nation-building) and the external (geopolitical relevance). The US regarded the Asian Pacific region as being under Communist threat after World War II so it gave them freedom to pursue economic development – via state repression – in exchange for their loyalty. As vassal states of the US, they could count on political stability and relief from the burdens of military budgets (Castells 3: 277).

The second characteristic of developmental states is the form of their internal *societal arrangements*; they based their national project on 'an outward orientation of the economy, and, more specifically, on their success in exporting manufactured goods' (Castells 3: 268). This was matched with the 'ability of these economies to adapt to the informational paradigm and to the changing pattern of the global economy' (Castells 3: 269). Economic development became a means to the end of the survival of society, and in this the developmental state challenged traditional (that is, Western) forms of state legitimisation: state legitimacy did not mean necessarily democracy, or a consensus-based relation between civil society and the state; rather legitimisation is attached to economic success (Castells 1: 182; 3: 271). The Asian developmental state created a type of nationalism primarily based on economic development: 'at the roots of the rise of Asian Pacific economics lies the nationalist project of the developmental state' (Castells 1: 183). In these countries democracy has not been a consistent demand although there is an increasingly assertive civil society and a growing international pressure towards democratisation (Castells 3: 281-2). The third characteristic of the

Asian developmental states follows from this, the *state's autonomy in relation to civil society*. The formation of a technocratic, efficient, and loyal state apparatus, whose main feature is a 'political capacity to impose and internalize their logic on their societies' becomes crucial (Castells 3: 278). The integration of the developmental state with its civil society is differentiated on the basis of social classes and middle classes are to become the main part of state bureaucracy. In relation to the elites, they had to be repressed first, and only then re-integrated and subordinated to the interests of the state. That proved possible because of the absence of a strong land-owning class (Castells 3: 268). As for the working class, repression went hand in hand with integration as the state took charge of the basic welfare of the population (Castells 3: 279).

African states represent, conversely, the failure of the project of the developmental nation-state; these states have proved unable to link up with processes of social transformation. Africa's weak industrialisation started to collapse at the same time that the technological revolution began in the 1970s, and Castells (3: 96) argues that the ideology of strong African nation-states also collapsed because of that failure. Nation-states in Africa have been predators of their own societies; in fighting for the benefits resulting from controlling the state 'various factions, closer to cliques and gangs than to parties and social groupings, have engaged in atrocious civil wars, sometimes on the basis of ethnic, territorial, and religious cleavages' (Castells 3: 104). This has meant the disappearance of the nation-state for all practical purposes. On a comparative scale, Castells argues that

One of the key features explaining why a developmental state emerged in the Asian Pacific, as well as, with lesser fortune, in Latin America, and not in

Africa, is the weaknesses of the nation in the African nation-state (...) The crucial difference was the ability of Asian Pacific countries to mobilize their nations, under authoritarian rule, around a developmental goal, on the basis of strong national / cultural identity, and the politics of survival. The weak social basis of the nationalist project considerably debilitated African states, both *vis à vis* their diverse ethnic constituencies and *vis à vis* foreign states competing for influence over Africa in the framework of the Cold War (Castells 3: 111-2)

In relation to the concept of the network state, Castells refers to the EU as the main political strategy with which European nation-states try to face their current challenges; the network state is then an emergent form of state (Castells 3: 311). In his view, what tends to be seen as inefficiency and lack of clarity in state procedures at the European level, is at the same time a major strength of the process of EU state-building; the EU is an open-ended process that contains no blueprint for its further development (1996-8, Vol 3: 330). This is the reason that makes 'the network' the right image for representing the relationships between EU institutions: a multi-layered form of organisation in which sovereignty is shared between different levels. The network state

*[I]s a state characterized by the sharing of authority (that is, in the last resort, the capacity to impose legitimized violence) along the network (...) the network state, with its geometrically variable sovereignty, is the response of political systems to the challenges of globalization, and the European Union may be the clearest manifestation to date of this emerging form of state, probably characteristic of the Information Age (Castells 3: 332)*



The main problem for the EU is that the contemporary notion of *Europe* portrays a rather ‘defensive political project’ (Castells 3: 311). For European integration to move forward it will require some kind of European identity; a type of European identity that can fulfil at least partly the roles ‘national’ identities have played for nation-states. Castells argues that this European identity cannot be based on sources such as religion, ethnicity and democracy as there is nothing particularly European in any of them. Rather, he proposes that the formation of a EU identity has to be a ‘project identity’, which in the case of the EU would mean a combination of welfare-state institutions, universal human rights plus a reaffirmation of social, political and civic rights (Castells 3: 332-4).<sup>95</sup> Yet, it is not easy to see how a form of ‘identity’ can be derived from these institutional arrangements. On the whole, Castells’ view on the EU is ambivalent. While he recognises that the type of state institutions being formed are a response to some current social trends he describes as core in the *Information Age*, he also acknowledges that there is no easy or clear solution to the question of the gap between Federal European institutions, which increasingly adopt a republican and civic colour, and the forms of nationalism that are still prevalent at the levels of internal politics; much seems to be still attached to ethnic forms of national identity (Castells 3: 328).

Overall, in relation to the problem of sociology’s methodological nationalism, Castells’ analysis of these forms of states requires, but does not generalise, the idea of nation-states. This is clear, for instance, in that while some developmental states have taken the form of nation-states (Japan), others have not (Singapore, Taiwan). The comparative analysis of the experience of developmental states in Asia and Africa, for instance, is rather a critique of the argument that nation-states will develop automatically and without considering internal and external circumstances. At the

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<sup>95</sup> For a different view on the question of the European identity, see Freise and Wagner (2002).

same time, the concept of the network state points in the direction of transcending nation-states: Castells recognises that the current world is formed by different forms of socio-political organisations and nation-states have no monopoly over it. In this sense, his picture is not methodologically nationalistic; it neither presupposes nor requires a world of nation-states. Yet, the assumption that this plurality of forms of state is something new and that can be used to distinguish the new era from previous ones is more problematic. I have been arguing throughout that nation-states have permanently co-existed with other forms of states and Castells' failure to realise this weakens his case on the novelty of the current world. Although more balanced than Beck's views on nation-states (see next chapter), Castells' arguments still surrender to the methodologically nationalistic image of the internal cohesion and stability of nation-states in the recent past and, in so doing, he over-dramatises the differences of that past with the present.

### **Excursus: What type of 'society' is the network society?**

At this stage of the thesis, it may be adequate to return briefly to some of the theoretical considerations that were introduced in Chapter 1. One central argument of my critique of methodological nationalism is that the term 'society' does not necessarily refer to nation-states in sociology. With this in mind, I introduced the hypothesis that 'society' has been used both in a referential manner (that is, by attaching it to a geographical unit) and also as a regulative ideal, that is, as a set of general presuppositions about the nature of social relations. It is worth repeating that the thesis of the regulative function of society is made on sociological grounds: the argument is not that sociologists *have to* use the idea of society in a regulative manner but rather that they have *actually* used society in this regulative sense. The discussion,

in Chapter 5, about Parsons' threefold definition of society (nation-state, modern society and social system) is an example of this argument. The aims and magnitude of Castells' project in the three volumes of *The Information Age* makes it also a good 'empirical' material to scrutinise the ways in which term 'society' is used in current sociology. This brief excursus will show that the idea of society takes different meanings depending on the context in which is used. My argument is that Castells uses the idea of society both referentially (as a nation-state) and as a regulative ideal (in his case, to indicate the nature of the new forms *social relations* that become most relevant in the information age).

Castells' simplest definition of society is that as networks are a new form of social morphology the generalisation of networks constitutes a network society (Castells 1: 467, 2000: 16-7). Castells also recognises the Japanese origin of the idea of 'Information Society'; the concept, which originated in the 1960s, was as a strategy of the Japanese state to promote a thorough transformation of 'its own' society (Castells 3: 236-9). In this original sense, then, the idea of information society does not oppose to the nation-state, rather it would be one of the forms in which nation-states can explicitly undertake a process of self-reflection and self-transformation. For the wider argument of the book, however, the idea of informationalism is used at the level of a technologically driven epochal change, while the actual idea of society is attached to the concept of the network.

My claim here is that the more Castells uses the idea of network the closer his use of society is to a regulative use. On the other hand, the more society is used to describe collective action, the more Castells uses it in relation to nation-states. For the sake of

space, I will present here only a few examples of these uses.<sup>96</sup> See, first, how the term ‘society’ is used in the following three paragraphs:

- The new social order, the network society, increasingly appears to most people as a meta-social disorder (...) derived from the uncontrollable logic of markets, technology, geopolitical order, or biological determination (Castells 1: 477)
- the network society is based on the systemic disjunction between the local and the global for most individuals and social group (...) Therefore, reflexive life-planning becomes impossible, except for the elite inhabiting the timeless space of flows of global networks and their ancillary locales (Castells 2: 11)
- all kinds of messages in the new type of society work in a binary mode: presence / absence in the multimedia communication system (...) From society’s perspective, *electronically-based communication (typographic, audiovisual, or computer-mediated) is communication* (...) Societies are finally and truly disenchanted because all wonders are on-line and can be combined into self-constructed image worlds (Castells 1: 374-5 italics in original)

These extracts show the idea of the network society as defined by the dynamics and logics of its own reproduction, with no clear reference to any geographical or socio-political unit. Yet, a different picture can also be portrayed and society be used as nation-state.

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<sup>96</sup> For a use of society that is more regulative, see Castells (Vol 1: 14-21, 213, 375-6, 398-412, 446, 464-77; Vol 2: 11, 122, 194, 298, 355-6; Vol 3: 340-52). For the use of society as nation-state, Castells (Vol 1: 13 Vol 2: 355-7; Vol 3: 67, 161, 271-2, 306-7).

- Articulation of the elites, segmentation and disorganization of the masses seem to be the twin mechanisms of social domination in our societies (...) elites are cosmopolitan, people are local (Castells 1: 415)
- When the state substitutes itself for society in the definition of societal goals (...) I refer to it as a revolutionary state (...) The historical expression of this societal project generally takes the form (...) of the building, or rebuilding, of national identity, affirming the national presence of a given society, or a given culture, in the world (Castells 3: 271)

Most tellingly, society can be both nation-states and social systems in the same paragraph:

- Not all dimensions and institutions of *society* follow the logic of the network **society**, in the same way that industrial *societies* included for a long time many pre-industrial forms of human existence. But all *societies* in the Information Age are indeed penetrated, with different intensity, by the pervasive logic of the network **society**, whose dynamic expansion gradually absorbs and subdues pre-existing social forms (Castells 3: 350, highlighted added)
- Space is the expression of **society**. Since our *societies* are undergoing structural transformations, it is a reasonable hypothesis to suggest that new spatial forms and processes are currently emerging (...) space is not a reflection of **society**, it is its expression. In other words: space is not a photocopy of **society**, it is **society** (Castells 1: 410, highlighted added)

- Thus, on the surface, *societies* were/are becoming dualized, with a substantial top and a substantial bottom at both ends of the occupational structure, so shrinking the middle, at a pace and in a proportion that depend on each country's position in the international division of labor and on its political climate (...) But down in the deep of the nascent social structure, a more fundamental process has been triggered by informational work: the disaggregation of labor, ushering in the network **society** (Castells 1: 279, highlighted added)

In the last three quotations, the italics refer to the use of society in which it replaces nation-states. When bold was used, rather, the meaning of society is closer to a regulative ideal, for instance, as a social system. My purpose here is not to criticise Castells for this 'inconsistency'; it may in fact be argued that this ambivalence is quite a permanent feature in sociology; I only need to point out that also in this question Castells' ambivalent use of society is part of the intellectual tradition he criticises; he is unable to understand the 'epochal break' of the information age without resorting to the categories of the intellectual tradition to which he belongs. Moreover, I think this proves a point in relation to the actual functions of society in sociology's theoretical apparatuses, something that cannot be dealt with through Castells' conception of 'disposable theories'. The thesis of the regulative function of society points precisely in this direction: that society is part and parcel of the sociological attempts to make sense of the present and that, in this process, it is not necessarily equated with the nation-state.

## **Conclusion.**

This discussion on M. Castells' work has remained ambivalent. While his views on nation-states are closer to a critique than to an endorsement of methodological nationalism, his conception of theory and his idea of epochal change produce a number of problems that end up undermining his more interesting arguments. Castells does not regard nation-states as the final or highest stage of modernity; he analyses different types of states and historical trajectories and also, with the idea of the network state, Castells points in the direction of understanding those forms of states that could eventually replace nation-states. On the question of his assessment about the novelty of our times, however, I have remained sceptical. The shortcomings in his understanding of theory, it seems to me, prevent him from setting up a framework within which to discuss thoroughly the thesis of the epochal change. Also, the technological bias in his explanations tends to a form of determinism in spite of the author's explicit intentions.

Overall, I think that the ambiguities in Castells' work illustrate well how and why sociology is in a place in which it has already been many times (has it ever been somewhere else?): at a crucial crossroad. Current sociology faces the problem of making sense of the past from a changing present, so it needs to keep in touch not only with the changing social world but also with its own history, concepts and concerns. The new orthodoxy's view of sociology – and its critique of methodological nationalism – may have helped revise some of sociology's more problematic practices, but the price they ask us to pay for that is dangerously close to the giving up of sociology itself.

## **Chapter 8. Ulrich Beck: Towards the end of the nation-state and sociology.**

Within the new orthodoxy, it is Ulrich Beck who has put at the centre of the current debate the question of sociology's methodological nationalism; the critique of methodological nationalism has become the crucial way in which Beck introduces the analytical and normative implications of his own work. On the one hand, for Beck, methodological nationalism is not peculiar to sociology but rather is part and parcel of the whole edifice of the disciplines dedicated to understanding and reflecting upon the modern social world. On the other, Beck's usage of the idea of methodological nationalism does not stop when he looks at the history of the social sciences. He uses the idea critically as well as prospectively: the thesis of methodological nationalism frames major questions and themes that he thinks are informing the current 'positive problem shift' in the social sciences from 'methodological nationalism' to 'methodological cosmopolitanism' (Beck 2002b: 52, 2003). Despite the criticisms to Beck's work that will follow in this chapter, I cannot but recognise that his critique of methodological nationalism has helped to clarify my own understanding of 'the history of the sociology of nation-states'.

The first part of the chapter will address some of the central concepts in Beck's sociology, reflexive modernisation and second modernity. I shall discuss his idea of 'reflexive modernisation' at the level of theory building; whereas the concepts of 'second modernity' and 'world risk society' will be assessed as Beck's diagnostic of the present. This first part also prepares the ground for a critique of Beck's understanding of methodological nationalism, which is the focus of the second part of the chapter. The general argument I shall deploy there follows from what has been presented so far in the thesis; the claim is that the history of the discipline cannot be



accounted for with the equation between society and the nation-state. Therefore, I shall fundamentally disagree with, and depart from, Beck's major conclusions.

### **8. 1. The rise of the second modernity through a process of reflexive modernisation.**

Beck's theory of the second modernity is developed *vis-à-vis* his theory of reflexive modernisation; Beck himself has argued that his work has been developed on these two levels simultaneously: at the level of theory-building, where it shall come to terms with previous theories of modernisation ('from Marx to Luhmann') and at the level of structural descriptions, that is, 'as a phenomenological diagnosis of our times' (Beck 1997: 4). This part of the chapter is then devoted to discuss critically Beck's work on both grounds.

Beck's first major publication, *Risk Society* (1992 [1986]), came out in German just at the time of the nuclear disaster at the Chernobyl Plant. Although the book was not a reaction to the tragedy, the event helped in lending notoriety and relevance to Beck's major theses. From the first moment Beck's sociology has been inextricably attached to environmental issues, and his idea of risk captured well a 'green consciousness' already strong at the time. This, plus the political events of 1989, marked for Beck the beginning of a new type of modernity that 'called into question basic premises of European thought and activity – the notion of limitless growth, the certainty of progress or the contrasting of nature and society' (Beck 1997: 12); he mentions individualisation, globalisation, falling employment, ecological crises and the gender revolution as the main trends of the second modernity (Beck 2000b: 5-18). The understanding of this new epochal time would require a new *theory* and Beck called it

the theory of Reflexive Modernisation (RM) “‘Reflexive modernization’ is supposed to mean self-transformation of industrial society (...) that is, the changing of the social foundations of industrial society modernization by industrial society modernization’ (Beck 1997: 15).

The theory of RM then has to come to terms with the rival theories that were available when it first emerged: on the one hand, it competed with what Beck sees as the conventional theoretical frameworks of sociology, which Beck calls the ‘Marx-Weber consensus’ (or ‘theories of simple modernisation’); on the other hand, the theory of RM has also to prove itself against the theories of postmodernity. In relation to the Marx-Weber consensus, Beck (1997: 22) argues that its major common assumption is the equation between modernity and industrial society and it is precisely this that needs disentangling. His attack is against those theories where modernisation is linearly conceived and thus becomes ‘ossified’; against those theories of modernisation that refuse to apply reflexively to themselves. In other words, the argument is that as the Marx-Weber consensus was relevant for the understanding of the first modernity, it was so for the first modernity *alone*. On the contrary, RM expresses a ‘pronounced aversion to all varieties of an automatic, action-free and thus ultimately unpolitical “modernization as usual” in society and sociology’ (Beck 1997: 13) and this is why the theory of RM would become best suited to study the emergent second age of modernity. Beck points out that the recognition of the equation between industrial society and modernity represents the starting point for the dissolution of the equation itself. This is, in fact, a first step in Beck’s critique of methodological nationalism as for him the project of modernity is equated with that of the industrial society, which itself is equated with the nation-state.

The term ‘reflexive modernization’ puts the central focus of the self-transformation and opening up of the first, national modernity – processes which have, for the most part, been unintended and unforeseen. What it signals is no longer change in society, but change of society, of the whole of society – or, to be more precise, change affecting the foundations of whole modern societies (Beck 2000b: 19).

In relation to postmodernism, Beck (1997: 22) argues that its proponents neither distinguish modernity from industrial society nor consider the consequences of ecological issues for the re-organisation of society. Beck reads theories of postmodernity as theories of the crisis of modern societies that do not recognise the positive elements of the enlightenment and are unable to transcend the current crisis in order to think of the future of societies: ‘[w]hile the followers of postmodernity emphasize destructuring and the end of modernity, my concern is with what is beginning, with new institutions and the development of new social science categories’ (Beck 2000c: 81).<sup>97</sup> The question, then, is to review how Beck understands the current problems affecting the social sciences and also how he expects to redress such problems. Beck’s theory of reflexive modernisation depends upon the thesis that the second modernity is a radical epochal break that is to transform radically the ways in which society reproduces itself

[I]n the wake of autonomized modernization, industrial society is overrun, even “abolished”, just as industrial-society modernization disembedded status-based

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<sup>97</sup> See also Beck (1997: 14) and Elliot (2002) for further comments. Beck (2000b: 48) has also claimed that his work reacts against a neo-liberal understanding of politics and economics although Stork (2002) has made the point that Beck’s work is institutionally attached to the project of ‘neo-liberal’ reforms to the welfare state in Germany.

and feudal society and re-embedded itself (...) [t]he motor of social transformation is no longer considered to be instrumental rationality, but rather the side-effects: risks, dangers, individualization, globalization. A series of things that go unreflected add up to the structural rupture that separates industrial modernity from the second modernity' (Beck 1997: 23)

Originally, the theory of reflexive modernisation was developed as a common research programme between Anthony Giddens, Scott Lash and Beck himself (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994). In Beck's evaluation of that common effort '[t]he outstanding aspect of Scott Lash's contribution to *Reflexive Modernization* is how radically he poses the enquiry into the conditions that make community formation and commitment possible in contexts that Giddens calls "post-traditional" and "cosmopolitan"' (Beck 1998: 88-9). Beck's concept of reflexive modernisation differs from Lash's and Giddens', however, in that for him it is *unawareness*, instead of *knowledge*, what must be taken as the key organising principle of the new 'world risk society'. This means that 'reflexive' modernisation becomes different from 'reflection' in previous modernisation theories as in the latter '[t]he concept of linearly increasing rationality has the double significance of a *descriptive* and *normative* model', which means that 'there is *no alternative to the basic institutions*' of the first modernity (Beck 1997: 28). In the period of first modernity the world was arranged to the convenience of nation-states socially, economically and politically. This linearity is what the theory of RM disputes, because 'further modernization' on the terms of the first modernity would simply abolish the 'foundations of industrial-society modernization' (Beck 1997: 28). Beck's theory of RM, rather

[A]ssumes a continuity of “modernity” (in the sense of a development of certain basic ideas and principles in intellectual history, on the one hand, and their political implementation and generalization in the model of classical industrial modernity, on the other) and asserts a change of foundations within unchanging structures (parliamentary democracy or the private market economy, for instance) (Beck 1997: 58)

In terms of theory of knowledge, Beck re-introduces the equation between industrial society and modernity as the equation between modernisation and ‘scientisation’. The theory of RM breaks the optimism, the ‘more-of-the-same dogma’ (Beck 2000b: 8-9), on which simple modernisation theories are based: the *linearity* of progress and the *control of side-effects*: ‘[s]ociety has changed not only by that which is seen and desired but also by that which is *not* seen and *not* desired. The *side-effect*, not instrumental rationality (as in theory of simple modernization), becomes the motor of social history’ (Beck 1997: 32); the second modernity is a ‘revolution of side-effects’ (Beck 2000b: 21). One can hardly fail to notice here the rather paradoxical – or in fact contradictory – character of the statement that side-effects have somehow become the motor of history. History would now move forward by a mechanism which, although we can neither control nor indeed foresee, becomes the new source to found ontological certainties for the second age of modernity. Indeed, Beck himself notes that this is rather problematic, but his solution makes the claim even more difficult. Beck recognises that the ‘principle’ of unintended consequences cannot be turned into an ‘absolute’ without becoming self-contradictory, so he acknowledges that the distinction between linear knowledge and side effects is not really a sharp one (Beck 1998: 84). With this, he could recognise that side effects cannot be put in the position of holding the whole edifice of the theory of RM together, but Beck does not do this.

On the contrary, he argues that '[t]he concept of "unintended consequences" ultimately does not contradict the understanding of knowledge in reflexive modernisation; instead it opens an expanded and more complex game involving not just various forms and constructions of knowledge, but also of unawareness' (Beck 1998: 85). The argument seems to be that the introduction of 'unawareness' into the relationship between side-effects and knowledge would result, unintendedly, in a particular type of predictive knowledge in which what was not originally foreseen can still be included. The idea of side effects is no doubt interesting in understanding some contemporary social problems but it does not contain enough analytical sharpness to be considered the new pillar of Beck's general theory of the second modernity.<sup>98</sup>

Beck (1997: 38) presents the distinction between simple and reflexive modernisation in six steps: [1] the concept of linear knowledge is replaced by a theory built upon multi-layered levels; [2] the idea of instrumental rationality (reflection) is replaced by side-effects (reflexivity); [3] industrial society as modern society is replaced by industrial society as a contradictory symbiosis between pre-, semi- and counter-modern elements; [4] large group categories (class, nation) and theories are replaced by individualisation; [5] functional differentiation of subsystems is replaced by functional co-ordination and fusion of subsystems; [6] the left-right political axis is replaced by other dichotomies such as safe-unsafe, inside-outside. Interestingly, although he understands the transition from the first to the second modernity in this way, Beck argues that his theory of RM does not presuppose a *telos* for history and that current modernisation can lead either to a critical re-engagement with the

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<sup>98</sup> In this sense, Beck's view on the role and position of technology in the developments of the second modernity is gloomier than Castells'. The arguments on unawareness and side-effects are in fact a response to the damaging social consequences of the 'more-of-the-same dogma' in the application of science and technology.

Enlightenment project or to counter-modernity phenomena such as neo-nationalism and xenophobia (Beck 1997: 5). It is not fully clear, however, how the critique of teleology is made compatible with this dichotomous understanding of the historical transition between the two modernities. On the one hand, Beck delineates quite clearly his idea of the future, so his claim on contingency is more formal than substantive. On the other, the actual processes that should explain the transition from the first to the second modernity are only enunciated in statements and not developed in any detail (Elliot 2002: 308).<sup>99</sup>

In more political terms, Beck seems to argue that the ‘elective affinity’ between ‘democracy’ and ‘capitalism’ is broken because the major container of them both, the nation-state, has itself collapsed. Although he would defend some enlightened principles traditionally associated with the nation-state (solidarity, justice, social welfare, political participation, individual freedom), the hub of the argument is that a new form of relationship between the economy and politics has to be found. The institutional settings in which these values can be implemented have changed and will continue to do so, so their actual implementation in society must change accordingly. For Beck, the core difference between first and second modernity does not lie in the rise of new themes and problems; more important is, rather, that old questions are posed differently and require new answers: ‘[t]he core epochal change is based on the fact that the guiding ideas and core institutional responses of the first modernity no longer appear self-evident or even convincing’ (Beck 2000b: 23-4). He argues that the crucial thesis is not that second modernity comes after first modernity, but rather that the social trends which are shaping this second modernity have more to do with

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<sup>99</sup> In the second part of the chapter I will show that this dichotomous way of thinking is quite characteristic of Beck’s sociology.

present and future than with the past: '[w]hereas first-order problems refer to a pre-modern world – nature, tradition, unbroken constraints of transcendently based systems of domination – against which the pretensions to problem-solving and progress in early modernity can develop their pathos and power of conviction, second-order problems stem from the institutional system of industrial modernity itself' (Beck 1997: 51).

As said, Beck does not criticise the project of the Enlightenment as a whole; in fact, his critique of postmodernism stands on a 'defence' of the modern project on the condition that it is critically 'self-applied'. This, Beck expects, should have important implications for understanding the problems of modernisation not only within but also beyond the West. In simple modernisation theory, he says, the only aim modern societies can pursue is further modernisation

The theory of reflexive modernisation asserts that no such thing as a 'modern' society exists anywhere. What a modern society "is", what it would look like, whether it would be liveable or unliveable, these are things no one knows because the type of a society more modern or more radically modern than industrial society has not even been conceived or anticipated. In so called 'modern', that is, industrial, societies, we are always dealing with "*semi-modern*" or partially modern societies, in the architecture and structure of which modern "components" are combined and fused together with elements of a *counter-modernity* (...) The talk of "modernization" in semi-modern society thus becomes ambiguous. It can be conceived and pursued either within the ways and categories of industrial society, or as the assertion of modernity



against industrial divisions and limitations, as a disembedding of industrial society by radicalizing modernity (Beck 1997: 32-3)

Beck argues that there are many ways of becoming modern and yet there are also many ways in which ‘modern’, ‘semi-modern’, ‘pre-modern’ and ‘counter-modern’ phenomena coexist in the *second* modernity. On the basis of these differences, Beck introduces the concept of ‘divergent modernities’ as a way of opening up the analyses of how the ‘underdeveloped South’ can somehow show the future of the ‘developed West’ (Beck 2000b: 96). He uses the concept of ‘divergent modernities’, which is taken from the work of Shalini Randeria: ‘one can say that in many ways the “Third World” today holds up a mirror in which Europe can see its own future’ (Randeira, quoted in Beck 2000c: 88-9). It is in this context that Beck introduces the thesis of the ‘Brazilianisation’ of the West: ‘[i]n a striking reversal, countries of so-called ‘premodernity’, with their high proportion of informal, multi-activity work, may reflect back the future of the so-called ‘late-modern’ countries of the Western core’ (Beck 2000b: 93). The thesis of the Brazilianisation of the West arises from an analysis of labour informality and the reorganisation of labour markets; Beck’s argument would be that ‘the West’, during the last two or three decades, has been experiencing the rise of a new type of informality in labour conditions, a process of flexibilisation that has a long history in the underdeveloped world.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Even at this simplest of levels, however, Beck’s argument is very problematic. It is hard to see the advantages of a comparison between Germany’s highly negotiated trend towards the de-regulation of its labour market and the always precarious and de-regulated labour market of countries such as Brazil. Whilst in one case we are talking of the partial dismantling of a welfare state that has been successful in building safety nets, in the other case the issue is that of a highly precarious labour market that becomes even more so in recent decades.

From the point of view of Beck's social theory, the relevance of the thesis of the Brazilianisation transcends the problems of employment or labour structure of developed and underdeveloped countries; in fact, Beck himself highlights the fact that the thesis of the Brazilianisation is full of implications for the theoretical core of sociology. He argues that this image of the Brazilianisation of the West 'may arouse suspicions of a reverse Eurocentrism, whereby Western measures of value and ideas of development are deconstructed with the aid of a negative stereotype called Brazilianization' (Beck 2000b: 93): I think that this is exactly what happens. The thesis of Brazilianization of the West seems to me, at best, naïve and empirically inaccurate, and at worst, and in spite of Beck's warnings, just Eurocentric. This thesis of the Brazilianisation of the West represents a form of Eurocentrism, but a *new* form of Eurocentrism whose novelty can be illustrated with Beck's own distinction between first and second modernity. Indeed, Beck is not the first to have argued that first-modernity theories all fall into one form or another of *normative* Eurocentrism, that is, the view that all parts of the world that have not followed the route inaugurated by the West would eventually do it. No doubt, Beck's thesis of divergent modernities avoids this. Yet, he is not aware of the fact that the thesis of Brazilianisation of the West reproduces a form of *empirical* Eurocentrism. That is, whereas simple modernisation theory had been normatively Eurocentric – Europe was the model to which the rest of the world represents a deviation – reflexive modernisation theory is empirically Eurocentric – current mainstream in sociology remains unable to see social patterns different from Europeans without making sense of them *only* in terms of the consequences they can have for Europe. The crucial problem here is that Beck (2000c: 87-9) adopts the concept of divergent modernities precisely *because* of the idea of the inverted mirror; his aim is no other than using Brazil to talk about the future of Germany (see the excursus at the end of the chapter).

At the end of this first part of the chapter, I would like to summarise my critique of Beck on two issues. Firstly, Beck's reconstruction of the past through the idea of the first modernity seems to be crucially problematic. He argues that 'although the concept of a first modernity goes back a long way, its densely knit institutional structure only took shape in the great transformation of postwar Europe' (Beck 2000b: 20); so he focuses the idea of the first modernity on the rather short-term period of the 'glorious thirty years' of the (Western European) welfare state. This mythic idea of the 'nation-state society' is the backbone of Beck's theory of the second modernity but in the part on modernist sociology of the thesis, however, we saw that this is quite a one-sided reconstruction of the views and concerns of that period of time; Beck bases his argument here by portraying a rather mythical image of that past. On the one hand, Beck's claims on the Marx-Weber consensus on industrial society do not respond to any systematic engagement with these theories; on the other hand, he inadequately characterises the epochal condition that he believes has passed away without coming to terms with what actors themselves held as the crucial problems of their historical period (as Parsons' or Moore's views on totalitarianism reviewed in Chapters 5 and 6). As we will see in the next section of this chapter, this reinforces his understanding of the current situation of the nation-state: in opposing methodological cosmopolitanism to methodological nationalism, Beck ends up in the thesis that nation-states can only be theorised from a methodologically nationalistic point of view.

Secondly, it has also been shown that Beck regards the theory of RM as a critique of simple modernisation theory in the form of 'self-criticism', a criticism 'aimed at further development, not refusal, of modernity, at opening it to the challenges of a world of "global homogeneity", which has lost the security of its foundations and

oppositions' (Beck 1997: 14). The question is placed here equally at the level of epochal diagnosis – the current radicalisation of modernity – and at the level of theory building – theoretical frameworks of the past will not help us to understand the present and shape the future. On both grounds, then, sociology would be on the verge of becoming the 'antiquary's shop specializing in industrial society' (Beck 1997: 18); current sociology would have become focused mainly on 'zombie categories' (Beck 2002b: 53). What sociology should do, in this view, is to take up new frameworks, categories and themes: it needs a 'new big idea' to survive the twenty-first century. For Beck (2002b: 50), this new big idea is that of the 'cosmopolitan state', which if put into practice would represent a shift from methodological nationalism to methodological cosmopolitanism

If the traditional model of the national state is to have any chance of survival at all in the new power structure of world market plus transnational actors and movements, the globalization process will have to become the criterion of national politics in every domain (in economics, law, military affairs and so on) (Beck 2000a: 15)

The original project of the theory of RM was that of a research programme to be developed *within* sociology; it included the rather grandiose aim of mapping the new epoch, but at least it expected to contribute to the remedy of some of the problems in previous sociological research. On this crucial aspect, however, the theory of RM has now been given up. Instead of a research programme that put itself to work within the traditions of sociology and the social sciences, what we now have is an allegedly autonomous research programme that bullies sociology and declares it obsolete. Beck's 'cosmopolitan manifesto' is based on the thesis that sociology's time is over so

that sociology should become a branch of the theory of RM (Beck 2003; Beck, Bonss and Lau 2003). This is apparent, as we have been discussing, in the contradiction between Beck's claim that his work is in critical conversation with the principles of the Enlightenment and the fact that he systematically devalues the intellectual relevance of that same intellectual tradition.

## **8.2. Beck's critique of methodological nationalism.**

Beck's work plays a central role in the current revisiting of sociology's methodological nationalism. It is no other than Beck (2000a: 21, 24) himself who recuperated A. D. Smith's reference to methodological nationalism as a crucial element in the development and self-comprehension of the social and political sciences. The thesis of methodological nationalism seems to be gaining momentum in Beck's analysis of the current scene; references to it are more and more prominent in his most recent publications (Beck 2002b, 2003). Beck's critique of methodological nationalism attempts to include new topics into sociology's research agenda; he has been instrumental in establishing a program that pushes for the inclusion of 'the various development versions of de-bounded politics and society' and the 'corresponding research questions and research programmes' (Beck 2002b: 52). The example of the rising awareness about environmental concerns shows that in the second modernity the social sciences will have to be able to cope with new phenomena; a new 'methodological cosmopolitanism' is needed, one that is able to tackle 'what had previously been *analytically* excluded as a sort of silent cartel of divided fundamental convictions' (Beck 2002b: 52). The novelty of the epochal change we have started to experience demands a radical change in the social science that will be used to understand the new epoch. World risk society puts 'heavy demands' on social sciences

Social science must be re-established as a transnational science of the reality of de-nationalization, transnationalization and ‘re-ethnification’ in a global age – and this on the levels of concepts, theories and methodologies as well as organizationally. This entails that the fundamental concepts of ‘modern society’ must be re-examined. *Household, family, class, social inequality, democracy, power, state, commerce, public, community, justice, law, history, politics* must be released from the fetters of methodological nationalism and must be reconceptualized and empirically established within the framework of a cosmopolitan social and political science which remains to be developed (Beck 2002b: 53-4)

As already argued, the central problem with this formulation lies in its fallacy of ‘presentism’; in its exaggeration of the novelty in understanding the current epochal change. Similarly, if the focus is placed upon the consequences of this view on the reconstruction of the canon of the social sciences there is what can be called the fallacy of ‘foundationalism’; the intellectual resources of previous social sciences become hopeless to make sense of the current world so a new type of social science needs to be created. Indeed, the theses that the social world has changed and that concomitantly we are in need of re-inventing the social sciences certainly reinforce each other and, in the case of Beck, they are the starting point of his critique of methodological nationalism. Although the problem of methodological nationalism goes beyond sociology and reaches the social sciences at large, the problem is more acute in our discipline because “[m]odern” sociology is defined in its typical textbooks as the “modern” science of “modern” society. This both conceals and helps to gain acceptance for a classificatory schema that we might call the *container theory of society*’ (Beck 2000a: 23). In Beck’s

definition, methodological nationalism has to be seen as the most ‘non-reflective fundamental premises of social science’

*Methodological nationalism* takes the following ideas premises for granted: it equates societies with nation-state societies, and sees states and their governments as the cornerstones of a social sciences analysis. It assumes that humanity is naturally divided into a limited number of nations, which on the inside, organize themselves as nation-states and, on the outside, set 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 organization (...) Indeed the social science stance is rooted in the concept of nation-state. It is a nation-state outlook on society and politics, law, justice and history, which governs the sociological imagination (Beck 2002b: 51-2)

Beck’s understanding of methodological nationalism has in one critical sense departed from the original formulations of both H. Martins’ and A. D. Smith’s; he has unfortunately naturalised an argument that had started with a critical intention. As introduced in Chapter 1, the idea of methodological nationalism arose as a critical insight into the ways in which sociology studied nation-states as if they were autonomous and self-contained units. In so doing, sociology would have created the inadequate equation between society and the nation-state. Martins as well as Smith, then, expected to re-orient sociology’s study of nation-states from within the intellectual tradition of the social sciences and sociology so, despite the problems of their arguments as an account of sociology’s development, it remains true that theirs was above all a self-critical effort. Against these first formulations, Beck’s critique of

sociology's methodological nationalism refuses to establish his own position within the intellectual tradition of the social sciences and, with this, not only severely curtails the reflexive impetus of the first critique of methodological nationalism but also hypostatizes the theory of RM for sociology as such. The result of this is that Beck ends up equating sociology with methodological nationalism and thus has no option but to understand nation-states from a methodologically nationalistic standpoint

The association between sociology and nation-state was so extensive that the image of “modern”, organized individual societies – which became definitive with the national model of political organization – itself became an absolutely necessary concept in and through the founding work of classical social scientists. Beyond all their differences, such theorists as Émile Durkheim, Max Weber and even Karl Marx shared a territorial definition of modern society, and thus a model of society centred on the nation-state, which has today been shaken by globality and globalization (Beck 2000a: 24)

Against this, I have insisted throughout that the claim of sociology's methodological nationalism fails to grasp the subtler ways in which sociologists have been trying to study nation-states so my argument is that Beck's thorough rejection of the sociological tradition based on the claim of its alleged methodological nationalism is simply untenable. Without denying the problems of previous sociology, the argument I have deployed in this thesis is that, on the one hand, classical and modernist sociology did not conflate the nation-state with society and did not take the nation-state for granted as a necessary and solid form of socio-political organisation in modernity.



It seems to me that Beck has advanced – in spite of himself, as it were – an evolutionary model in the understanding of current social changes whose results are as problematic as the focus of his own critique. Throughout the last decade or so, Beck has proposed a number of conceptual pairs which, although they do not exactly fit with one another, all point in the same direction. As we have had the occasion to review, he contrasts simple *versus* reflexive modernisation; linear knowledge *versus* side effects (Beck 1997); nation-state society *versus* world risk society (Beck 1998); work society *versus* political society (Beck 2000b); the first age of modernity *versus* the second age modernity (Beck 2000c); simple globalisation *versus* reflexive cosmopolisation (Beck 2000a); national state *versus* cosmopolitan state (Beck 2002a); methodological nationalism *versus* methodological cosmopolitanism (Beck 2002b, 2003). The use of italics for the word ‘versus’ is not rhetorical: in all cases, the latter stands in opposition, comes to replace – analytically, first, but also historically – the former. See, for instance: ‘it becomes necessary systematically to raise the question of a paradigmatic change, which is characterized by the *conceptual opposition* of methodological nationalism and methodological cosmopolitanism (Beck 2002b: 52 emphasis added); or also ‘[t]he cosmopolitan project contradicts and replaces the nation-state project’ (Beck 2000c: 90).<sup>101</sup>

This way of using oppositions can be criticised on a number of grounds. Internal to Beck’s theoretical premises, it is his argument against the use of evolutionary frameworks in the social sciences and his claim that the first and second modernity are

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<sup>101</sup> And again: ‘the globalization debate in the social sciences may be understood and developed as a fruitful dispute about which basic assumptions and images of society, which *units for analysis*, can *replace* the axiomatics of the national state’ (Beck 2000a: 25, italics in the original). Analogous formulations are found almost everywhere (Beck 1997: 19, 121; 1998: 29; 2000a: 3-4; 2000c: 81, 83, 88, 99).

not to be seen in temporal sequence. In fact, Beck (2002b: 53) has argued that ‘the paradigmatic opposition between (inter)nationalism and cosmopolitanism does not establish a logical or temporal exclusivity, but an ambivalent transitional coexistence’. In this sense, the theory of reflexive modernisation would run explicitly against Parsons’ idea of evolutionary universals as a single pattern of development (Beck 2000c: 81, 88). It is difficult, however, to make these latter statements compatible with Beck’s view that the new epochal change and the theory of RM come to replace and stand in opposition to the old social order and previous sociology and indeed one can question the advantages of *opposing* methodological nationalism to methodological cosmopolitanism. In fact, even if during the first age of modernity a methodologically nationalistic social science was unable to provide an accurate account of nation-states it is difficult to understand how and why now a methodologically cosmopolitan social science can succeed in doing so for the second age of modernity.

The comparison of Martins’ and Smith’s original critique of methodological nationalism with Beck’s views can shed some further light on some of the problems in the latter’s views. For instance, a major problem in Beck’s reconstruction of methodological nationalism has to do with the possibility of drawing a distinction between methodological and political (normative) nationalism. In Beck’s (2002b: 51) own words

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 sciences 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 determine itself within the frame of its cultural

distinctiveness. Methodological nationalism assumes this normative claim as a socio-ontological given and simultaneously links it with the most important conflict and organization orientations of society and politics. These basic tenets have become the main perception-grid of social science

This distinction between methodological and normative or political nationalism is more problematic than it first appears. In fact, the quotation starts off by claiming the necessity of the sharp distinction between the two forms of nationalism, supported by the difference of perspective between the ‘social sciences observer’ and the ‘political actors’; but, towards the end, neither distinction holds. Beck ends up recognising that there is a link between the actor and the observer – and between methodological and political nationalism – and that they have reinforced each other in order to create ‘the most important conflict and organization orientations of society and politics’. In fact, one of Smith’s major propositions is precisely that one of the causes for the rise of methodological nationalism is what he called the intellectuals’ ‘psychological satisfaction’ in seeing their own small states as self-contained units.<sup>102</sup> Smith’s argument shows that neither the distinction between observers and actors nor the difference between political and methodological nationalism can be systematically introduced. It is due to the same reason that, instead of doing so, I proposed that there are in fact two different versions or arguments of methodological nationalism: one in which the questions are primarily logical and analytical (Martins) and one in which the premises are crucially sociological and historical (Smith). Various chapters of the

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<sup>102</sup> Thus Smith (1979: 191) ‘the theoretical underpinning [of methodological nationalism] derives much of its force from acceptance of nationalist conceptions, and goes a long way to reinforce those conceptions. In this way, the world nation-state system has become an enduring and stable component of our whole cognitive outlook, quite apart from the psychological satisfactions it confers’.

thesis – those on Weber, Durkheim and Parsons, for instance – have shown that the tensions between political and methodological nationalism are very real indeed; that the relations between the two forms of nationalism are quite complex, and that their resolution has nothing to do with a sharp distinction between the two nor with making one the instrument of the other. The tensions between theoretical and normative claims are intrinsic to the development of sociology and in relation to nation-states they express the real ambivalences of their historical development.

Another problem in Beck's understanding of methodological nationalism is his belief in the novelty of the dissolution of the distinction between the internal and the external: 'the foundations of the power of nation-state are collapsing both from the inside and the outside' (Beck 2002b: 53). Or more clearly

The labels "national" and "international" can no longer be separated (...) the increasingly problematic distinction –though it is a distinction typical of the field- between "domestic" and "foreign" politics, as "national governmental politics" and "international relations", becomes definitively obsolete. Thus it is not only a matter of integrating national explanation factors in the analysis of international political processes (...) [r]ather, it is a matter of questioning the very separation between "inside" and "outside" (...) traditional conceptualizations of terms and constructing borders between domestic and foreign politics or society and state are less and less appropriate to tackle the challenges linked to the world risk society (Beck 2002b: 52)

An 'impenetrable' distinction between the national and the international is, for Beck, one of the central tenets of the social sciences' methodological nationalism.

Interestingly, Beck (2000a: 22) uses Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* to argue that 'the national vision which still holds the social sciences captive was already being questioned when it first emerged in the maelstrom of rising industrial capitalism'. Although he has strongly argued against the limitations of previous social science, Beck recognises that there is the seed for a critique of methodological nationalism in Marx's sociology but this he does not develop any further. Classical social science is of no use because it is old, it talks us of a world that does not any longer exist. Yet, in Part Two of the thesis on classical sociology I argued not only that Marx, Weber and Durkheim were quite critical of a clear-cut distinction between the internal and the external but also that there were a national *and* a global perspective in the making at that time. Furthermore, the argument deployed in Chapter 2 was that Marx's reading of both classical political economy and political philosophy can be taken as though a critique of methodological nationalism even before the rise of the nation-state. So, instead of opposing these two realms, the classics seem to have understood that they presuppose and belong to one another. Disappointingly, Beck fails to see the critique of the reification of the nation-state that is behind the *Communist Manifesto* because he understands it only as a *response* to 'the national vision which still holds the social sciences captive' (Beck 2000a: 22). Beck's critique is flawed here less because of what the classics did or did not say and more because of the internal inconsistencies of his own arguments.

Also, I think we need to raise the issue of how and why Beck seems to have overstated the analytical novelty of methodological cosmopolitanism. This has to do with his understanding of comparative analysis. Beck (2002b: 51 and 53) argues

The comparative analyses of societies, international relations, political theory, 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 (...) [a]gainst the background of cosmopolitan social science it becomes suddenly obvious that it is neither possible to distinguish clearly between the national and the international, nor (...) convincingly to contrast homogeneous units.

I have discussed this issue in Chapters 5 (on Parsonian sociology) and 6 (on historical sociology). One central argument of these chapters was that modernist sociology addressed the question of the historical formation of nation-states without presupposing their necessity: nation-states, as societies, do not necessarily converge in modernity. Indeed, modern societies adopt different social and political forms so if one does not want to get rid of comparative analysis altogether then some form of units have to be formed for the comparison to be possible. Furthermore, this does not deny the fact that nation-states have been theorised as societies and compared as such, but this has been by no means the only focus of historical comparative analysis in sociology. It is not only that class, ethnic and gender relations have equally been the focus of comparison but also that such comparisons have also been made between the first, the second and the third world, as well as between civilisations, continents, regions and sub-regions (Crow 1997: Ch. 1). No doubt, comparative analysis can adopt a methodologically nationalistic approach but comparative analysis neither requires nor presupposes methodological nationalism.

The final theme to discuss here has to do with the rather mythical view of the nation-state as a harmonious socio-political form: '[i]nternal homogeneity is essentially a creation of state control. All kinds of social practices – production, culture, language, labour market, capital, education – are stamped and standardized, defined and rationalized, by the national state, but at least are labelled as national economy, national language, literature public life, history, and so on' (Beck 2000a: 23). Then again, I have argued in the thesis that such an image of the nation-state is, at the very best, only partly true and in fact, both classical and modernist sociology seem to have argued in much more sophisticated ways. Nation-states have been theorised as conflictive and unstable forms of socio-political organisation and if we now tend to see them otherwise this has certainly to do with *our* current circumstances. The idea that state and society are fully organised and governed around the principle of nationality is just an overstatement from the point of view of the 'history of the sociology of the nation-state' I have tried to reconstruct in the thesis. This is, I think, the crucial question in Beck's conceptualisation of methodological nationalism: Beck is missing a theory of the nation-state beyond methodological nationalism; or rather, *Beck's idea of the nation-state mirrors the methodological nationalism he criticises*. On the one hand, the argument is that '[t]he critique of methodological nationalism should not be mistaken for the thesis of the end of the nation-state'. And yet, on the other, Beck (2002b: 51-2) argues that nation-states

[W]ill continue to thrive or will be transformed into transnational states. At any rate, 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 science observer perspective*. In this sense, social science can only react to the challenge of globalization adequately if it manages to overcome

methodological nationalism, and if it manages to raise empirically and theoretically fundamental questions within specialized fields of research and thus elaborate the foundations of a *cosmopolitan* social and political science

Indeed, we must overcome methodological nationalism. The problem seems to be in the way in which Beck believes that task is to be fulfilled. Beck's whole argument holds together only if one accepts his methodologically nationalistic view of the nation-state during the first modernity. His misrepresentation of the sociological canon is matched, I believe, by his confusion about the historical development and major characteristics of nation-states. In naturalising the idea of methodological nationalism, Beck's critique of methodological nationalism has in fact just equated methodological nationalism with sociology.

### **Excursus: A new form of Eurocentrism?**

Part of Beck's criticisms against previous generations of social scientists are focused on the lack of understanding of non-western patterns of social, cultural and economic development. This is seen as yet another weakness of modernist sociology as both historical and Parsonian sociology would have failed to consider sociological and historical particularities beyond the Western world (Amin 1989). The new orthodoxy endorses this critique of previous theorising on modernisation processes that has taken Europe and the US as the model to which the rest of the world represents a deviation; they duly criticise the *normative* Eurocentrism that is undoubtedly part of classical and modernist social science. My argument, however, is that rather than overcome the shortcomings of previous generations of social scientists, the new orthodoxy reproduces them within their own frameworks and thus they inaugurate a new form of



*empirical* Eurocentrism.<sup>103</sup> With the partial exception of Castells, they portray what can be called a phenomenology of the rich West: when they talk about mobility, one can hardly include asylum seekers in that group, when cosmopolitanism is described, imperialism is not really being considered, where they see networks, they are hardly thinking about people lacking drinking water; this is very much ‘the class consciousness of frequent travellers’ (Calhoun 2002). In this empirical Eurocentrism, the social sciences remain unable to see social patterns different from the West without making sense of them in terms of the consequences they have only for the West. If for the former generation of sociologists Europe and the US were the model to which the development of the rest of the world represented a deviation for the new orthodoxy the understanding of social patterns different from Americans and Europeans are relevant only if they can be translated into the possible consequences for Europe and the US.

I cannot enter here into the debate on the historical development of modernity, but it can at least be said that a number of alternatives have been developed in order to try to avoid both normative and empirical Eurocentrism. Concepts such as ‘multiple modernities’ (Eisenstadt 2000; Beriain 2002); ‘different trajectories of modernity’ (Therborn 1995, Larraín 2000) ‘non-European conceptualisation of modernity’ (Mouzelis 1999) and ‘entangled modernities’ (Therborn 2003) have all been proposed and they all focus directly on the problems of Eurocentrism. What these concepts share, and I believe is their major advantage in relation to the idea new orthodoxy’s empirical Eurocentrism, is *precisely* that they do not make the highly Eurocentric claim of the Third World being Europe’s inverted mirror. In these accounts, the assumption of the convergence of modernity is dropped for the idea of historical

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<sup>103</sup> The distinction between normative and empirical Eurocentrism is based on M. Centeno’s work (2002: 275).

research into modernity's different routes. In fact, Therborn (2003: 293) has recently pointed out that the concept of 'entangled modernities', which is also coined by S. Randeira, arises out of 'a profound dissatisfaction, first of all with Eurocentrism and, after the Second World War, North-Atlanticist West-centrism of mainstream (...) views of the world and its history'. In fact, Randeira's (1999) paper to which Therborn refers is an attempt to integrate the critique of Eurocentrism that emerged from post-colonial studies into the mainstream sociological debate on modernity. All these nuances, it seems to me, are lost if we follow Beck's way of addressing the problem in his thesis of Brazilianisation.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the critical tone of the chapter, it is fair to repeat here that Beck's work has proved important for my thesis in that he has explicitly re-introduced the problem of methodological nationalism into the self-comprehension of the sociological canon. Yet, my overall assessment of his project is quite critical, so let me summarise here my major problems with it. In the first section of the chapter I developed the argument that, in abandoning his original position in which the theory of reflexive modernisation was seen as a critical reconstruction of the canon of the social sciences *from within*, Beck has now moved to the more ambitious but largely untenable view that sociology itself should follow the research agenda of theory of reflexive modernisation. This is what I called Beck's foundationalism: instead of using the intellectual tradition of sociology to strengthen his understanding of the current epochal condition, Beck makes the claim that this tradition is increasingly redundant. Beck regards his theories of reflexive modernisation and of the second age of modernity less as a contribution to a sociological understanding of contemporary social life and more as the 'new big

idea' with which the social sciences are going to cope with their imminent obsolescence.

The starting point for the second part of the chapter is that at least one possible explanation for this has to do with Beck's (mis)understanding of the canon as inextricably and inevitably methodologically nationalistic; with Beck's equation of methodological nationalism and sociology. The argument is that the problems in Beck's theories of reflexive modernisation; world risk society and the second age modernity seem to arise from an methodologically nationalistic theorisation of the phenomena that these concepts oppose and are meant to replace: simple modernisation, the nation-state and industrial society. It is the lack of a deeper understanding of the history and major characteristics of nation-states that seems to undermine Beck's bigger project. Beck's understanding of our current epochal condition is based after all on a methodologically nationalistic understanding of nation-states *and* sociology so it comes as no surprise that he finds that the world has changed dramatically and that there is nothing particularly useful or rewarding in sociology with which to look at the social world.

## **Conclusions. The owl of Minerva and the ambivalent legacy of nation-states in modernity.**

The thesis has reviewed the critique of sociology's methodological nationalism, both in its early formulation of the 1970s and in its current one – sociology's new orthodoxy. Beyond differences, both views share the claim that sociologists have understood the nation-state as the natural and rational representation of 'society' in modernity. In addition to the negative task of arguing *against* this view of the history of sociology, a second more positive line of argument has also been present: in parts two, three and four of the thesis I have highlighted different conceptualisations of nation-states. These two arguments are indeed consistent with the two aims set out in the introduction to the thesis: a *critique* of the equation between society and the nation-state and also a *reconstruction* of a conventional version of the sociological pantheon – 'a history of the sociology of the nation-state'. The evaluation of whether sociologists have actually employed society and the nation-state as the same concept and whether they have portrayed the nation-state as the final stage in the development of modernity should therefore deal with both levels. I have demonstrated that sociology's analytical tools and thematic concerns cannot be accounted for as though they were focused only on the nation-state, because this both misrepresents the discipline's intellectual history and undermines what can actually be gained from a sociological understanding of nation-states. On the one hand, historically, the claim is that although the current scenario provides us with an opportunity to reconsider the alleged necessity of the nation-state in modernity, one should not do so by overstating the claim of the novelty of the present: we must keep a balance between continuities and discontinuities. On the other hand, conceptually, the argument is that sociologists have occupied the idea of society in more forms than the nation-state. The distinction between a referential and a

regulative role of society pointed in the direction of disentangling the equation between society and the nation-state. In the context of the reflexive vocation of sociology, the thesis has addressed the canon with the attitude that in learning about sociology one will also learn about nation-states.

I will not try to summarise in a few lines the main arguments for each part or indeed chapter of the thesis. That would be not only difficult and somewhat tiresome but also I do not think it very profitable: what has not been already achieved in terms of the arguments on individual authors or schools of thought will hardly be reached at this stage. Moreover, there is no question that some of the interpretations given on the authors reviewed can be found contentious. For instance, Chapters 4 and 5 – on Durkheim and Parsons, respectively – present arguments that contradict some relatively well-established views on their works. In the case of Durkheim, the relationship between political and methodological nationalism in his sociology; in the case of Parsons, the idea that his concepts of social system and modern society are precisely based on an equation between society and the nation-state. So, although I have tried to produce a different interpretation on the works of the authors discussed neither my critique nor my reconstruction should be refuted on the grounds that I have misunderstood one or another part of the work of a particular author. The thesis of sociology's methodological nationalism focuses on the history of the discipline 'as a whole'; it is less about M. Weber or B. Moore and more about the *nature* of sociology's theoretical and normative concerns. As the dispute is not about any single author but about sociology's self-understanding my effort has itself been directed towards the re-assessment of this conventional canon of sociology.

Rather, this is the time to address directly the question of the ambivalent legacy of nation-states in modernity. So far I have consciously avoided the introduction, in any schematic form, of the actual content of these ambivalences because, in the context of the reflective vocation of sociology that was presented in the introduction of the thesis, I wanted my reassessment of the canon to proceed internally rather than from the outside. Without holding hermeneutical illusions of ‘objective’ readings, I have tried to let the canon speak in its own words and avoided imposing forced convergences upon the different positions that have been reviewed. A reassessment of the canon which also intends to draw some substantive lessons about the social world requires, it seems to me, the maintenance of a certain level of flexibility or even ambiguity in its formulations as a way of unfolding the conceptual ambivalences in thinking, the actual ambivalences in the social world, and hopefully as well the relations between the two. Furthermore, this is a counterbalance to the new orthodoxy’s simplification of current social trends as ‘crises’ and ‘epochal changes’ and to their presentism and foundationalism – the cult of novelty for novelty’s sake. Instead of grandiose historical changes and major paradigm shifts, my story tries to make sense of advances and retreats, certainties and equivocations. At the same time, however, I am aware of the fact that this can be no excuse for the lack of a clear argument about the ambivalences to which I have made reference throughout so, *keeping in mind that the primary theme of thesis is sociology rather than nation-states and for purposes of clarification only*, I shall now summarise the ambivalent position of nation-states in modernity as it seems to emerge from this reconstruction of history of the sociology of the nation-state.

**Historically**, there is the ambivalence between *teleology and contingency* in the development of nation-states in modernity: Nation-states are a modern form of socio-political organisation but are not a necessary product of modernity (Weber, Durkheim

Parsons, Mann, Moore, Bendix); they have been regarded as a transitory political form in capitalism (Marx) and have co-existed with different forms of socio-political organisation such as overseas empires and colonies (Marx, Weber, Hobsbawm); city-states, absolutists regimes and multinational empires (Tilly); blocs and totalitarian regimes (Parsons) and network states (Castells). **Sociologically**, there is the ambivalence between *solidity and instability* in nation-states' self-presentation; nation-states are an unfinished project and are periodically battling for their survival. They have been systematically threatened by different social forces and processes: the expansion and changing nature of capitalism (Marx, Castells); totalitarianism and Blocs (Parsons, Moore); internal diversity along ethnic or class lines (Tilly, Hroch, Hobsbawm); state's inability to 'cage' the nation (Mann) and global risks (Beck). **Politically**, there is the ambivalence between *internal and external sources of legitimacy* of nation-states: From within, claims on national democracy (Bendix); national geo-political interest (Weber) and national economic interest (Castells) have been recurrently made. From the outside, nation-states have found legitimisation on the basis of their membership to the international system of states (Smith); their role in the world revolution (Marx); their position in the development of the West (Parsons) and the cosmopolitan basis of their moral foundation (Durkheim).

From the point of view of my reconstruction of the history of the sociology of the nation-state, these three types of ambivalence converge in the form of a *critique* of the previous critiques of methodological nationalism; they invite us to move *beyond* methodological nationalism. Above all, these ambivalences show that nation-states have been both a progressive and a conservative force in modernity; the equivocations in sociology's attempt to understand nation-states reflect the problems that nation-states themselves have experienced. In Chapter 2, for instance, I discussed this

question on the grounds that Marx had understood that neither nationalism nor internationalism could be automatically associated with the forces of progress or the reaction: democratic or working-class movements have no monopoly over internationalist or even cosmopolitan ideals; conservatives or reactionary ones are not always nationalists. Nation-states were progressive when fighting against absolutist old-regimes but were equally quite conservative as soon as patriotism changed into chauvinism and nation-building was combined with colonialism; the same nation-state which showed its worth in fighting totalitarianism also contained many not quite democratic trends within it such as racism, restricted franchise and social inequality; the same nation-state which aroused high sympathies and hopes during the decolonisation of Africa and the developmental period in Latin America has decimated 'its own' populations through corruption, civil wars and brutal dictators.

Nowadays, we face yet again the problem of trying to make sense of the position of nation-states in modernity. On the one hand, it is indeed the case that the new orthodoxy's doubts on the current situation of the nation-state have opened the possibility for the re-assessment of the history of the sociology of the nation-state. On the other hand, the new orthodoxy's 'mortal sin' is to have missed the ambivalent position of nation-states in modernity and to have embraced a one-sided account of the history of both sociology and nation-states. The fact that appears to them as the newest of all, the crisis of the nation-state, is in fact the most constant of all features of nation-states in modernity – and of sociology's understanding of nation-states. Sociology's struggle to grasp the nature and development of nation-states mirrors nation-states' own equivocations; sociology's ambivalent attempts at conceptualising nation-states reflect the actual ambivalences of the position and legacy of nation-states in



modernity: *nation-states can embody both the progressive and conservative forces of modernity*, this is their ambivalent legacy.

Arguably, one way in which the question of the relationships between sociology's conceptual ambivalences and nation-states' actual ambivalences has found expression in the thesis is that of the tensions between political and methodological nationalism. This theme deserves further attention, moreover, because it relates to the broader issue of the relationships between normative and descriptive dimensions of the social sciences, which is in itself one of the central tenets of the reflective vocation of sociology. I certainly cannot address this broader debate here but some things can be said on the basis of the arguments of some of the chapters. On the one hand, in opposition to Beck's claims, it has been argued that a complete separation between political and methodological nationalism is as impossible as it is potentially dangerous. It is impossible because it fails to recognise that theoretical statements necessarily contain normative implications; it obscures, behind a false appearance of scientific neutrality, what these implications may be. It is also dangerous because it takes at face values normative statements that should be in fact the object of a more rigorous intellectual scrutiny; a claim for a cosmopolitan social science does not automatically or necessarily redeem the underlying chauvinism or Eurocentrism of its proponent – as in the case of Beck's own thesis on the 'Brazilianisation of the West'. On the other hand, against some interpretations of Weber's and Durkheim's works, it has been shown that the authors' political nationalism does not account for an alleged methodological nationalism in their sociology. Weber and Durkheim explicitly addressed the subject of the relationship between values and facts, between politics and science, in their works and I have tried to show that even at the moment in which their political nationalism was at its peak – during the outbreak of World War I – it is

simply not the case that their sociology became an instrument for their politics. In the case of Weber, the gloomier his views on the future of Germany the stronger his claim on the incommensurability between politics and science; the more sceptical Weber became on whether a German nation-state was viable project – ‘this *pathetic pride* in the power of one’s own community’ – the more his sociology moved away from methodological nationalism and focused on the ‘tragedy of culture’. In the case of Durkheim, the more chauvinistic the tone of his critique of Germany, the more he presented his case as a tension between actually-existing communities and ‘morally universal’ values – between national and world patriotism. If anything, Durkheim’s work shows that political nationalism can as well correlate ‘inversely’ with methodological nationalism as his *political* defence of France’s national role during the war is made vis-à-vis his *sociological* reflection on the ‘morally universal’ sources of state power and the rise of a ‘global consciousness’.

The failure to understand the tensions between normative and descriptive dimensions runs the risk of wrongly resolving them under the appearance of either over-determination or autonomy; in every case political nationalism would necessarily translate into methodological nationalism – or, in Beck’s case, political cosmopolitanism into methodological cosmopolitanism. At its limits, the argument of over-determination can only become cynical – science *is* nothing but politics – and the claim of autonomy is simply naïve: it obstinately maintains that we can fully separate the two realms; both claims are equally wanting. Throughout the thesis, rather, the discussion of different writers has shown that the connections between political and methodological nationalism should be regarded more as a theme for reflection than an already reached conclusion; a possibility than a necessary result; a problem than an established point of view.

To accept that there are new events and trends that need to be addressed, however, does not require or imply that this ‘current crisis’ constitutes a ‘new epoch’. The problem of assessing the relationships between new events and the rise of a new epoch, between the progressivism and conservatism of social change, may remind us of Hegel’s ‘owl of Minerva’ in that the historical legacy of the nation-state in modernity seems to become truly apparent only *now* in the certainty that its peak has definitively gone.<sup>104</sup> The problem of understanding the position and direction of certain events in history is at the centre of the argument of the owl of Minerva but there are precisely these issues that have proved a major difficulty in the case of nation-states; there does not seem to be a privileged point of view from which to look at the development of nation-states. A very recent expression of this is the change in the attitude towards the thesis of the decline of the nation-state during the four years since I started this research; there seems to be a more qualified excitement with ‘the global’ after the Terrorist Attacks on New York than was the case before; so much so that some commentators have even argued that the ‘age of globalisation’ has effectively ended (Rosenberg, forthcoming). At the very least, there is no need of further reminder that all types of social forces can become potentially global – human rights as well as

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<sup>104</sup> According to Hegel (1991: 23), philosophy ‘always comes too late to perform’ the function of prescribing ‘how the world ought to be [...philosophy] appears only at a time when actuality has gone through its formative process and attained its completed state. This lesson of the concept is necessarily also apparent from history, namely that it is only when actuality has reached maturity that the ideal appears opposite the real and reconstructs this real world, which it has grasped in its substance, in the shape of an intellectual realm. When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk’.

terrorism – and that a global war on terror can be fought and justified on the rather nationalistic arguments of national security and national interests.

These ambivalences are subtly captured by the differences in the *tone* of some of J. Habermas' (1999, 2003) public interventions about recent international events: his cautious but decided defence of NATO's intervention in Kosovo and his open condemnation of the recent war in Iraq. The conclusion to the thesis may not be the best place to introduce new arguments, but it seems to me that Habermas is a good case in point for two reasons. On the one hand, because Habermas differs from the new orthodoxy's thesis of the definitive crisis of the nation-state and therefore some mention to his work may partly redress some of the imbalances in my discussion on current sociology. On the other, Habermas' work has played a modelling role in the thesis with regards to the reflective vocation of sociology; the link between normative arguments and theoretical claims is central to his intellectual project; Habermas has systematically faced and struggled with the tensions 'between facts and norms' and this finds a rich expression when it comes to his assessment of the position of nation-states in modernity.<sup>105</sup> In the case of the intervention on Yugoslavia, Habermas argues that, despite the fact of the legal gaps in the justification for a international military action on a sovereign state's internal affairs, the intervention *was* right due to the urgency of stopping genocide, on the one hand and its normative basis, the 'leap from the classical international law of states to a cosmopolitan law of a global civil society', on the other (Habermas 1999: 264). Indeed, Habermas was seriously concerned at the time with the lack of an explicit UN Security Council resolution to back the use of military force but he none the less regarded the situation in Kosovo so grave that, *as an*

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<sup>105</sup> For a thorough discussion of the ambivalences in Habermas' conceptualisation of nation-states and cosmopolitanism, see Fine and Smith (2003).

*exception*, the intervention was justified. ‘The dilemma of having to act as though there were already a fully institutionalised global civil society’ Habermas says ‘does not force us to accept the maxim that victims are to be left at the mercy of thugs’ but at the same time, he argued that ‘NATO’s self-authorization should not be allowed to become the general rule’ (Habermas 1999: 271).

The ambivalence in the relationships between international law and cosmopolitanism during the Kosovo experience led Habermas to the conclusion that, pragmatically as well as normatively, the risks of waging a morally justified war on grounds that are not fully legal are simply tremendous. In thinking about these potential dangers, he put, hypothetically, the following question ‘what do we say when one day the military alliance of another region – for example, in Asia – pursues the politics of human rights with military means in accordance with a very different interpretation of international law or the UN Charter?’ (Habermas 1999: 270). The problem that the recent war in Iraq poses is even worse than the one he foresaw in 1999 because this ‘very different interpretation of international law’ has indeed arisen within instead of beyond the West: ‘normative dissent has divided the West itself’ Habermas (2003: 366). The war in Iraq marks a change as

For half a century the United States could count as the pacemaker for progress on this cosmopolitan path. With the war in Iraq, it has not only abandoned this role; it has also given up its role as guarantor of international rights (...) the normative authority of the United States of America lies in ruins (Habermas 2003: 365)

Habermas' argument is that we should not misrepresent the current neo-conservative doctrine of international relations as old *Realpolitik*; the novelty in this most recent Anglo-Saxon alliance lies in its claim that 'if the regime of international law fails, then the hegemonic imposition of a global liberal order is justified, even by means that are hostile to international law' (Habermas 2003: 365). In his view, this is the reappearance in a new context of deep-seated legal and political traditions in the UK and the US in which the tensions between national and cosmopolitan interests and values are resolved in the form of 'national liberalism'. Habermas (2003: 366) is therefore forced to face the upsetting fact that 'in hindsight', even during the Kosovo crisis, Britain and America 'satisfied themselves with the normative goal of promulgating their own liberal order, through violence if necessary' so that what in 1999 could be counted for as 'the undisputed democratic and rule-of-law character of all the members of the acting military coalition' may still be true but it certainly adopts a much less cosmopolitan flavour. The image of the owl of Minerva reappears here in the dilemmas Habermas faces: on the one hand, finding a way to differentiate what is old and what is unprecedented in these two wars; on the other, unfolding the rational movement of cosmopolitan normative ideals in the framework of actually existing international institutions.

More than the substance of the argument, I am interested here in the ambivalences that are reflected in the change in tone between the two pieces. The kind of 'normative optimism' that is found in the Kosovo paper seems to have been widely shared at the time and Habermas advocated the importance of recognising the signs of the transition from international to cosmopolitan law.<sup>106</sup> Less than five years later, however, this

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<sup>106</sup> See Habermas (1998). On a personal note, these were also the happy days in which Pinochet was detained and forced to stay almost two years in Britain – Habermas (1999: 264)

normative optimism is severely weakened. Habermas' views on the war in Iraq are indeed based on the same normative claims as his previous arguments but the historical and sociological grounds for his claims are weaker and in his own view the institutionalisation of this embryonic cosmopolitan legal order seems, if anything, more distant now than it looked in 1999 because of the normative split within the West. The conclusion I would like to draw from this brief discussion is that we should not lose sight of the ambivalent position of nation-states. For instance, when Habermas (1999: 267) poses the question '[d]oes the universalism of the Enlightenment collide here with the obstinacy of political power ineradicably inscribed in the drive for the collective self-assertion of a particular community?' he is facing one of the ambivalences of the history of the sociology of nation-states that has accompanied us throughout the thesis.

Going back to the question of the owl of Minerva, it seems to me that one should not make a 'substantive' interpretation of the argument of the owl in claiming that it is precisely due to the current crisis of the nation-state that one becomes aware of its historical role in modernity; we should not look at the present as though it contains the master key with which to unlock a rational unfolding of the past before our 'privileged' eyes. As a matter of fact, my critique of the current mainstream is based on the idea that the urgency with the present may also prevent us from grasping the bigger picture; the past – of nation-states and of sociology – may as well help us understand the present. F. Webster's argument on the 'fallacy of the presentism' is one way of capturing the drama of becoming enchanted with the owl of Minerva's pledge

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himself presented this case as though the forces of cosmopolitanism had defeated the old dictator. Eventually, when Pinochet was granted permission to go back to Chile, it became clear the British and the Chilean governments agreed to this on the application of conventional principles of non-intervention and national self-determination.

for 'true knowledge' but then becoming lost in the labyrinth of the present which, although full of beauties and temptations, is none the less deceiving and devoid of content. Instead of taking the present as a master key to understand the past, a more 'methodological' interpretation of the owl-of-Minerva argument accepts the fact that knowledge 'always comes to late' so that what *now* looks certain is, above all, an expression of how ephemeral our certainties may turn out to be and that the temporal gap between 'actuality' and concepts is expressed in multiple and complicated ways.

This problem is particularly apparent in the case of nation-states because the question of their historicity, the idea that their time has already gone, is at the centre of their ambivalent position and legacy in modernity and indeed of their treatment in sociology. On the one hand, the early thesis of methodological nationalism was right in disregarding an idea of the nation-state as self-contained units that had little to do with actual historical experiences but it still accepted at face value the thesis that nation-states incarnated the project of political modernity. On the other hand, the new orthodoxy's critique of methodological nationalism duly disregards this idea that nation-states incarnate the project of political modernity but in so doing misreads the current crisis as the herald that the owl of Minerva has started to fly and that the end of the nation-state is, this time for good, in sight. Nation-states' ambivalent position in modernity should make us aware of the fact that the distance between enlightenment and deception; between knowledge and propaganda; between legitimate reconstruction and deceitful hindsight, is shorter than we might wish. The troubled *conceptual* history of the nation-state that the thesis has reconstructed seems to reflect the disturbing *actual* history of nation-states; the legacy of nation-states has proved to be particularly complicated; it is historically uncertain, conceptually opaque, and normatively ambivalent. If we were going to flag our understanding of nation-states with the help



of the owl of Minerva's flight I would then like to know *how* the owl learns that its moment has arrived *before* deciding to follow the flight's actual direction. How to achieve this certainty – or whether it is achievable at all – however, I just don't know: more than close these gaps and resolve these tensions, my thesis has aimed to unfold some of these relations and start exploring their consequences.

### **A final word on society.**

Throughout the thesis, the enquiry into the equation between society and the nation-state has mostly taken a negative form: society and the nation-state have not been the same in sociology. Indeed, an immediate counterbalance for this has been the claim that society is a regulative ideal; the differentiation between the referential and the regulative roles of society sets up a framework with which to look at the different roles of society in the discipline beyond the equation of nation-state and society. Yet, the question remains as to what are the other meanings of society in sociology and, although the answer to question of alternative definitions of society is somewhat extrinsic to the argument of the thesis itself, it is none the less instrumental to a longer-term and more ambitious (probably over ambitious) research agenda: the reconstruction of the different uses of society in sociology.<sup>107</sup>

Indeed, some hints of this have already been given, as in the excursus to Chapter 7 about M. Castells' different uses of society and its implications for his own research programme and indeed in Chapter 5 with the discussion of Parsons' threefold

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<sup>107</sup> It is probably true that the only intuition that remains from the original proposal of my thesis is that I wanted to look at the nation-state as an 'excuse' to analyse in some detail this particular use of society in sociology.

definition of society as social system, modern society and nation-state. The threefold definition of society in Parsonian sociology has become quite crucial for this long-term research agenda as it could be used to set up in more clear terms the tasks of a research into the uses of society in sociology; I am increasingly convinced that these three concepts – plus, maybe, the concept of ‘civilisation’ – have been the major ways in which sociology has *actually* used the idea of society throughout. On the one hand, the claim of the threefold definition of society itself emerged when I was trying to come to terms with Parsons’ ambiguities when referring to ‘society’. On the other, however, there is an antecedent for this in that I had done some research into the links between the idea of society and the concept of the social system before (Chernilo 2002). Although that paper does not address directly the relationships between the concepts of social system and society – and further research into that relationship is still needed – that particular publication arose from a previous dissertation in which the argument was *explicitly* that the theory of generalised symbolic media was the central conceptual strategy with which systemic sociology has tackled the problem of defining society (Chernilo 1999). More recently, I have just been awarded a two-years research fellowship (by the National Council for Science of Chile) to undertake a research project into the concept of modern society from the point of view of society’s role as a regulative ideal. For that project, apart from looking at Parsons’ concept of modern society, I shall also explore the ways in which the concept of modern society has played a major role in modernist sociology’s epochal diagnoses.<sup>108</sup> So, although the intention of researching into the uses of society in sociology existed before the beginning of my PhD, the research being done for this thesis has given a whole new

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<sup>108</sup> If I mention these antecedents now it is only to show that this longer-term research agenda has existed, in one way or another, for some time now and that steps have been taken towards its advancement. It is clearly too early to announce, however, whether this agenda will eventually produce substantive results.

sense of unity to this longer-term research agenda. In substantive terms, the thesis' contribution to that project has to do with the systematic exploration of the nation-state as one definition of society in sociology. Indeed, I by no means anticipated that the actual result of the reconstruction was going to take the form of a *critique* of the equation of society and nation-state; and yet, the fact that the reconstruction had actually taken that form is in itself an argument in favour of searching for the alternative uses and meanings of society in sociology.

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