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**Citation:** Walby, S. (2003). The myth of the nation-state: Theorizing society and polities in a global era. *Sociology*, 37(3), pp. 529-546. doi: 10.1177/00380385030373008

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**Link to published version:** <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385030373008>

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## The Myth of the Nation-State: Theorizing Society and Politics in a Global Era

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### **ABSTRACT**

The analysis of globalization requires attention to the social and political units that are being variously undermined, restructured or facilitated by this process. Sociology has often assumed that the unit of analysis is society, in which economic, political and cultural processes are coterminous, and that this concept maps onto that of nation-state. This article argues that the nation-state is more mythical than real. This is for four reasons: first, there are more nations than states; second, several key examples of presumed nation-states are actually empires; third, there are diverse and significant polities in addition to states, including the European Union and some organized religions; fourth, polities overlap and rarely politically saturate the territory where they are located. An implication of acknowledging the wider range and overlapping nature of polities is to open greater conceptual space for the analysis of gender and ethnicity in analyses of globalization. Finally the article re-conceptualizes 'polities' and 'society'.

### **KEY WORDS**

difference / globalization / nation-state / politics / theory

## **Introduction**

**M**odern societies have often been equated with nation-states, although pre-modern social associations have been conceptualized differently (Giddens, 1984; Habermas, 1989; Meyer et al., 1997). But nation-states are actually very rare as existing social and political forms, even in the modern era. They may be widespread as imagined communities, or as aspirations, but

their existence as social and political practice is much over-stated. There are many states, but very few nation-states. The notion that there have been neatly bounded societies – where economic, political and cultural domains or levels map neatly onto to each other – is inadequate. This article takes issue with the assumption in much of sociology that our fundamental unit of analysis is that of a ‘society’, which entails a single form of internal governance, and which can be equated with the concept of ‘nation-state’. We need to rethink the concept of ‘society’, which is so often equated with ‘nation-state’, and that of ‘polity’, which is wider than that of ‘state’.

One part of the globalization debate proceeds as if globalization were undermining nation-states (Castells, 1996, 1997, 1998; Cerny, 1996; Ohmae, 1995), indeed undermining nation-states as self-contained democratic solidaristic units (Habermas, 2001). Others counter that globalization does not have this effect. Thus Mann (1993a, 1997) argues that the rise of the nation-state has not been thwarted by globalization; Hirst and Thompson (1996) argue that economic globalization is not new and that states remain strong; and world-society theorists such as Meyer et al. (1997) argue that nation-states are a product of the development of world society. More complex accounts have argued that, rather than the nation-state being undermined or created by globalization, it is being restructured and transformed (Held et al., 1999).

But, since nation-states have never been common entities, these accounts of the relationship between globalization and nation-states must be questioned. The understanding of globalization demands, not only an appreciation and theorization of the nature of the increased density and speed of social linkages around the world, but also a re-think of the concept of the fundamental building block of the social, that is, of society, and of the nation-state as society and polity.

Much work on globalization has analysed social processes primarily connected with changes in capitalism and its associated class, political, economic and cultural relations (Held et al., 1999; Ohmae, 1995). However, this is unduly restrictive, especially with the broadening range of interest in sociology in forms of difference (Calhoun, 1995; Taylor et al., 1994), stemming from ethnicity, ‘race’ (Smith, 1986), diaspora (Cohen, 1997) and gender (Felski, 1997). When the focus includes these forms of difference in addition to class, then a wider set of polities comes into focus. In particular, religions are prime carriers of ethnic, national and gender projects into global and regional conflicts. Such conflicts, for instance that between ‘fundamentalism’ and ‘the West’, are hard to understand without the inclusion of gender and ethnic projects alongside those of class and economics. This article seeks to integrate the concern with multiple forms of difference into the theorization of polities and globalization.

Definitions of globalization are diverse. The definition used here is deliberately minimalist, both in order to avoid conflating the causation of globalization with its definition and also to allow for the possibility of multiple waves of globalization with different causes. I define globalization as ‘a process of increased density and frequency of international or global social interactions

relative to local or national ones'. This closely follows Chase-Dunn, Kawano and Brewer (2000: 78). I am resisting a definition in terms of supraterritoriality (Scholte, 2000), as this underestimates the extent to which global processes still have a territorial component (Sassen, 1999). The causes of globalization include: the increased power of global capital markets; the rise of new information and communication technologies (Castells, 1996, 1997, 1998); and the rise of a new hegemon which creates the conditions for increased trade (Chase-Dunn et al., 2000).

## Beyond Nation-States

It is inappropriate to treat nation-states as the main type of society for four reasons:

- 1 There are more nations than states.
- 2 Several key examples of supposed nation-states at their most developed moments were actually Empires.
- 3 There are diverse and significant polities in addition to states, including the European Union (EU) and some organized religions, as well as the emergence of multi-lateral and global forms of governance.
- 4 Polities overlap, notwithstanding the popular myth of nation-state sovereignty over a given territory. This means that the economic, political and cultural domains are not neatly over-lapping in discrete bounded units.

These phenomena are not new, consequences of the recent round of globalization. However, attempts to theorize globalization brings them to the fore.

## More Nations than States

There are far more nations than states. It is rare for a territory to have one nation and the whole of that nation, and one state, and the whole of that state. Most nations and national projects do not have a state of their own; instead they often share a state with other nations and national projects. This pattern of cross-cutting nations and states can be a result of migration, forced or voluntary, of war, or of conquest. This is not an argument that there are not states, but rather that there are not often stable *nation*-states. A nation is a political and cultural project, based on a sense of common heritage (Smith, 1986) and imagined community (Anderson, 1983). It involves social institutions in civil society and it may or may not include a polity of its own. Nations are much more often projects that are in the process of becoming something more, than they are actually realized in stable political institutions and command over territory.

For instance, within the United Kingdom, there are nations of English, Scottish and Welsh as well as part of the Irish nation. The history of Ireland is significantly about the struggle of a national project to establish a state of its own in order to break free from the British Empire, but one which is never fully realized. It is obvious in the case of Ireland that it is necessary to distinguish analytically between nations, states and other polities since during the 19th century the Irish nation was ruled by the British state. The Irish nation sought its independent state, winning one in the 1920s after military action on behalf of the nation, but only for that part of the Irish nation living in the south of the island (Curran, 1980). During this struggle the nationalist movement made an alliance with the transnational Catholic Church (Larkin, 1975), and as a consequence the inter-war Irish constitution gave a special place for the Catholic Church (Farrell, 1988). The transformation of Ireland into its current 'Celtic Tiger' status (O'Hearn, 1998), as a modern rapidly growing economy, only took place after Ireland joined yet another transnational polity, the EU. This not only provided a stepping-stone to global markets, but also demanded the modernization of gender relations in employment, such as ending the then legal ban on married women working in some occupations, as a price for membership of the EU (Curtin, 1989).

In order to understand Irish development, we need to understand multiple polities of nations, states, religion and the EU. A nation-state has been a mythical goal, often sought, but never fully achieved. Ireland's insertion into global processes depends upon the varied insertions of different polities within diverse global networks. Links to global capital and economic networks are facilitated by the EU; links to a power centre of the domestic gender regime exist via the Catholic Church; while the Irish diaspora in the USA provides a link into a US presence in the negotiations over the status of Northern Ireland, a link which is strengthened by global communications media (Anderson and O'Dowd, 1999). The relationship between Ireland and globalization is not best represented as that of the undermining of a nation-state by global capital, but rather of the complex restructuring of multiple polities which are linked into different global networks.

Ireland is not an isolated example of the complex conflictual intertwining of nations and states rather than comfortable congruency. Within Spain and France there is a Basque nation which seeks separation and a state of its own. The break up of the Soviet empire has precipitated many nations and would-be nations into seeking a state of their own; several of these have not achieved their objective, despite the multiplicity of new states that have been created. The state of Canada contains not only Canadians but also the French-speaking, state-seeking nation of Québécois. Boundaries of states change rapidly. For instance, Germany was established as a state only in the 19th century but has seen the repeated movement of pieces of territory between itself and France; enlargement and contraction during the middle of the 20th century; partition into two territories each with a very different state in the second half of the 20th century; followed by a short recent period of reunification of East and West.

Europe is riddled with cross-cutting nations, aspiring nations, and states (Boje, van Steenbergen and Walby, 1999; Brubaker, 1996). Nation-states with the whole of one nation and no other and one state, and no other polity, which are stable in time and space, are hard to find in Europe, and indeed, anywhere elsewhere in the world. At most, nation-states exist for short moments of history, before being reconstructed yet again.

### Empires not Nation-States

It is often considered that nation-states became a common political and social form after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, with the height of this form existing from the 18th or 19th centuries until the mid-20th century. The most frequently found location of nation-states is usually assumed to be Europe (Mann, 1993b; Tilly, 1990).

However, several key examples of what have been claimed to be nation-states during the period of its supposed height, for example Britain, France, Spain and Portugal (e.g. Mann, 1993b), were actually empires during the 19th century, not nation-states. The British state ruled many countries around the world, from Ireland to Africa, from Canada to Australia. Most of Africa was subject to colonial rule from Britain, France and Portugal. Most of South America was subject to colonial rule from Spain and Portugal until nearly the end of the 19th century. Decolonization of Africa from the British Empire was not complete until the 1970s (Banks and Muller, 1998). It does not make sense to consider people who were subject to these empires to be members of European nations. The civil society institutions of the Europeans, which constituted the basis of their nations and national projects, were significantly different from the civil society institutions of the conquered peoples. The Europeans and the Africans within the British Empire did not share a sense of common heritage, rather they were quite different. There might have been a large and territorially extended British state, but this was not matched by a similar extension to the British nation. The British nation was a smaller, more confined entity than the British state. At the time of these empires, most people in the world were not within an entity that could reasonably be called a nation-state, since those who were colonized were not part of the colonizing 'nation'.

Analyses of the 19th century have often focused on the states ruling the empires. For instance, despite his (1986) interest in pre-1760 empires, Mann leaves this conceptualization behind in his analysis of the post-1760 period, where he, in practice, treats Britain and France as if they were nation-states (1993a). In so doing there tends to be, at best, the leaving out of focus, at worst, of erasing from history, the experiences of those many people who were subject to these colonial states. It is not appropriate to ignore these empires in accounts of the rise of nation-states, as if those under the rule of empires were of little significance, as if Europe and North America constituted the whole of the world. The 19th century was the hey-day of empires, not nation-states.

### Polities Beyond Nation-States

In order to theorize polities in a way which allows both for the consideration of differences other than class and for the engagement with globalization, there needs to be a re-thinking of the concept of polity. There are polities in addition to states. There are states, but more besides. There are nations, if they have well-developed sets of civil society institutions. There are also regional polities or hegemons, such as the EU. Some organized religions, such as Catholicism and Islam, also constitute polities. It is particularly important to include regional polities and religions because they are highly significant carriers of ethnic and gender projects. Further, there are additional emergent forms of governance which are not polities, including both multilateral and global forms.

The definition of 'polity' developed here is that of an entity which has authority over a specific social group, territory or set of institutions; some degree of internal coherence and centralized control; some rules and the ability to enforce sanctions against those members who break its rules; the ability to command deference from other polities in specific arenas over which it claims jurisdiction; and which has authority over a broad and significant range of social institutions and domains. The forms of authority, power and means to enforce sanctions are varied. There are different kinds of power, including coercion, economic, legal and symbolic power. These can be coordinated in different ways and have varied spatial and temporal reach. The notion of membership is needed to ascertain who is within and who is outside a polity. Most have complex rules on entry and exit (for instance one parent must have been a member or location of birth was within its jurisdiction), with complex processes or rituals mediated by bureaucrats or priests for later changes.

This definition of polity is wider than that traditionally used. However, it is not intended to capture all forms of governance structures within this definition. There are some forms of governance which do not have the temporal and spatial scale or the institutional range necessary to constitute a polity. Small scale, specialized institutions of governance, such as business firms, labour unions, hospitals and universities, are not within the concept. Not all sets of political institutions constitute polities. There are a number of borderline cases: for instance, national projects that have strong institutions within civil society. If a political collectivity is not able to enforce deference to its rules from its members and from established polities then it falls outside my definition of polity. Only well-developed national projects will meet these criteria and many embryonic projects do not. Similarly, communities based on criteria of ethnicity, racialization or linguistic commonality may or may not establish sufficient institutions for them to constitute a polity.

Nations can be a type of polity under certain circumstances. A nation is a social and political group which is perceived to have a common history and destiny and which has a set of governing institutions which root such beliefs in the social and political structure. It can be a polity when its institutions are well developed and it is able to demand some external deference. One example is the

Irish nation just before the establishment of the Irish state (Larkin, 1975), another is Scotland (McCrone, 1992).

States today are typically polities. Modern states usually have sufficient power and authority to command internal governance and external deference and to warrant being conceptualized as polities. However, there are occasional exceptions, such as when a state's institutions of internal governance have suffered serious collapse due to civil or foreign war, for example, as was the case in Somalia.

### *European Union*

The existence of the EU further compromises the notion that Europe is full of nation-states. The EU is a strong polity in its own right. It is a polity on the global stage. In particular, the EU is a major trading bloc. It is able to command deference from other polities for its actions, such as representing the interests of all member states of the EU in world trade discussions. It represents a significant set of economic interests, as well as a particular stance on a wide range of associated issues, for example, food safety. It is the EU, not its member states, which is threatened by reprisals from the USA over bananas and GM foods and it was the EU which banned British beef exports during the BSE crisis, rather than the UK government. A further arena where the EU has an important global presence is in the discussion and implementation of human rights. While human rights is a global discourse, its operationalization in particular institutions and practices is uneven and contested. It is in the practical implementation of human rights in the post-Second World War period for which the EU is noticeable (Therborn, 1995).

While the EU meets the definition of a polity, there have been extensive arguments over whether or not the EU meets the conventional definition of a state. The arguments focus on its lack of armed forces and on the question of whether it is autonomous from member states. Conventional definitions of states, following Weber (1968), include a monopoly of legitimate force in its territory. The EU does not have its own armies, militia or police, and attempts to create a military arm failed (e.g. the European Defence Community in the early 1950s) (Kapteyn, 1996), although this is currently under review following the Balkans and Gulf crises. This either means that the EU is not a state, or that the conventional definition of the state needs to be revised so as to encompass such bodies as the EU. The second reason offered as to why the EU might not be a state is that it is merely an intergovernmental body, used as a tool by member states to complete their own domestic agendas (Milward, 1992; Moravcsik, 1993). This position is based on giving primacy to the consent of member states through their signature on treaties, rather than to the actions of the EU machinery of governance, and on considering the Council of Ministers as more important than the European Commission, the European Parliament, or the European Court of Justice.

However, these arguments that the EU is merely an intergovernmental body are not convincing. This is because the EU has supreme legal power in important areas, as well as cohesion through institutions such as the European Court of Justice, European Commission and European Parliament (Weiler, 1997). The laws of the EU take legal precedence over the laws of member states in areas that are within its remit, or legal jurisdiction. The EU has supreme authority over a specific and agreed range of arenas, of which the most important is the Single European Market in goods, services and labour. These powers are far-reaching in its spheres of legitimate action. For example, the EU took legal action against member states which did not adequately implement its Directives on equal opportunities in the 1970s and 1980s. The European Commission took several member states to the European Court of Justice, winning the legal battle and ensuring that the defeated member states revised their domestic legislation. A second route by which the EU achieves legal dominance is by allowing individual citizens to appeal directly to EU law over the heads of their national governments (Hoskyns, 1996; Walby, 1999a).

While the EU is legally superior to the member states on those areas within its remit, this superiority is not best conceptualized as always being a simple zero-sum game. Rather, sometimes, the EU enables member countries to carry out domestic agendas more successfully than if they were not part of the EU. In particular, the development of the Single European Market has made it more possible for some European countries to have successful domestic economies in a global era. Nevertheless, the consequence of the supreme authority of the EU over the regulation of the economic market within its territory is that member states are not able to regulate major parts of 'their' economies themselves. Since the regulation of the economy is usually regarded as a key feature of a modern nation-state, this development seriously compromises the extent to which member countries of the EU constitute nation-states.

The EU depends for its internal power on legal authority based on political agreement. Its powers to govern economic matters are huge, yet its cohesion and power do not rest on a shared identity. The EU is a polity, not a culture, nor a nation-in-the-making. The EU is a significant polity, of a type that is not reducible to traditional conceptualizations of a state or nation-state.

### *Religion*

Organized religions typically have a different range of power resources from those of states. Nevertheless, they may effectively govern important social institutions, such as the family. Not all religions take the form of a polity. The concept is restricted to those religions that have regularized structures of governance and a hierarchy of organizational practices. Only salvational religions are likely to develop such governance structures.

Religion is often considered no longer relevant to analyses of modernity (Thompson, 1995), largely because of a presumption that modernization produced secularization. However, the extent of secularization can be exaggerated,

while the significance of its restructuring in relation to secular polities can be underestimated (Gorski, 2000). Organized religions have three main routes to authority. First, there is the moral authority articulated through religious belief. Second, there is action as a form of political pressure on states and other polities. Third, there is the power to sanction members of the religious community if they break rules of the religion.

It might be thought that, in the modern world, the powers of organized religion are reduced to the first two, and that only the state has the right to sanction citizens for breaking the community's rules. However, this is mistaken. This power is still potent in some locations, especially in the regulation of 'personal life', that is in areas of sexuality and family relations such as marriage, divorce, contraception, abortion and homosexuality. The sanctions range from the religion's refusal to carry out rituals which are considered essential (e.g. communion for those ex-communicated; divorce; church re-marriage for those divorced by the state), to the threat of eternal damnation (e.g. for abortion). There are several examples of religions that are sufficiently organized in some locations in some periods of time to constitute polities in this sense, including both Catholicism and Islam today, though only as practised in certain locations.

There are significant variations in the form of Islam, which are at least partly due to the interaction between Islam and the state and the economy of the country within which it is located (Kandiyoti, 1991; Shamsul, 1996). The detailed implications of the Koran for conduct are interpreted by local as well as regional and global Islamic leaders and can vary according to the social and economic environment. For instance, the interpretation of the rules surrounding interest on savings and related banking transactions are more conducive to capitalist modernization in Malaysia than in Pakistan or Saudi Arabia (Said, 1996; *The Economist*, 2001).

In many Moslem countries, Islamic (Sharia) law directly governs 'personal life', while in other matters Islamic principles merely guide the state. In practice, there is a vast range of relations between Islam and states, from the formal separation of religion and state in Turkey, the application of 'personal' religious laws to Muslims only as in Malaysia, to the integration of religion and state in a theocratic state under the Ayatollah in post-1979 Iran (Kandiyoti, 1991). The contestation of the remit of the state and Islam has been particularly acute in the area of 'personal laws' regulating marriage, divorce, women's clothing and whether wife beating is within the remit of secular or religious law. There have been quite different outcomes of this contestation among such Muslim countries as Malaysia, Iran and Turkey (Hardacre, 1993; Moghadam, 1993).

In international politics Islam can constitute a significant polity which has effects on the policies of other bodies. Islam can be an actor on the global stage, despite internal differences and multiple centres of power. It can constitute a frame of reference within which Islamic individuals perceive themselves to be acting. Some people are prepared to die in the pursuit of goals that they perceive

as Islamic. However, the coherence and unity should not be overstated. Mobilization is often most intense when Islam overlaps with another polity, especially nations, for example, Palestine.

Catholicism, similarly, is a polity with a contemporary as well as historic presence on the global stage. Similarly to Islam there are complex relations with its host states and, though most today have a formal separation of Church and State, there have, historically, been examples of theocratic Catholic states (Gorski, 2000). Catholicism, like Islam, simultaneously has both a coherence and considerable diversity. There is diversity within Catholicism between different countries, for instance that in Latin America is significantly different from that in Europe, and there have been significant changes over time. Again there are moves to reform Catholicism from the inside so that it is more conducive to contemporary social developments.

A further example of the presence of both Catholicism and Islam as polities on the global stage is that of the alliance between Islam and Catholicism in opposition to the EU in the fourth UN world conference on women on the nature of women's human rights in relation to fertility and sexuality. The religious coalition sought to restrict the extension of rights to individual women to make their own choices on matters of 'personal' life, especially abortion, contraception and sexuality. The EU, by contrast, was a significant advocate of women's individual right to choose (Moghadam, 1996).

The content of religion and its relations to other social institutions may be being restructured in modern countries (Gorski, 2000), but this is not the same as a simple decline. The nature of this restructuring can be highly significant. As in contemporary Islam, there are within Catholicism particular contestations of remit with the state over issues of 'personal' behaviour, in particular the regulation of contraception, abortion, marriage and divorce (Ingليس, 1987). These contestations are shaped by both economic developments and the involvement of these polities in complex transnational networks and conflicts. They are affected by the extent and nature of global connections in economic, political and cultural domains. The argument here is that the major salvational religions of Catholicism and Islam govern significant aspects of life among significant numbers of people, while simultaneously cross-cutting other polities.

There has been a significant development of multilateral (Ruggie, 1998) and global forms of governance, which stop short of constituting new forms of polities. These include: first, the development of a form of international law in which not only states but individuals have rights, especially in relation to human rights, for instance in the operationalization of the UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights; second, the internationalization of political decision-making, including formal bodies such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, UNESCO, the United Nations, as well as international non-governmental bodies; and third, the development of international 'security' structures, such as the military pacts embedded in NATO (Held, 1995).

### Polities Overlap and do not Politically Saturate a Territory

Polities cut across each other and do not politically saturate a territory. Different kinds of polities may govern different areas of social life. For instance, a church and a state may divide between themselves the institutions over which they claim authority and jurisdiction. Sometimes polities will agree overtly or accommodate *de facto* to their division of jurisdiction over different institutions, although at other times it is contested.

While some polities that co-exist in a given territory may reach an accommodation as to their respective *remits*, others contest this. The variable boundary between religion and state is an example. In most of Europe, Churches have over recent centuries been slowly if unevenly ceding to the state, often after struggle, the authority to regulate many aspects of 'personal' life, such as contraception, abortion, marriage, divorce, homosexuality and sexual practices. These have often been constructed as 'moral' issues when they have been under religious jurisdiction, but have become more 'political' the more they have become under the jurisdiction of the state. This change is related to processes of modernization, and to change in the nature of the gender regime. This transfer of remit is not complete in Europe, since it is openly contested in Ireland (Smyth, 1992), although it is more settled in the Nordic countries. The issue of the proper boundary of religion and state on these issues is an important focus in many fundamentalist movements, both Christian and Islamic, from Asia to the USA, which seek to reverse this transfer of authority (Hardacre, 1993). These contestations between the polities of religions and states within the same territory for the regulation of 'personal' life are often highly gendered, in that these issues are critical to the differences between domestic and public gender regimes. With the conceptualization of religion as a polity, the theorization of these struggles is made more straightforward.

Polities do not have exclusive authority over a given territory, nor are their powers limited to a specific territory. This is not a new phenomenon, as is sometimes suggested in accounts of the ostensibly restricted power of the nation-state in the era of globalization (Brenner, 1999). Several religions, including Islam and Catholicism, have always straddled state boundaries and have often been accommodated by a state, dividing authority over different areas of social life (Kandiyoti, 1991). Supra-states, such as the EU, share legitimate authority with their member states, within negotiated and agreed arenas (Leibfried and Pierson, 1995; Walby, 1999b). Further, the power of some states extends way beyond their borders, as a result of their exercise of military or economic power. Rather we see a set of overlapping polities, with differing *remits* over differing areas of social life. The boundaries between these different *remits* are themselves variously contested and accommodated.

The extent to which polities and other large-scale social entities are constituted in and through space is quite variable. Mid-20th-century states were more intensely territorialized than many other entities. Early empires did not have the technologies of power necessary to have such an intense hold on their territories,

such as bureaucracies with sophisticated means of surveillance (Mann, 1986). Religions are less intensely territorialized, in the sense that members of religious groups often retain their affiliations whether or not they are in the heartland of their religion, although they are stronger when they have at least the amount of proximity needed for groups to meet in churches and temples. Ethnic groups likewise usually retain their sense of belonging, whether they like it or not, even when they are a minority. The retention of such ethnic and religious identities constitutes the basis of the phenomenon of diaspora (Cohen, 1997). In the contemporary world, religions and ethnic groups may have strong maintenance of group boundaries that does not necessarily depend on territorial boundaries.

The tendency to identify a political or social unit with a territorial unit not only inappropriately reifies the nation-state, but more importantly leaves no room for other polities in this physical space. 'State-centrism' is criticized by Brenner (1999), who argues that there is a fixation, indeed false epistemology, based on territorial conceptions of the state as the unit of analysis. I am contesting the notion that a polity usually saturates, that is, has a political monopoly over all social relations, in a territory. Any one polity is unlikely to politically saturate all the social relations in a territory. Rather, polities co-exist and overlap in territories.

### **Any Nation-States?**

Are there any nation-states? In the period of empires, such an entity would have had to be both not an empire and to have escaped the reach of the several empires which circled the world, such as those of the British, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Russians. Examples of such countries are rare. In the current period they would need to be outside the EU. It is better to think in terms of a continuum towards nation-statehood, since there are no pure examples that are stable over time. There are two examples of countries that are quite well developed towards nation-statehood. The first is that of the USA, though only since the late 19th century. The second is a group that is fleeting, made up of entities after they had escaped empires yet before they had become absorbed by regional polities.

While Mann (1993a) suggests that the USA is an obvious example of a nation-state, I think limits need to be placed on this claim. It must be limited by time, not only to after its independence from the British empire, but also to after its own military defeat of erstwhile nations including the native peoples of America, of the Mexicans, of the settlers from the Spanish and French empires, and of the secessionist movement of the Confederacy in the South. This limits the start of the period of nation-statehood to the latter part of the 19th century. However, it is the case that in the contemporary USA, unlike many European countries, the many ethnic groups, despite deep divisions, rarely aspire to the creation of their own state, with the possible exception of the Black Nation of Islam. So on these grounds the contemporary USA is one

of furthest developed towards nation-statehood. However, the criterion that a single state and a single nation are coterminous is somewhat compromised by the extent to which the US state extends its powers over other nations. The USA is a hegemon which significantly interferes within the borders of other countries, with covert and overt political and military actions. These considerations compromise the claim that the USA is a nation-state, giving it some of the features of an empire, though not of the traditional sort (Van Alstyne, 1960). Nevertheless, it meets the criteria for nation-statehood more than other countries.

The second set of examples of nation-states are fleeting in time. They emerge on the world stage post-empire with a flurry of nationalist enthusiasm. Typically they are small and ethnically close to homogenous. However, many swiftly seek new coalitions and dependencies, which compromise their sovereignty, in order to gain access to other desired resources. For example, many in the long queue of countries seeking to join the EU have but recently departed the Soviet empire.

## Rethinking the Polity

Rethinking the concept of the polity is necessary. It should be broadened so as to include, not only traditional forms of state and those nations which have a developed set of institutions, but also emerging supra-states (such as the EU), and world salvational religions (such as Catholicism and Islam). It is crucial to disaggregate the concept 'nation-state' into nations and states, which may overlap, but are not co-terminous. Each of these types of polities has different forms of governance and different forms of authority and power. Nevertheless, each retains internal coherence, sets of rules for the members of the polity, and means of enforcing these rules against rule-breakers. Each of the polities carries different ethnic, religious and gender projects. Broadening the concept of polity beyond state and nation-state to include religion, nations and supra-states better allows analysis of gendered and ethnic political projects alongside those of class.

The traditional conceptualisation of the polity as a state within sociology draws on Weber's definition of a state as a community that claims the monopoly of legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. However, many polities today do not have a monopoly on a territory, notwithstanding Weber's (1968) definition of the state, or the Westphalian concept of the sovereignty of the nation-state. Polities overlap and contest each other's domains, so that any given territory is likely to be subject to several competing polities. For instance, the territory covered by the EU is subject to demands from both the EU and its member states, sometimes with agreed delimitation and sometimes not. The overlap and contestation between polities is particularly clear in the case of religions and states, when there can be conflicts as to whether church or state has primacy in the regulation of certain behaviours. Religions, with their centres

outside the territory of the state with which they are in conflict, can be polities of longer duration than many states.

## Rethinking 'Society'

I have argued that the typical sociological conception of society, which usually involves the coincidence of economy, polity and culture, is problematic. Ethos and polis, culture and polity, rarely map onto each other completely, notwithstanding nationalist aspirations in this regard. In order to understand globalization we need to understand the differential insertion of various kinds of overlapping polities in the networks of the emerging global order (Walby, 2004 forthcoming).

This is not quite an argument for the end of the usefulness of the concept of society. Rather it is an argument to treat societalization as a matter of degree. The extent of societalization is the extent to which the economic, political and cultural domains map onto each other in a given territory and mutually affect each other. The extent to which a system is produced, in the sense of such mutual interconnections, usually increases over time. This is to suggest that, rather than assuming that these levels of economy, polity and civil society map onto each other in a congruent fashion within units which are bounded in space and time, the extent to which this occurs is a question for analysis. We might ask about the degree of societalization, rather than presuming that it exists. The spatial and temporal reach of particular social institutions becomes a matter for investigation rather than presumption. There should be no assumption that a territorialized basis is necessary for connections between phenomena.

While in recent decades much of sociology has presumed this congruency of economy, polity and civil society, the classic sociological heritage was more diverse. While the development of national sociologies in the post-Second World War period and the legacy of Durkheim and Parsons and various Marxist structuralist schools of thought have tended to produce a conception of a bounded society, this is not a universal aspect of the sociological heritage. Marxists have held diverse positions, with some, such as Wallerstein (1974), theorizing the world, rather than specific countries, as a system, while other Marxists such as Jessop (1990) presume that societies and nation-states map onto each other. Weber (1968) cautiously made some references to 'societalization' as a process, though he did not systematically develop a theory of this process. To rethink the concept of 'society' and to replace it with a process of 'societalization' is not to abandon the sociological heritage, but rather to refocus our reinterpretation of it.

## Conclusions

In conclusion I am arguing for: a conceptualization of the social beyond the nation-state, which refuses the myths of the nation-state as the ideal society;

and in which the mapping of the economic, political and cultural domains onto one another is a matter of degree not presumption. In this framework links between the economic, political and cultural levels take place, not within a closed, bounded system, but in an immense variety of territorial and non-territorial locations. Different polities have different linkages into global networks. In particular, the development of the EU is speeding the development of the linkages between the economies of member states and global capital flows. The differential insertion of these varied domains into the global is the substance of contemporary sociology.

This brings into focus the significance of diaspora, of nations straddling state boundaries, and of polities overlapping with states. Nations can make appeals to a global stage independent from 'their' state. The increasing power and reach of the global media speeds and deepens the communications. Key linkages are routed through notions of collectivity of nation, religion and ethnicity, not merely evenly diffused. It contributes to the sociological ability to analyse the significance of gender and religion, as well as class, in global processes.

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