

Beyond Nation-State Paradigms: Globalization, Sociology, and the Challenge of Transnational Studies¹

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Globalization has made it increasingly necessary to break with nation-state centered analysis in macrosociologies. Social structure is becoming transnationalized, and an epistemological shift is required in concurrence with this ontological change. A new interdisciplinary transnational studies should be predicated on a paradigmatic shift in the focus of social inquiry from the nation-state as the basic unit of analysis to the global system as the appropriate unit. Sociology's fundamental contribution to a transnational studies should be the study of transnational social structure. This article does not establish a new transnational paradigm. Rather, it surveys and critiques nation-state-centrism in extant paradigms, provides a rationale for a new transnational approach, and proposes a research curriculum of a new transnational studies that may contribute to paradigmatic reconceptualization.

KEY WORDS: nation-state; macrosociology; globalization; comparative sociology; transnational studies; development.

In times of structural transformation representativity enters an alliance with the past and blocks our view of the peaks of the future that are intruding onto the horizon on all sides . . . Before clarity can be achieved here, however, a bit more future must come into view.—Ulrich Beck

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INTRODUCTION

Sociology, and the social sciences in general, are attempting to come to terms with globalization as the world-historic context of events on the eve of the 21st century. Acknowledgment of the growing importance of studying the whole world “as a legitimate object of knowledge” (Sklair, 1995a:1) has contributed to the emergence of multidisciplinary units dedicated to “global studies” or “transnational studies” in universities in the United States and elsewhere. Alongside this emergence is a proliferation of research institutes, nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations dedicated to exploring the diverse dimensions of globalization, including its nature, consequences, and policy implications.

I do not propose in this essay a survey of the current state of transnational studies or a comprehensive review of recent literature, much less to elaborate a new transnational paradigm. Rather, my intent is twofold. First, I call for a break with the “nation-state framework of analysis” that continues to guide much macrosocial inquiry despite recognition among scholars that globalization involves fundamental change in our paradigmatic reference points. Even as the social sciences turn toward transnational studies, scholars often fail to recognize the truly *systemic* change represented by globalization, or what Ruggie terms an “epochal threshold” (Ruggie, 1993). Consequently, research into transnationalism unfolds within the straightjacket of a nation-state framework. The nation-state is still taken as the basic unit of analysis, and transnationalism and globalization are seen as merely some new stage in *international* relations or in *cross-national* comparative studies (Robinson, 1996a). I suggest that much macrosocial inquiry has run up against certain cognitive and explanatory limitations in the face of globalization since nation-state conceptualizations are incapable of explaining phenomena that are transnational in character. The way out of this impasse is to shift our focus from the nation-state as the basic unit of analysis to the global system as the appropriate unit. Sociology’s fundamental contribution to transnational studies should be the study of *transnational social structure* as the discipline’s essential object of inquiry and as a key variable in the global system. I also will selectively examine some recent and promising lines of research into globalization, and suggest elements of an ongoing research agenda in transnational studies.

Second, this essay aims to make the case for a more systematic communication and collaboration in the academy between sociology and political science—particularly between sociology’s development studies and political science’s international relations (IR). The goal is to promote the development of an emergent transnational studies as a more integrated interdisciplinary endeavor. Sociology has a rich reservoir from which trans-

national studies should draw (cf, Halliday, 1987; Smith, 1987). Political sociology, with its insights into class, the state, and social structure, the relation between structure and agency, and the interconnections it draws between different dimensions of the social totality, provides important analytical and explanatory tools. Comparative and historical sociology, with their stress on the world-historic context of international developments and their clues to patterns of change over time and place, contribute to understanding transitions between distinct historic epochs. And sociology's world-system theory—in particular, its theoretical presupposition that the development of international society is constituted by the spread of a social system at the international level—constitutes a powerful macrostructural framework for analyzing world events despite certain limiting factors that I discuss below. On the other hand, IR scholars have contributed greatly to a sociological understanding of globalizing dynamics with their recent renewal of research into world political economy and with the development of a Gramscian model of international relations.

Social scientists contend, however, over the precise meaning of globalization. My definition of globalization, which underlies my analysis, is as follows. The core of globalization, theoretically conceived, comprises two interwoven processes: (1) the near culmination of a centuries-long process of the spread of capitalist production around the world and its displacement of all precapitalist relations (“modernization”); and (2) the transition in recent decades from the linkage of nations via commodity exchange and capital flows in an integrated international market, in which different modes of production were “articulated” within broader social formations, to the globalization of the process of production itself. Globalization denotes a transition from the linkage of national societies predicated on a *world economy* to an emergent transnational or global society predicated on a *global economy*. The essence of globalization is global capitalism, which has superseded the nation-state stage of capitalism. This definition draws on Jameson's (1984), Harvey's (1989), and Mandel's (1975) analysis of a third, “postmodernist” expansion of capitalism into its current global stage. Building on their insights, I propose that new patterns of accumulation based on this “third-wave” technology—communications, informatics, computerization, etc.—*require* a more generalized commodification. This wave therefore catalyzes the breakup of residue precapitalist spheres and hastens the process of globalized integrated circuits of production. However, as Ruggie (1993) notes, Jameson and Harvey do not match their analysis of a new global economic/social space (space–time compression in the economic and social) with new forms of configuring political space beyond the nation-state. Economic globalization brings with it the material basis for the emergence of a singular global society, marked by the transnationalization of

civil society and political processes, the global integration of social life, and a "global culture." In this view, nations are no longer linked externally to a broader system but internally to a singular global social formation.

My definition of globalization, therefore, supersedes extant conceptions offered by Robertson (1992), Giddens (1990), and Waters (1995). These sociologists see globalization as a *quantitative* process of the deepening of global interconnections (the objective dimension) and the deepening of our awareness of such interconnections (the subjective dimension). In Water's typology (1995:4), there are three distinct theoretical approaches to globalization, all of which posit globalization as a quantitative process: a process beginning with the dawn of human history, a process associated with modern world history (modernization) that involves the development of capitalism and accelerates quantitatively in the current period, and a recent process associated with postindustrial society. The *qualitative* definition I advance here sees globalization as coextensive with all three approaches in this typology but views quantitative change as giving way to qualitative change. The very constitution of human societies has always involved interconnections as asserted in the first approach in the typology. Consistent with the second approach, I view capitalism is the first *form* of society to spread globally and to incorporate all societies into a world system. Under globalization, I argue, consonant with the third approach, that the capitalist system is breaking down all precapitalist residues and integrating the various polities, cultures, and institutions of national societies into an emergent transnational or global society. In distinction to Waters' premise that economic, political, and cultural dimensions of globalization are "structurally independent," and to Robertson's and Giddens' cultural determinacy, my definition of globalization posits a material over an ideational determinacy, and assigns structural determinacy to the global economy. The modern world system has gone through successive waves of global interconnections, each of which has deepened webs of relations and further broken down local, national, and regional autonomies. The qualitative change generated by globalization is the supersession of the nation-state as the principal form of social organization. This process is underway but far from complete. By my definition, the current epoch cannot be captured by nation-state paradigms. Understanding of the epoch therefore demands paradigmatic reconceptualization.

THE NATION-STATE REIFICATION IN EXISTING PARADIGMS

Globalization has thrown existing paradigms in development (and more generally, in comparative and macro) sociology and in IR into an

impasse. The way out of this impasse is to break with nation-state centered analysis. Paradigms consist of particular ontological assumptions and particular epistemological principles, and embody as well a set of theoretical principles. Most importantly, they provide a definition of the appropriate domain of inquiry to which these principles are to be applied. Despite their divergent theoretical principles, distinct nation-state paradigms share as the domain of their inquiry the nation-state and the interstate system. As a consequence, these paradigms are unable to account for mounting anomalies brought about by globalization.

Nation-state paradigms describe how motion occurs given a set of historical structures. But limitations are revealed in the ontological comprehension of fundamental transformation in the historical structures upon which the analysis of motion is predicated. The nation-state is not transhistoric. Good social analysis requires that we study not only the laws of motion of a *given* set of structures, but also the transformation of those structures—both the synchronic and the diachronic dimensions of historically constituted structures. The nation-state system is the historically specific correspondence between production, social classes, and territoriality—a correspondence that led to a given political form that became the nation-state. The material basis for the nation-state is presently being superseded by globalization. Thus, a truly transnational studies requires the return to a theoretical conceptualization of the state, not as a “thing” but as a specific social relation inserted into larger social structures that may take different, and historically determined, institutional forms, only one of which is the nation-state. Viewing the interstate system as an immutable structure in which social change and development occur has resulted in a *nation-state reification*.

The essence of this reification is the twin conflation of the nation-state with the state and with society. Several seminal studies in the 1970s renewed interest in studying the state (cf. Evans *et al.*, 1985). For example, Skocpol’s *States and Social Revolutions* (1979) highlighted the role that states play in mediating the intersection of internal and external boundaries of a social formation. Evans’ *Dependent Development* (1979) analyzed the role of states in guiding national development. But the case for “bringing the state back in” has been overemphasized, tending to equate states with the institutional form they have taken in the nation-state. In contrast, a new transnational studies requires that analysts “take out” the crippling nation-state framework into which states, social classes, political systems, and so on have been pigeonholed. The problem is manifest in the way the terms “state” and “nation” are used almost interchangeably in nation-state paradigms. The imputation of a *transhistoric* character to the nation-state is erroneous in that it assigns a universal character to relatively fixed set of historic struc-

tures whose foundations were laid in the sixteenth century. Yet the presupposition of an immutable nation-state structure and interstate system still constitutes the basis of IR research and remains one of the central theoretical tenets of sociology's world system analysis and of development sociology in general.

The second conflation contained in the nation-state reification is the conflation of the nation-state with society. Following Giddens' (1985) assumption that society and the nation-state tend to be coterminous, many recent approaches to globalization and transnationalism pose a research agenda that implicitly and often explicitly rests on interactions among nation-states as societies and propose that the task of a transnational studies is to examine such exchanges between national societies. The problem with this construct is the proposition that social relations across the formal juridical boundaries of nation-states are somehow "extrasocietal." A recent study of the impact of globalizing dynamics on development, for example, asserts that "societies are not independent units," and therefore global phenomena should be approached by focusing on "intersocietal exchanges" and "the character and dynamic of the international system" (Fiala, 1992:205). But "society" as social structure cannot be limited to the specific historic form of the nation-state. Without understating the existence of societies prior to the emergence of the nation-state, nation-states cannot be understood as isolated social systems under the assumption of a *transhistoric* symmetry between nation-states and social structure that rules out by ontological assumption and methodological fiat the study of social structure that is truly *supra-* or *transnational* in character.

It is debatable whether the essential locus of social organization was the nation-state even in the modern period. Transnational studies must move beyond the notion that nation-states are the organizing principle of modern society since globalization involves the emergence of truly supranational social structure (cf. Sklair, 1995a; Robinson, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c). But the "intersocietal systems" approach proposed by Giddens to "cut across whatever dividing lines exist between societies or societal totalities" (Giddens, 1984) does not resolve the national-global antinomy. This approach views the nation-state as the basic unit of analysis, assumes that a nation-state "society" is in fact a totality, and posits relations between nation-states as an object of study external to the study of nation-state societies. Although Giddens systematically incorporates the term "globalization" in a more recent study, the nation-state fetishism persists: globalization is the "universalization of the nation-state" through a deepening of the modernization process ("space-time distancing"; 1990). In Giddens' construct, transnational studies becomes simply the examination of

“intersocietal systems” that leaves untouched the conflation of nation-states and societies.⁴

Mann (1986) remarks that sociologists often have conceived of society as “an unproblematic, unitary totality” and as “the total unit of analysis” when, in fact, this concept applies at best to nation-states. In distinction to Giddens’ and others’ approaches that would suggest transnational studies focus on external exchanges between nations, Mann argues that nation-states cannot be understood as social systems. The nation-state is an historically bound phenomenon, emerging in the last 500 years or so, in conjunction with the European transition from feudalism to capitalism, the consolidation of national markets and productive structures, and concomitant states and polities. The emergence of territorially based *national* economies regulated by the (nation) state led to peoples’ derivation of subjective identities from their sense of geographic space, with a certain congruence between subjective identity and the material coordinates of life in the preglobalization period. In turn, the phenomenology of the nation-state period of world history led to the “nation” as a Sorelian myth or what Anderson (1983) has pointedly characterized as an “imagined community.”

The nation-state system, or interstate system, is an historical outcome, the particular form in which capitalism came into being based on a complex relation between production, classes, political power, and territoriality. This relation is now being superseded by globalization. Mann shows how the system of territorial states emerged as part and parcel of the emergence of capitalism in its European core, and this system has dominated international relations ever since. However, there is “nothing in the capitalist mode of production” that itself leads to the emergence of “many networks of production, divided and at war, and of an overall class structure that is nationally segmental” (Mann, 1986:515). Mann identifies four basic networks of social interaction constitutive of social power: economic, political, ideological, and coercive. He challenges the concept of “society” and argues that every historical period should be analyzed in terms of these networks of interaction. Although the lack of determinacy in his construct raises issues of causality in historic change, the point I wish to raise there is that these interactive networks, under globalization, operate both “over” and “under” the nation-state system and undermine its institutional logic and any rationality in conceiving of social structure in national terms. The global

⁴In somewhat contradictory fashion, Giddens also notes (accurately, in my view) that globalization involves the disembedding or “lifting out of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across time and space” (1990:21), or what I would characterize as the globalization of social structure. This being the case, it is not clear why the capitalist nation-state should remain the primordial fixed *institution* of social life, as Giddens suggests.

economy is eroding the very material basis for the nation-state. Territoriality and production are no longer bound together. Yet sociologists, political scientists, and other scholars are still trapped in outdated notions of international relations as a phenomenon whose principal dynamic is interaction between nation-states. The terms we have developed are highly revealing and underscore a problem of commensurability: *international*, or *interstate*, meaning between nations or national states; comparative *national* development, and so on.

The nation-state reification is apparent in existing paradigms in development studies (and comparative sociology more generally) and in IR. While paradigms have competed with each other *within* sociology and political science, a definite correspondence exists between philosophical and macrotheoretical ideas and assumptions and a set of three principal paradigms in each discipline. The three broad paradigms in development sociology are modernization, dependency/world system theories, and Marxist models. The three paradigms in IR are liberalism/pluralism, realism, and Marxist models. Modernization in development studies and liberalism/pluralism in IR exhibit a rough correspondence, as do realism and dependency/world-systems theory, respectively,⁵ and Marxist class analysis in both. Each of these three sets of paradigms has maintained an internal logic and consistency. Until recently, each has also been able to maintain a theoretical coherence and therefore legitimacy in the social sciences despite competition from other paradigms.

Modernization theory in development studies and liberalism in IR are both premised on pluralist models. They are philosophically anchored in Grotian natural law theory and theoretically grounded in structural-functional sociology. They rest on assumptions of social equilibrium as a natural state of global order and of developmental processes based on the nation-state system. The free operation of the market in an international setting brings the most efficient worldwide allocation of resources and output, and is in the general interest of nations seen as unitary units. Attempts to come to grips with globalization *within* the logic of the paradigm have remained within the nation-state framework. A new generation of modernization studies, for instance, purports to correct earlier defects in modernization theory, such as conceding that "tradition" is not necessarily an impediment

⁵Equating dependency/world-system analysis with realism in IR as I do is not typical. The reasons why are discussed below. While this equation should not be overstated, both share a state-centered structuralism, although the point beckons an elaboration not possible here. But I should state as caveat that aspects of these paradigms overlap, and scholarship does not usually exhibit a one-to-one correspondence with a particular paradigm. Thus, e.g., many Marxist analysts borrow from world-system theory, many dependency theorists would consider their brand of analysis Marxist, much realist analysis incorporates major assumptions of liberalism/pluralism.

to development, incorporating “external factors” and concrete historical analysis into a more synthetic analysis of development (Weiner and Huntington, 1987; So, 1990). But the unit of analysis remains the nation-state system, and the fundamental assumption is that modernization and development unfold within this system. Reich (1992), operating from within the liberal paradigm, has warned of impending paradigmatic breakdown absent a reconceptualization.

Dependency/world-system theories in development studies and realism in IR share managerial and “state-centered” models of power and nation-state interaction as the basic locus of analysis. They are philosophically anchored in Hobbesian assumptions of a natural state of conflict and zero-sum dynamics in the international system, and are of Weberian theoretical persuasion in underlying notions of geopolitical competition and in theoretical conceptualization of the state. The dependency theory of the 1960s and 1970s, in large part a response to modernization assumptions, emphasized external constraints to national development. Dependency theory was later broadened and systematized in world-system theory. This theory dramatically challenged then-conventional assumptions and should be credited with having altered the whole terrain of inquiry at the time with its original and path-breaking emphasis on a larger world-system as the appropriate unit of analysis. Concomitantly, much realist IR theory in the 1970s and 1980s called attention to growing international interdependencies. However, paradigmatic reconceptualization in these paradigm sets continues to be hampered by the fundamental premise of a nation-state system in which the units of comparison remain nation-states and within which relations of dependency and interdependency are reproduced or modified. World-system theory, akin in this regard to “left-wing realism,” posits a zero-sum dynamic: any national or regional movement through the periphery, semiperiphery, core continuum is, by theoretical fiat, at the expense of downward movement of another (nation) state or region. The construct is predicated on the (nation) state system, and the spatial, territorial, and juridical parameters of that system, in which the historically specific becomes transhistoric. The interstate system remains central to theoretical work in the world-system perspective, and much analysis from this theoretical perspective remains couched, implicitly if not explicitly, in nation-state centrism. The fundamental premise of world-system theory that “the key political institution of the modern world-system is the state system (or ‘international system’) [Chase-Dunn and Rubinson, 1979:277]” is almost identical to the fundamental operating assumption of realism in political science. Realist theory posits world dynamics as a zero-sum game board. The key actors are (nation) states operating in an “anarchic world” through a “competitive state system.” Leading IR scholars have grappled with the

systemic implications of globalization, proposing that transnational actors and processes are displacing the nation-state (cf. Keohane and Nye, 1977; Rosenau, 1980; Gilpin, 1987). And world-system theorists have noted certain systemic constraints in the world-system. Chase-Dunn and Rubinson (1977), for example, identify “ceiling effects” revealed by globalization. And Arrighi (1994) grapples with systemic implications as he explores the disjuncture, or increasing nonsymmetry, between world centers of accumulation and nation-state power as the world-system enters a new phase with the breakdown of the “U.S. regime.”⁶ But most cling tenaciously to the notion of an immutable nation-state system or to the position recently reiterated by Wallerstein that “the correspondence of the boundaries of the capitalist world-economy to that of an interstate system comprised of sovereign states” is a constitutive feature of the system (1990:289). What is problematized is how globalization *modifies* the dynamics of the nation-state system (in IR), or the international state system (in world-system theory), *rather than how globalization transforms and transcends the nation state system itself*.

Classical Marxist paradigms are better positioned in regard to paradigmatic reconceptualization insofar as they posit social classes and capital accumulation as the key unit of analysis, rather than the nation-state and the state system per se, at least at the level of theoretical abstraction. Tensions in the state system are derivative of class tensions and the contradictions of capitalism within and between nations, and uneven national

⁶Arrighi’s study is masterful and he proposes a research agenda quite compatible with a new transnational studies. But his prognosis for the future remains couched in embedded nation-state centrism. State power (and territorial-bound geopolitics) are implicitly equated with nation-states. He identifies, for example, the late 20th-century noncongruence of economic and political centers of power in the world-system and ponders the systemic implications of the observed phenomenon. But the state remains theoretically conceived as the nation-state. Arrighi suggests separate logics of analysis for the interstate system and the world economy, and discussion in the conclusion and epilogue is on the systemic implications of this novel development. He explores the changing patterns of distribution of attributes *within an interstate system*, i.e., particular novel combinations of economic and political networks that are increasingly out of synchronization and no longer under the coordination of a single center, as well as the tension between an emergent “East Asian regime” and a declining “U.S. regime.” In contrast, as I argue below and elsewhere, neither centers of accumulation nor political power are any longer correlative with nation-states or for that matter with geographic coordinates. Economic and political networks are increasingly located in transnational space and managed by transnational classes and groups that exhibit conflict among themselves not correlative with nation-state or territorial dynamics. World-system theory remains a benchmark in the social sciences. In my view, however, the adjustments to the theory necessary to explain the phenomena associated with globalization, such as the separation of the social, economic, and political variables that drive the global system from identification with nation-states and geographies, would result in a transmutation of the theory into something other than what it is, precisely along the lines of the paradigmatic reconceptualization that I advocate in the present essay.

development is a consequence of the law of uneven capital accumulation. Scholars in the classical Marxist tradition have thus argued, taking their cue from Lenin and Bukharin (cf. Bukharin, 1917/1989), that the dynamics of international relations are explained by “competing national capitals” and that the dynamics of unequal development are explained by the uneven accumulation of capital across national boundaries. However, as I discuss below, most Marxist inquiry into globalization posits, as a consequence, a globalizing scenario of competing core states and regional blocs (U.S., Europe, Japan) reflecting intensified rivalries among national capitals which become coequivalent with state rivalries. On the basis of the nation-state framework of analysis, they search, along with realist and world-system analysts, for a new “hegemon” in the international system. And most debate within the Marxist paradigm, played out among other places in the annual compendium of articles published in *The Socialist Register*, also problematizes how globalization modifies (but does not qualitatively change) the interstate system and modifies the prospects and circumstances of *national* development (cf. Miliband and Panitch, 1992, 1994). Many Marxist models thus also reify the nation-state by assuming that a correspondence between class and (nation) state power are immanent to capitalism, that (uneven) capital accumulation necessarily takes place within given nation-state territorialities, and that the indicator of uneven development is necessarily the uneven development of nations. As the global economy removes the territorial and national basis to capital, globalization tends to redefine the historic relationship Marxists have posited between class power and state power (cf. Gill and Law, 1988). Conflict between capitals in a global setting continues in such forms as fierce oligopolist competition over world markets, but this competition corresponds ever less to nation-state competition and rivalries, given such factors as the interpenetration of formerly “national” capitals and the transnationalization of capital and of classes (van der Pijl, 1984; Hymer, 1979; Gill, 1990; Robinson, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; Gilpin, 1987; Cox, 1981, 1987).⁷ It cannot be assumed that the contradictions of capitalism necessarily manifest themselves under globalization as contradictions between nation-states representing the interests of competing national capitals.

With the onset of globalization, there has been increasing recognition of the obsolescence of the nation-state as a practical unit of the global political economy, and concomitant recognition of the need in all three paradigm sets for new perspectives and for paradigmatic reorientation.

⁷Classical Marxism has not provided an adequate explanation for which dominant classes by some unexplained fiat are nation-state based, whereas subordinate classes are organically internationalist.

These concerns led in recent years to a attempts to develop new approaches, including calls within sociology for a “New Comparative International Political Economy,” or simply NCIPE (cf. Evans and Stephens, 1988; Fiala, 1992; Kincaid and Portes, 1994), and within political science, for a renewed “International Political Economy,” or IPE (cf. Gilpin, 1987; Gill and Law, 1988; Murphy and Toze, 1991; Hettne, 1995; Holm and Sorensen, 1995). A rich body of NCIPE and IPE literature continues to thrive. Nonetheless, much otherwise fine research within these modified approaches continues to posit the nation-state as the basis for analysis in all three sets of paradigms. A careful reading of recent NCIPE, IPE, and related literature in sociology and political science exploring globalizing dynamics suggests that the focus is still on the nation-state and the interstate system, as Taylor (1996) has recently noted. Sociology has focused on globalization processes as a new context for comparative *national* development (cf. Kincaid and Portes, 1994), and IR research in political science has taken a similar tack, posing in essence the following question: How is globalization modifying the context in which relations between nations—or *international* relations—unfold? In both disciplines, globalization is seen as some new stage in *inter-* or *cross-*national relations as the interaction among nation-states. The challenge is seen as how to modify existing frameworks or paradigms. But the same underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions bound up with the nation-states and the interstate system are accorded continuity.

Mind-sets—in this case, nation-state centric mind-sets—are exceedingly difficult to break even when confronted with problems of logical inconsistencies and of empirical validity. The various efforts in sociology and political science to grapple with globalization “are prepared to admit the emergence of a world economic system but are unwilling to admit the possibility of the ultimate disintegration of nation-states and national cultures,” observes Waters. “Indeed, they often resort to a theoretical dualism in which contradictory causal effects are allowed to reside in separate parts of the theory.” Given the tenacity of this theoretical dualism, one might justify Waters’ extraordinarily harsh criticism of these logical inconsistencies as intellectually “schizoid” (Waters, 1995:28).

NEED FOR PARADIGMATIC RECONCEPTUALIZATION: NATIONAL IN APPEARANCE, TRANSNATIONAL IN ESSENCE

What is required is an “epistemological break.” “Prevailing modes of analysis simply lack the requisite vocabulary” to address transnational realities, notes Ruggie, “and what we cannot describe, we cannot explain”

(1993:143–144). This problem of language—continued reliance on nation-state terms, and along with them, the concepts they denote and the particular nation-state centered framing and interpretation of empirical data they imply—is indicative of an underlying problem of incommensurability. In the view of Kuhn (1962) and Althusser (1966), the relations among rival or successive paradigms are always liable to be that of disjuncture and incommensurability, in which the central concepts and procedures of one paradigm or problematic are unstable in the language of the other. The different “nation-state” paradigms have a language unsuitable for grasping transnational or global dynamics and require a certain epistemological break. So long as social structure was commensurate with the *historically specific* form it took through the system of nation-states, then we had a type of incommensurability advanced by Feyerabend (1975). The different theoretical perspectives, or paradigms, could enter into dialogue with the aim of appreciating each others views even though they were not strictly comparable in terms of a theory-neutral data language since they involved sharply contrasting and often diametrically opposed interpretations of data (and also normative structure). For instance, the NCIPE, as articulated by Evans and Stephens (1988), suggested just such a dialogue within development studies and proposed as its goal a theoretical synthesis around the NCIPE. However, the fundamental epistemological assumption that undergirded this and related efforts was precisely the nation-state framework of social analysis, around which modernization, dependency, world-system, and other development theories all converge. Globalization requires therefore an epistemological break, that is, a break with the very underlying assumption driving competing theories.

What is at issue is the relation between our knowledge of the world and social structure. Social structure is becoming transnationalized; an epistemological shift is required in concurrence with this ontological change. Transnational studies requires that social science methods and the epistemological assumptions that underpin them revert back to those of classical political economy and sociology, which set out to theorize a set of relationships that were not self-evident in contemporary practices in order to highlight both structures and historic movement latent in existing conditions. In the case of transnational studies, this means distinguishing in social analysis between appearance (national phenomena derived from nation-state analysis) and essence (transnational phenomena). Facts and theory are interpenetrating, and therefore nation-state theories will guide and circumscribe our interpretation of data. Utilizing the nation-state framework for social analysis can be highly misleading and illusory, leading us to believe we are observing phenomena that is nation-state in character when in fact it is transnational. An essential task of a new transnational studies

is to decipher the transnational essence in social phenomena that appear as national.⁸ Our view of reality is mediated by our finite cognitive abilities, which are structured by evolving theories and concepts and their units of analysis. A shift in the unit of analysis from the nation-state to the global system facilitates a switch to a more powerful set of “cognitive lenses” and yields, in my view, quite dramatic results. Several examples will suffice.

The old units of economic analysis such as national trade deficits and current accounts balances acquire an entirely different meaning once we observe that the vast majority of world trade is currently conducted as “intrafirm trade,” that is, as trade among different branches of a few hundred oligopolistic transnational corporations that are themselves constituted on the basis of the interpenetration of numerous former national capitals. Intrafirm trade is when a single global corporation operates numerous branches and subsidiaries across the globe, each with specialized operations and output. Therefore, what *appears* as trade between “nations” is actually movements between different branches and units of global corporations that have no single national headquarters. Gilpin (1987:254) has estimated that such intrafirm trade now accounts for some 60% of what are called “U.S. imports.” The World Bank estimated that by the early 1980s, intrafirm trade within the largest 350 transnational corporations contributed about 40% of global trade (World Bank, 1992:33). Seen through the lenses of the nation-state system, the much talked about “U.S. trade deficit” is characterized as a situation in which the United States imports more goods from other countries than it exports to other countries. But this is a meaningless construct. In reality, the trade deficit has nothing to do with nation-state exchanges but is a consequence of the operation of fully mobile transnational capital between the ever-more porous borders of nation-states across the globe and through the institutional form of a competitive oligopolist cluster of global corporations. To be sure, trade and current account deficits are not irrelevant but must be seen in a different light, not as indicators of national economies competing with each other but as factors that upset macroeconomic indicators in individual national territories and therefore impede the cross-border operations of transnational capital,

⁸There is, of course, a problem of measurement, as Sklair discusses at some length (1995a), in which our basic measurements and indicators are all based on nation-state data, leading to “state-centered classifications of the global system.” This should be seen as part of the broader protophilosophical problem of incommensurability expressed in our very language as well as the empirical data with which we conceptualize (know) the world. Resolution of this antinomy truly does require a Kuhnian revolution: so deeply ingrained are mind-sets, so nation-state centered are our classifications, that even those who most forcefully argue for globalist analysis, such as Waters (1995), fall back, ironically, on nation-state categories to make the case for globalization. See, e.g., chapter 4, which presents and interprets nation-state data sets in order to demonstrate economic globalization.

with consequent implications for socioeconomic and political conditions in distinct geographic areas. A correct understanding of intrafirm trade and fully mobile transnational capital demonstrates how inappropriate and misleading the old nation-state framework of analysis can be.

Another example comes from the 1994 Mexican peso crisis and the subsequent U.S./multilateral bailout of Mexico. This is a highly illuminating case of a nation-state in the appearance of a phenomenon whose structural causality is globalization and whose essence is transnational. Analysts operating on the basis of a nation-state framework were at a complete loss to explain the underlying dynamics of the crisis and the bailout, in which multilateral agencies, under the auspices of the U.S. Treasury, mobilized almost overnight \$50 billion dollars for the Mexican Treasury. Before the bailout, the U.S. had sustained a trade surplus with Mexico. But the bailout and the sum of circumstances surrounding the crisis allowed Mexico to turn the tables completely and convert its sustained deficit with the U.S. into a sustained trade surplus over the next few years, meaning that the U.S.-sponsored bailout led the U.S. from sustaining a surplus to sustaining a deficit (Chronicle of Latin American Economic Affairs, 1995). The bailout was thus seen by some observers as illogical *vis-à-vis* "U.S. interests." In appearance, there was a nation-state phenomenon of a U.S. trade surplus with Mexico beneficial to "U.S. national interests." In essence, there was a transnational phenomenon of a sustained Mexican trade deficit prior to the crisis that was not beneficial to transnational capital in Mexico that required macroeconomic stability and the provision of convertibility to world currency by the Mexican state in order to service transnational capital operating in Mexico. Under globalization, the U.S. state played a leadership role on behalf of a *transnational* elite in mobilizing global economic resources in order to service the interests of transnational capital in Mexico—which should be seen in this context as an investment jurisdiction and not a "nation"—and to sustain the macroeconomic conditions within the Mexican investment jurisdiction for the profitable operation of this capital *even though* the U.S.-led bailout resulted in a shift from a sustained U.S. trade surplus to a sustained trade deficit with Mexico and therefore contradicted "U.S. interests."

Similarly, on the basis of the logic of a competitive nation-state system, much international relations, world-system, and Marxist literature has searched for signs of a "new hegemon" as a continuation of the historic succession of "hegemons," from the United Provinces to the United Kingdom and the United States. Among the predictions are the emergence of a Japanese- or Chinese-centered Asian hegemony, a Pacific Basin hegemonic bloc incorporating the United States and Japan (the "Nichibie economy" [cf. Gilpin, 1987]); a split in the centers of world capitalism into

three rival blocs and their respective peripheral and semiperipheral spheres (North America and its Western Hemispheric sphere, Western Europe and its Eastern European and African spheres, and Japan and its Asian sphere), and so on (cf. MagDoff, 1992; Bendaña, 1996). These different neomercantilist scenarios of a new hegemon or "hegemonic bloc" among regional rivals are all predicated on important phenomena in the global economy. The problem lies in how to interpret empirical data and the pitfall of looking for a new hegemon based on the outdated notion of a competitive nation-state system as the backdrop to international relations.

The "three competing blocs" prognosis correctly notes that each bloc is developing its own trade, investment, and currency patterns (cf. Magdoff, 1992). It makes reference in this regard to widely circulated *World Investment* reports for 1991 and 1992 by the United Nations Centre on transnational corporations (United Nations, 1991, 1992). Those reports concluded that investment patterns by transnational corporations (TNCs) were driving the evolution of the world economy, and that three "clusters" based in the United States, Japan, and the European community each had developed a "pole" around it consisting of a handful of "developing" countries. But what the "three competing blocs" prognosis fails to note is that, in turn, each "cluster" is thoroughly interpenetrated by the other two. The United Nations reports, in fact, stressed that the three regional structures formed an integrated global "Triad." This in turn is based on the thorough interpenetration of capital among the world's top TNCs, such that countries in the South tend to become integrated vertically into one of three regional poles, while in turn the Triad members themselves exhibit horizontal integration. In effect, regional accumulation patterns do not signify conflicts between regions or core country "blocs" but rather certain spatial distinctions complementary to increasingly integrated transnational capital managed by a thoroughly transnationalized and now-hegemonic elite as agency that does not exhibit a particular national identity (Sklair, 1995a,b; Cox, 1987; Gill, 1990; Robinson 1996a). It is important to stress that globalization does *not* imply an absence of global conflict, but rather a shift from interstate to more explicit social and class conflict.⁹ This leads to the next point:

Globalization also requires a fundamental reconceptualization of development, with corresponding implications for the sociology of development. Many otherwise insightful studies pose the underlying issue as, How does national development become affected by globalization? Rather, it

⁹One underlying dynamic in this regard is conflict, in Robinson's words, between descendant national and ascendant transnationalized fractions among dominant groups, and in Gill's words, between globalizing and territorially based social forces. This conflict takes place within and between nation-states. This contradiction was crystal clear in the Mexico case discussed above.

should be, How might development be reconceived as a transnational rather than a national phenomenon? Such is the case, for instance, with a recent volume edited by Kincaid and Portes (1994), whose very title, *Comparing National Development*, reveals underlying nation-state centered assumptions, and with recent “global commodity chains” research, which creatively traces the global decentralization and transnationalization of production processes but draws nation-state centered developmental conclusions grounded in the state-stratification assumptions of world-system theory (cf. Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994).

The experience of the “Asian Tigers” and other newly industrializing countries (NICs) from the 1960s to the 1980s, for example, motivated numerous studies on (nation) state policies, developmental strategies and outcomes, and so on (cf. Amdsen, 1985, 1989; Deyo *et al.*, 1987; Frobel *et al.*, 1980). A key locus of analysis has been rising wage levels, productivity, and the launching of accumulation on the basis of successful technology transfers and industrialization. Starting in the 1980s, however, with the total mobility of transnational capital (including South Korean and Taiwanese capital that had become transnationalized and integrated into global circuits), capital began to relocate into lower wage zones, such as China, Southeast Asia, and Central America. Capital flight and the local ramifications for the Asian Tigers of global restructuring have been the stagnation of wages, a decline in living standards, a rise in inequalities, unemployment, and problems in sustainability. Some even predict backward movement for these NICs as globalization proceeds apace (cf. Appelbaum and Henderson, 1992; Bello, 1991).

Nation-state paradigms posit development as a national phenomenon, but the decentralized and globally fragmented nature of complex production processes under globalization means that the actual productive activity that takes place in a specific nation is not a “national” activity, and should not be seen as such. Outcomes that appear as comparative national development or as national development strategies determinative of developmental outcomes are increasingly a consequence of fully mobile transnational capital, locating and relocating accumulation processes in different global zones of a single, open global economy, in accordance with the most congenial conditions in each local zone and diverse practical and conjunctural considerations. The dramatic mobility of the factors of production in the current period and the hegemony of globalized money capital, which has become the regulator of the international circuit of accumulation, strongly suggests that such local conditions and considerations that determine where transnational capital will locate and what it will do where it alights are ephemeral, and have as much—if not more—to do with short-term and entirely unpredictable social and political factors as

with long-term developmental processes. This was evidenced in the ease and rapidity with which \$25–30 billion in money capital fled Mexico and the subsequent near collapse of the Mexican economy following the 1994 New Year Zapatista uprising and other local political shocks, throwing a model of “success” in the global economy into a model of dismal failure overnight. The world has become a single field within which capitalism operates. The relative advantage that transnational capital finds in particular spatial locations is by nature contingent on impermanent conditions. Any correlation of Asian state policies and development outcomes would therefore have to take into account how globalization has resulted in a disjuncture between nation-states and global accumulation, and this requires moving beyond nation-state frameworks of analysis.

The abundant research into the global restructuring of labor and of production suggests that the type of “polarized accumulation” that observers have long noted in the case of South Africa and Brazil (cf. Frank, 1981) is becoming a worldwide phenomenon under globalization. In this model, an affluent “developed” population, including a privileged sector among segmented labor markets linked to Fordist-oriented production and consumption and new patterns of “flexible accumulation,” exists alongside a superexploited secondary segment and a mass of supernumeraries constituting an “underdeveloped” population *within the same national borders*. This implies developed and underdeveloped *populations* with no nationally defined geographic identity. It might therefore be more appropriate to reconceive development not as *national* development, but in terms of developed, underdeveloped, and intermediate population groups occupying contradictory or unstable locations in a transnational environment and how accumulation processes that are no longer coextensive with specific national territories determine levels of social development among a globally stratified population. But this global stratification is increasingly along transnational class and social lines rather than along national lines.

Frobel *et al.* (1980) argue that an emergent New International Division of Labor (NIDL) involves the concentration of capital, technological innovation, knowledge-intensive production and management in the core, and the shift in the labor-intensive phases of global production to the periphery. However, more recent evidence suggests that this NIDL is giving way gradually to spatially diffuse and decentralized circuits of production utilizing globalized labor markets. New labor-intensive sweatshops have been located in “global cities” inside the core, where (Third World) populations work under similar wage and labor conditions as their counterparts in the periphery. This reflects a more general tendency of “peripheralization” of labor in advanced capitalist countries and involves diverse new hierarchies and modes of labor control that themselves have become globalized, among

them, part-time and “temp” employment, subcontracting, contract labor, and home-based domestic outwork (in effect, a return to “putting-out” systems; cf. Cox, 1987, especially pp. 322–335; Crook *et al.*, 1992]. The increasing mobility of factors of production (labor included, despite state restrictions) under globalization has led transnational capital, in its search for cheap labor, to combined strategies of relocation to the periphery *and* the use of immigrant, ethnic, and female labor pools in highly segmented labor markets in the core. As Sassen (1988, 1991) has shown, movements of labor across the center-periphery divide tend to intensify due to the social disruptions by global capital. These labor pools become an established labor market reality and lend themselves to the further disjuncture between geography and clusters of developed and underdeveloped social groups, independent of corporate planning *per se*. Similarly, the plummeting of wages and living conditions among broad majorities in core countries, “downward leveling,” and the global “race to the bottom,” have been well documented (cf. Korten, 1995).

The law of combined and uneven development postulates that the unevenness or inequality between regions together with their combination in a single international division of labor underlies capital accumulation.¹⁰ The spatial distribution of unequal development between North and South (or center and periphery) as a particular territorial feature of the world-system was determined in large part by the role of states as instruments of territorially bound classes (this is an essential argument, e.g., of Wallerstein, 1974), and by the distinct socioeconomic and historical conditions that capitalism confronted in its genesis and worldwide spread (cf. Mandel, 1975). The reality of capital as a totality of competing individual capitals and their concrete existence as a class relation within specific spatial confines determined geographically as nation-states worked against a trans-, or supranational, unifying trend. Yet the liberation of capital from such spatial barriers brought about by new technologies, the worldwide reorganization of production, and the lifting of nation-state constraints to the operation of the global market taking place under globalization imply that the locus of class and group relations in the current period is not the nation-state.

The global mobility of capital, together with the concentration of worldwide economic resources in transnational capital, enhances the structural power of capital over the direct power of nation-states, as Gill and Law have analyzed at some length (1988, 1989) and tends to make the direct use of state power by capital increasingly less necessarily, with consequences for the relation between nation-states and dominant classes. The

¹⁰On applied discussion on the law, an extension of Marx’s law of uneven accumulation, see Mandel (1975).

global (spatial) decentralization of the circuits of production and distribution, together with the global centralization and concentration of ownership and decision making in transnational corporate capital operating in a denationalized setting, has a transformative effect, in manifold ways, on the relations between states, capital, and social groups. Among these are the universal imposition of economic or "market discipline" as the principal worldwide means of social control over extraeconomic or political discipline exercised by states as sites of direct social control. The tendency is toward a dissolution of the historic affinities between capital accumulation, states conceived of in the Weberian sense as territorially based institutions, and social classes and groups.

As globalization erodes the linkages between territoriality, production, classes, and state power, the tendency for self-reproduction in the international division of labor is increasingly counterbalanced and undermined by diverse economic, political, and social globalizing dynamics. We can expect sustained class polarization and also continued uneven accumulation between regions or areas characterized by hierarchies and divisions of labor in which some zones are selected for global production activities, others assigned "feeder" roles (e.g., labor or raw materials reserves), and still others marginalized entirely from the global economy (the so-called fourth world). But there is no theoretical reason to posit any necessary affinity between continued uneven development and the nation-state as the particular territorial expression of uneven development. Witness, for example, seas of poverty and islands of wealth, and the breakdown of social infrastructure in any Northern city increasingly approximate to any Third World metropolis. The fallacy of orthodox world-system theory on this point is to conflate the historicity (historically specific) of the nation-state system as the particular historic form which the birth of the world-system took with a feature immanent to the system itself.

Increasingly, we might reconceive the concepts of center and periphery (uneven and combined accumulation) outside of a nation state and/or geographic basis. Development and underdevelopment should be reconceived in terms of global social groups and not nations, in which core-periphery designates social position rather than geographic location. To continue to posit a center-periphery divide along geographic nation-state lines, we would have to (1) provide a coherent theoretical explanation for capital's need to concentrate spatially and geographically; and (2) explain why the "imagined community" of a nation, given the increasing separation of classes and territoriality, of class power and nation-state power, and the rising disjuncture between the fortunes of social groups and of nation-states, might want to concentrate these activities; and (3) argue that capital accumulation still corresponds to national capitals, a proposition that has

ever less empirical validity. As Cox points out, "it is [increasingly] difficult to give the terms *core* and *periphery* generalizable concrete points of reference Although the functional characteristics of core and periphery remain analytically valid, their association with specific geographical positions must be considered to be a matter of perhaps transitory circumstances, not of immutable destiny" (emphasis in original, 1987:319–320).

In sum, in its transnational stage, the national–international axis upon which the world capitalist system has been based has mutated into a qualitatively new global axis in which world zones (e.g., center, semiperiphery, periphery) and nation-states are no longer the central locus of social change. However, the supersession of the nation-state system will be drawn out over a lengthy period and checkered by all kinds of social conflicts played out along national lines and as clashes between nation-states. Social science should be less concerned with static snapshots of the momentary than with the dialect of historic *movement*, with capturing the central *dynamics* and *tendencies* in historic processes. The central dynamic of our epoch is globalization, and the central tendency is the *ascendance* of transnational capital, which brings with it the transnationalization of classes in general. In the long historic view, the nation-state system and all the frames of reference therein is in its *descendance*. However, capitalist globalization is a process, not so much consummated as in motion, and is unfolding in a multilayered world system. Determinacy on the structural side is shifting to new transnational space that is eroding, subsuming, and superseding national space as the locus of social life, even though this social life is still "filtered through" nation-state institutions. This situation underscores the *highly contradictory* nature of transnational relations as well as the *indeterminacy* of emergent transnational social structure.

One key disjuncture in the transnationalization process that has caused confusion in this regard is the internationalization of productive forces within an institutional system still centered around the nation-state. A full capitalist global society would mean the integration of all national markets into a single international market and division of labor and the disappearances of all national affiliations of capital. These economic tendencies are already well underway. What is lagging behind are the political and institutional concomitants—the globalization of the entire superstructure of legal, political, and other national institutions, and the transnationalization of social consciousness and cultural patterns.

In the next section, I review recent globalization theorizing on an emergent transnational state. Here I restate the need to avoid a conflation of the state with the nation-state. A number of Marxists recently have argued that a supersession of the nation-state system cannot take place because, in Samir Amin's words, "capitalism requires the intervention of a

collective authority representing capital as a whole,” and that therefore “the state cannot be separated from capitalism” (Amin, 1995:13). They note the manifold contradictions that global capitalism faces precisely because transnationalized capital is no longer subject to the institutional regulation of (nation) states that in the earlier period resolved certain contradictions internal to capitalism. I concur with Amin that capitalism (the market) is not self-regulating and does, in fact, require a state. Moreover, structural problems of global capitalism such as the tendency toward stagnation, rampant and uncontrolled financial speculation in unregulated global currency markets, and so forth, underscore that capitalist globalization faces numerous contradictions which may become aggravated by a prolonged lag or disjuncture between a more developed globalized economy and a relatively less consolidated transnational political and regulatory structure. As capitalism transnationalizes, it requires the intervention of a transnational authority representing, specifically, the “whole” of global capital. In Amin’s view, capitalism is unable to overcome the growing contradiction between its economic management in an increasingly globalized space and its political and social management that remain fragmented among national spaces.

However, contradictions should be seen not as anomalies in social formations (in this case a global one) but as elements germane to them. The task of social science research is to uncover historic movement therein and the dialectic interplay of structure and agency in their resolution (or non-resolution). To conclude that the contradictions of global capitalism denote the necessary reproduction of the nation-state system lacks logic. If such a conclusion were correct, it would be logical to argue, likewise, that the contradictions of nation-state capitalism and the inability of nation-states to resolve these recurrent contradictions meant that nation-states could not have existed! It may be more fruitful to see these contradictions as *internal* to global capitalism. This leads to another, and crucial, point:

A new transnational studies should take a dialectic approach that combines structure and agency in such a way that allows room for human agency in the past, the current, and the future configuration of world capitalism. Just as the particular and historically specific nation-state *form* that the world capitalist system took in the period now being superseded was not inevitable, the particular transnational structures that emerge in the period we are now entering will be impermanent and will be shaped by the dialectic interplay of structure and agency. These ascendant structures should no more be reified than should the descendant nation-state. History might be open-ended, but the past shapes the present and the future. Decaying structures (in this case, the nation-state system) condition and mediate emergent structures. Transnational structures are emerging from the

womb of a nation-state system that itself is unevenly developed. Behavioral responses to globalizing processes will be uneven and will be shaped in part by the particular character of nation-state development and the variegated and distinct sets of social contradictions therein, including extant ethnic conflict, the relative strengths of competing dominant and subordinate groups, the uneven development of transnational *vis-à-vis* national class fractions, diverse manifestations of what some (cf. Mittleman, 1996) have called “the dialectics of sub-nationalism and supranationalism.”¹¹ A new transnational studies should strive to avoid any teleological notions of an inevitable unfolding of a particular set of transnational structures, a pitfall that would be tantamount to reifying a unified global system as the inverse to the reification of the nation-state. In the same vein as the nation-state was (is) a transitional institutional form in the unfinished evolutionary development of the world capitalist system, we should conceive of emergent transnational structures as similar *transitional* forms in the evolution of an open-ended system. How the contradictions of global capitalism are (or are not) resolved and the particular forms that transnational social structure take will be conditioned by struggles among the diverse social forces brought into play by the globalization process. The synthesis in the dialectic between nation-state and global capitalism is highly contested.¹²

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE ITALIAN AND GLOBALIZATION SCHOOLS

I discuss in this section several recent lines of research, overlapping in content but with distinct disciplinary hues, which have contributed to

¹¹While space constraints limit discussion, an analogy of sorts with distinct “paths to the modern world,” to use Barrington Moore’s language, might be instructive in underscoring the point that the nation-state, including the particular histories and structures of distinct nation-states, the differential behavioral responses of collective agents, and historic “accidents,” will all influence the path of development of transnational structures. The French “path” to the modern world involved a revolutionary destruction of the old institutions and classes. The English “path” transformed—but did not per se do away with these institutions and classes—so that they met the needs of the new capitalist order. The Japanese “path” involved a combination of destruction and transformation. And so on. These different “paths” were determined by sets of particular collective behavioral responses, historic structures, uneven levels of development, different locations in a larger world system, a series of “accidents,” and so on. The point, transferred to the current world historic juncture and the present discussion, is that the decaying nation-state world order and its manifold character remains central in shaping and redirecting emergent transnational structures in unanticipated ways. In the best tradition of historical social science, a new transnational studies should view history as process and the present as history.

¹²I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for raising these very incisive issues addressed in the preceding few paragraphs. These issues require further exploration elsewhere.

the task of paradigmatic reconceptualization by purging globalization and its dynamics of nation-state reification. Among this research, one is the Italian or neo-Gramscian school in international relations developed by a diverse group of political scientists and sociologists. Another is the “global system” or “globalization” approaches taken recently by several sociologists.

Gramsci’s historic formulation that “International relations [the character of the international system] flow from social relations” (Gramsci, 1971:176) has been developed by the Italian school into the edict that changes in social structure lead to modifications in state–society relations and in transnational social relations conceived as distinct from the historically specific form of national exchanges. Globalization pressures modify all national social structures and institutions in such a way that they become transnationalized (Cox, 1981, 1987; Gill and Law, 1988; Gill, 1993, Robinson, 1996a). The neo-Gramscian school does not—nor claims to—provide an alternative transnational paradigm as such. And not all of the neo-Gramscian literature supersedes nation-state centrism. But the school offers essential conceptual tools with which to do so. The Italian school has utilized Gramsci’s concept of the *expanded* (or *extended*) *state* in reconceiving of the state in the context of transnational processes. Gramsci posited an extended state as “civil society plus political society” (1971:12), encompassing political society as the state proper, or government, and civil society as the complex of private institutions and practices that encompass social life. This concept has been used by neo-Gramscian scholars to subordinate each of the key analytical categories of the paradigm sets discussed above—society/civil society (pluralism/liberalism), states as actors (realism and world-system approaches), and classes by themselves (classical Marxism)—to a larger totality that supersedes the nation-state framework, in which one key analytical unit is the extended state. States are thus not expunged from analysis of global society. Indeed, neo-Gramscian scholars have emphasized what Gramsci referred to as the “piedmontese function,” in which class interests are embedded in states. Rather, states are disembedded, in analytical abstraction, from the nation-state.

Studies in this emergent neo-Gramscian school have explored the connections between an emergent transnational extended state and existing national state-civil society clusters, and as well, the complex of economic, political, and social connections that link national groups and classes to transnational class formation and social structure. Emergent transnational class and social structures are not seen as phenomena explainable through the nation-state system but specifically as emergent supranational forms of social structure whose very theorization and conceptualization require supersession of the nation-state framework. An internationalized extended state need not take the shape of a formal institutional apparatus as such that *replaces* na-

tion-states as juridical units. It may be more appropriate to conceptualize, as Cox (1987) has suggested, a global extended state as cross-national linkages in which transnational practices are operationalized through nation-states and their modified institutions. Along similar lines, Robinson (1996a) has argued that a dense network of supranational institutions and relationships that increasingly bypass formal states (see below) should be conceived as an emergent transnational state that has not acquired any centralized institutional form and through which an increasingly denationalized transnational elite exercises global hegemony in a Gramscian sense.

For both realists and world-system analysts, hegemony is inextricably tied up with state power, and state power is conceived in terms of the nation-state. As discussed above, clinging to the logic of a competing nation-state system as the basis for international relations leads analysts to search for hegemony in some type of *nation-state configuration* in the new world order. The neo-Gramscians propose that class power and state power (conceived of in terms of nation-states), while still related, needs to be entirely redefined, and that the emergence of a new historic bloc, global in scope and based on the hegemony of transnational capital, is class hegemony in which the relation between political and civil society needs to be reconceived in a transnational setting. From a Gramscian viewpoint, this is logical: the *extended state* that incorporates civil and political society and upon which hegemony is constructed needs in no way be correlated, theoretically, with territory, or with the nation-state. Weberian conceptualizations of the state as that institution that holds a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a given territory loses its logic under globalization since global economic and social forces may exercise veto power or superimpose their power over any "direct" state power exercised in the Weberian sense. In this formulation, the state is seen as the institutionalization of social relations among coalitions of classes and groups, and the challenge is to problematize the boundaries of the (declining) national and the (ascendant) transnational in the mutation of the nation-state system into an emergent transnational extended state as the dominant form of global political organization.

This transnationalization of the state, lagging behind the globalization of production, has involved the emergence of truly *supranational* institutions. These supranational institutions of the late 20th century are gradually supplanting national institutions in policy development and global management. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (now supplanted by the World Trade Organization) are assuming management of the global economy. They owe their allegiance not to any one state but to the transnational elite (cf. Robinson, 1996a). Within these powerful supranational economic institutions, technical economic criteria corresponding to the objective

needs of capital replaces, as Gilpin observes, "parochial political and national interests." This phenomenon expresses transnational capital's unity of political interests and lack of any national interests (Gilpin, 1987:153). The shift from national to supranational institutions also is evident in supranational political institutions. Such political forums as the Trilateral Commission, the G-7 Forum, the United Nations, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe have acquired newfound and increased importance as political organs responsive to the agenda of the transnational elite (cf. Gill, 1990; Murphy, 1994), although their functions as components of a transnational political society are considerably less developed than those of the supranational economic institutions.

These emergent supranational institutions are representative of new forms of state power in the context of a transnational state, in which state apparatuses and functions (coercive and administrative mechanisms, etc.) do not necessarily correspond to nation-states. These supranational institutions are incipient reflections of the political integration of core states and their Southern "clusters." The function of the nation-state is shifting from the formulation of national policies to the administration of policies formulated by the transnational elite acting through supranational institutions (Robinson, 1996a).¹³ The governmental apparatuses of nation-states assume the role of adjusting local economies to the dynamics of the global economy and "the nation-state becomes part of a larger and more complex political structure that is the counterpart of international production" (Cox, 1987:253). Gill and Law (1988) have argued, in noting the continued institutional existence of the nation-state even as its commanding functions are shifted to a transnational state is a central condition for the operation of transnational capital, not because the nation-state remains the immutable form of political organization but because of an historically determined political structure carried into the period of transnationalization. We will not witness the "death of the nation-state," but rather, to paraphrase Marx, the gradual "withering away" of the nation-state system, seen from the long-historic lens of the next century and beyond as the globalist outcome of what Gramsci referred to as "molecular change" (Gramsci, 1971:109). In this construct, deeply historicist in the sense that specific form in social

¹³In a very revealing quote, former chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve Paul Vocker underscored the penetration and externalization of national states by transnational forces and corresponding shift in policy-making from national to supranational arenas: "The objective here [in increasingly the power of supranational institutions such as the IMF], quite frankly, is to bring a little more international political clout to the IMF and in turn to have international concerns [read: the concerns of a transnationalized elite] reflected intimately and directly in the councils of national governments." As cited in Cox, 1987:448, note 44.

structure is predicated on the particular way in which social structure has evolved through an historic set of conditions, the nation-state is seen as an atavistic element, in which the qualitatively new is constructed upon the preexisting juridical and organization form of the old, as well as on existing forms of human consciousness.

While much neo-Gramscianism has emphasized the transformation of the nation-state system under globalizing dynamics, Sklair's "theory of the global system" proposes taking "the whole world" as the starting point—that is, viewing the world not as an aggregate of nation-states but as a single unit and object of study, as "increasingly necessary for the analysis of a growing number of rapidly changing phenomenon" (Sklair, 1995a:2). Critiquing "state-centrism" in comparative and macrosociology, Sklair identifies transnational practices (TNPs) as operational categories for the analysis of transnational phenomena. The model involves TNPs at three levels: the economic, whose agent is transnational capital; the political, whose agent is a transnational capitalist class; and the cultural, involving a "culture-ideology of consumerism": "The global system is made up of economic transnational practices and at the highest level of abstraction these are the building blocks of the system. The political practices are the principles of organization of the system. They have to work with the materials on hand, but by manipulating the design of the system they can build variations into it. The cultural-ideological practices are the nuts and bolts and the glue that hold the system together" (94–95). Locating these practices in the field of a transnational global system, Sklair thus sets about to explain globalizing dynamics from outside of the logic of the nation-state system (indeed, he theorizes globalization at the *systemic* level). And Sklair, like the neo-Gramscians, is also concerned with the disjuncture between globalization and the continued institutional existence of the nation-state. "The nation-state . . . is the spatial reference point for most of the crucial transnational practices that go to make up the structures of the global system, in the sense that most transnational practices intersect in particular countries and come under the jurisdiction of particular nation-states" (7–8). One result of this disjuncture is that "while capitalism is increasingly organized on a global basis, effective opposition to capitalist practices tends to be manifest locally" (Sklair, 1995b:495).

Robinson attempts to synthesize neo-Gramscian insights with Sklair's theory of the global system in his analysis of an emergent global social structure of accumulation (Robinson, 1996c). A social structure of accumulation refers to a set of mutually reinforcing social, economic, and political institutions and cultural and ideological norms that fuse with and facilitate a successful pattern of capital accumulation over specific historic periods (Kotz *et al.*, 1994). A new global social structure of accumulation is becoming superimposed on, and transforming, existing national social

structures of accumulation. Integration into the global system is the causal structural dynamic that underlies the events in nations and regions all around the world over the past few decades. The breakup of national economic, political, and social structures is reciprocal to the gradual breakup, starting some three decades ago, of a preglobalization nation-state based world order. New economic, political, and social structures emerge as each nation and region becomes integrated into emergent transnational structures and processes.

A new global social structure of accumulation has mutually reinforcing economic, political, and cultural norms. The economic norm is *neoliberalism*, a model that includes the elimination of state intervention in the economy and the regulation of individual nation-states over the activity of transnational capital. This model also involves macroeconomic adjustments that seek to harmonize a wide range of fiscal, monetary, and industrial policies among multiple nations as an essential requisite for the activity of transnational capital if it is to be able to function simultaneously, and often instantaneously, among numerous national borders. The political norm is global management by a transnationalized extended state and the democratic organization of each nation-state, or what he calls elite-based "polyarchic systems of political authority," as the legitimizing form of political organization and of social control in emergent global society. The cultural norm, following Sklair, is the culture of consumerism and individualism, diffused globally through mass communications and advertising.

In addition to neo-Gramscian and global system approaches there are a spate of more exotic, if at times obtuse, theories on globalization that, taken together, constitute a loose, postmodernist "global culture" school. This school sees culture as the determinant in globalization, emphasizes the phenomenological side of the process (globalization as "consciousness of the global whole" Robertson, 1992:8), and draws a link between "postmodernization" and globalization as the "synthesis of universalism and particularism" (Waters, 1995:63). Most notable are Robertson's (1992) apparent globalist update of modernization theory and Waters' theory of a consumption-driven globalization (1995, especially pp. 139–150). Individual societies become "modernized" via a process of integration into a modernized global society exhibiting Parson's modern pattern variables that have now condensed into a new "global field" involving "globalized tastes," "consumption preferences," "lifestyle choices," and "consumer sovereignty," in which consumption is completely severed from the organization of production and of power.¹⁴

¹⁴In a remarkable inversion of the elemental principle of thermodynamics, "from nothing comes nothing," Waters goes so far as to assert that under globalization consumption displaces production as the central economic activity (1995:161). Thus, for Waters, from nothing comes something.

The notion of a global culture should not be dismissed. The organic integration of peoples into global social structure and social life implies a universal cultural transmission and by ontological fiat involves a minimum quotient of shared symbols if social life is to be possible at the global level. Human beings cannot interact in any meaningful way except through the medium of culture as shared symbols and adaptive systems, and a focus on "global culture" has an important contribution to make to transnational studies (cf. varied entries in Featherstone, 1990). But much of this literature has idealized culture, proposing it as structurally independent movement determinative in the process of globalization and which can be analyzed in isolation from economic globalization. These versions, grounded in an implicit consensus theory, exhibit a normative system-maintenance bias that ignores the extant relations of domination and subordination involved in globalization. They seem oblivious to global cultural domination as a mode of social control, as Barnett and Cavanagh (1994) have creatively explored, and to the proposition that social conflict and political struggles are played out in cultural arenas.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: A RESEARCH AGENDA IN TRANSNATIONAL STUDIES

If the picture I have painted here is incomplete (it is) by having not established any new transnational paradigm, then this essay will not have exceeded its intentions, which was to make a case for a break with nation-state analysis. To recapitulate by way of conclusion, a new multidisciplinary field of transnational studies should be predicated on a decisive break with the nation-state framework of analysis, and diverse *transnational phenomena and processes* should constitute its general subject matter. The "commanding heights" of transnational studies are economic globalization, the transnationalization of the state, classes, political processes, and culture, and the current integration processes taking place around the world (e.g., NAFTA, the European Union, etc.). In addition, transnational studies should interact with all area studies by helping to illuminate the changes globalization brings to each region as components of a global system. Perhaps the principal contribution of such a field, therefore, is less to open new avenues of research into the social universe than to *recast* numerous current social science research agendas in light of globalization, to expunge nation-state centrism in the process, and to explore the complex scenarios that emerge from the dialectic interaction of descendant nation-state and ascendant transnational spaces. At a concrete level, transnational studies may enrich multiple lines of research that have developed over the past two decades

by providing new paradigmatic points of reference (the transnational essence of phenomena under study) and a macrostructural-historical context (globalization) for this research. Among this research, all of which should form part of a broad curriculum, are as follows:

- the new international labor studies that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and that have explored the global restructuring of labor (cf. Munck, 1988);
- new global population and transnational migration studies (cf. Sassen, 1988; Cohen, 1987; Portes, 1995);
- the “global cities” literature and the new urban studies (cf. Sassen, 1991; Davis, 1990; King, 1990; Castells, 1989);
- the recent renewal of research into race and ethnicity in a new global environment (cf. Hargreaves and Leaman, 1995; Robinson, 1993);
- supranational forms of organization, including the burgeoning sociological literature on the new social movements and political science literature on intergovernmental and international nongovernmental organizations (cf. Murphy, 1994).
- world order studies (cf. Holm and Sorensen, 1995);
- environmental studies (cf. Yearly, 1996; Foster, 1994);
- gender studies (cf. Basu, 1995).

As mentioned at the onset of the present essay, and at the risk of displaying my own disciplinary bias, sociology, as the unifying discipline in the social sciences, has a central role to play in a new transnational studies. This is because economic, political, and cultural activities are embedded in larger social structure (Granovetter, 1985; Polanyi, 1944), and social structure is the raw material and subject matter of sociology. Sociology’s essential contribution is the study of *transnational social structure*. Political science conceived largely as the (sub)system of the organization of power has come to recognize increasingly the need to embed its subject matter within the most fundamental object of sociology’s concern, social structure (see, e.g., Skidmore’s [1997] recent proposition that international politics are embedded in “contested social orders” rather than in state systems). A new transnational studies may suffer from the lack of communication and debate across the social sciences, as evidenced in the near-complete divorce in past decades of international relations in political science and development studies in sociology. Sociology and political science have taken the lead in the social sciences in exploring globalization as a concept, and should collaborate in a more systematic fashion, including efforts to synthesize development studies and IR. We need to lower disciplinary boundaries and barriers to a holistic approach. Specialization in social science has often gone to-

gether with a disciplinary fragmentation that may do much to hamper paradigmatic reconceptualization and the development of a new transnational studies. The persistence of conventional disciplinary boundaries presents obstacles not only to a multidisciplinary transnational studies, but to theoretical development in each discipline.

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