



HAL
open science

Rebooting migration theory: Interdisciplinarity, globality and postdisciplinarity in migration studies

Adrian Favell

► **To cite this version:**

Adrian Favell. Rebooting migration theory: Interdisciplinarity, globality and postdisciplinarity in migration studies. Brettell Caroline, Hollifield James. Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines, Routledge, pp.259-278, 2007, 9780415954266. hal-01032383

HAL Id: hal-01032383

<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-01032383>

Submitted on 22 Jul 2014

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Rebooting Migration Theory
Interdisciplinarity, Globality, and
Postdisciplinarity in Migration Studies

Adrian Favell

It is no small ambition to bring together a comprehensive overview of contemporary migration theory across the social sciences and humanities. Such has been the explosion of interest in international migration in the past decade or so that no scholar nowadays can feel adequate when confronting the avalanche of literature that has followed. The rather heroic enterprise presented here has the virtue of letting disciplinary perspectives speak for themselves in a congenial dialogue, rather than attempting a unified theory, the most prominent of which have typically emerged from a base in economic theory (Massey et al. 1998; Hammar et al. 1997). It is thus highly instructive to read each chapter as a guide to the specific mindset of various disciplines toward the subject. Nonspecialists will learn as much about what political scientists, anthropologists, demographers, economists, or lawyers *do* from reading the respective chapters, as about political science, anthropological, demographic, economic, or legal approaches to migration theory.

The first edition came under fire for its lack of true interdisciplinarity and for a pervasive U.S.-centered bias. Authors were thus asked to engage more with the non-American literature in each discipline, while new chapters on geography and demography fill out a broader range of subjects. To be fair, though, offering a comprehensive overview for the American market—in which international migration (or “immigration,” as it is mostly misleadingly titled) is nowadays a central topic on syllabi—is certainly not quite the same thing as it might be in Britain or continental Europe, let alone elsewhere in the world. Immigration is such a central part of the self-narrative of the United States that no one would today question the relevance of studying it in the mainstream social sciences and humanities. Elsewhere in the world, migration is no less a significant subject, but it has taken time for it to be established as

a serious academic topic. A major problem in anglophone countries is that it is often lumped together on syllabi and in bookstores with “ethnic and racial studies.” It has taken the great effort of some scholars to delineate a research program on migration that is quite distinct from that on race and ethnicity (Castles and Miller 1998; King 2002).

This volume, then, will be useful further ammunition to that end—to the emergence and institutionalization of migration studies as a full-fledged interdisciplinary field. In this brief bookend to the collection, my goal is to not only explore some other dimensions raised by the question of interdisciplinarity in migration studies, but also to offer some thoughts as to what the core theoretical building blocks of this field might be. In attempting to synthesize our efforts in this volume, I aim to diagnose the weak spots and miscommunications in the research field, as much as to point the way forward to the next decade of (hopefully) increasingly multidisciplinary, multimethods research.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN MIGRATION STUDIES

On the face of it, there could hardly be a topic in the contemporary social sciences more naturally ripe for interdisciplinary thinking than migration studies. This should be obvious to anyone sitting down to design a comprehensive course in international migration. In such a course, there is always a need to somehow marry quantitative data sources and basic economic or demographic analysis of migration, with an ethnographic or oral historical sense of the lives and experiences of migrants themselves. Sociology and political science readings are needed to broach the structural background of immigration and incorporation processes; and there is so much interesting work coming out of anthropology and geography—particularly looking at transnational processes—that these approaches clearly must not be overlooked. Migration studies need a simultaneously top-down as well as bottom-up approach, and it needs history to temper the overwhelming topicality of the present. A course such as this should also be comparative and global, although that part is the hardest. Our experiences at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where I have co-taught an ambitious program with Roger Waldinger, Ivan Light, and Rubén Hernández-León as well organized an interdisciplinary summer school for the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), is that contrary to the constant advice in the United States about the need for specialist technical training, students are well able to appreciate and assimilate readings from across disciplines and methodologies when migration is the singular focus. A course such as this can play a vital role in prising open the disciplinary closing of the American mind, which is often hammered home in departments riven by fruitless quantitative/qualitative divides. In studying migration, multidisciplinary with a multimethods approach should be a basic premise *even* if the case study focus of the course is exclusively immigration in the United States.

Yet interdisciplinarity, in the social sciences at least, is a struggling ideal. To talk across disciplines in the United States is also to speak against one's disciplinary career interests, which often wholly reflect the business of reproducing disciplinary canons and professional hierarchies that takes up so much of the everyday academic enterprise. There is still quite a bit of this going on in the chapters here, which is a pity. Reading these authors, it is clear how much all of them have been socialized in the *habitus* of their own disciplines, however open-minded their explicit intentions (Bourdieu 1984). None, for example, are writing about disciplines other than their own. In the disciplinary mindset, the canon in each is presented like an accumulation of sanctified knowledge stored in a tall farmyard silo.¹ This is a very American problem. As part of their training, students are taught to prepare for disciplinary "field exams," which teach them to read and reread only familiar literature. Alternative methodologies are sidelined, they are often forced to study the United States (out of practical accessibility), and to pose the questions in a classical mode. The only space for interdisciplinary social studies in the United States has been in international studies units, which often do not have their own faculty, and which are always less prestigious positions than mainstream disciplinary professorships. Woe betide the young graduate student who wanders too far from the disciplinary path. It can be professional suicide in terms of scoring those job-talk, essential first publications in the "top" recognized journals of the given discipline. Young academics in the United States are basically taught that their dream someday should (only) be to become chair of their respective disciplinary association. It is ironic and unfortunate that the willfully diverse, and distinction-obsessed social sciences are behind the times in this sense. Interdisciplinarity is becoming a rule of thumb for natural scientists in scientific fields unifying across old boundaries: for example, in the intersection of biological and physical sciences, or the pathbreaking work in complexity science in which natural sciences are marching boldly into social scientific territories.

In Europe, interdisciplinarity is threatened by the grim progress of bureaucratic research-assessment exercises, spearheaded by the British model, and self-inflicted by a generation of compliant Stakhanovite academics recast by policy makers as standardized organization men (and women). In these, all academic output is reduced to scoring major journal articles, the ranking of which is inevitably defined by disciplinary canons. To put this bluntly, if you are assessed as a geographer, sociologist, or political scientist, publishing an article or two in *International Migration Review* or the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (two core migration studies journals) will count for nothing in the disciplinary review. On this basis, it is hard to make a career as a multidisciplinary migration studies scholar. Interdisciplinarity across Europe is now associated with the failure of experiments in university structures in the 1970s and 1980s.²

Our idea at UCLA was to run a thoroughly interdisciplinary program with sociology as a base. Sociology students as such were always a minority in classes that drew in students from anthropology, geography, education, health sciences, public policy, and political science. It works very well and is fun to teach. Sociology, at least when it breaks clear of classical questions, has the virtue of being a space in which interdisciplinarity is fairly automatic. The most important areas of sociology are in effect interdisciplinary dialogues—political sociology, economic sociology, comparative historical sociology, ethnography (with anthropology), demography (with economics and statistics), conversation analysis (with linguistics), and so on. This leaves the difficulty of defining who or what a sociologist is—as opposed, say, to economists, political scientists, or anthropologists, who have rather clear conceptions of who they are. But this can be a virtue as well as an identity problem.

Geography, which although rather marginal in the United States, is arguably the most exciting discipline in the social sciences in Europe, has, at its best, a similar quality. Susan Hardwick's chapter here emphasizes the postpositivist, cultural studies wing of population geography. This version of geography is certainly inter- (if not post-) disciplinary, although her presentation does not fully represent the full range of methodologies used by geographers today. To be interdisciplinary does not have to entail the postpositivist stance of endorsing only qualitative work, rejecting explanation, or conceiving of theory as relentless "critique" (as opposed to empirical hypothesis generator). Yet with its central concern about flows, networks, space, place, and transactions across the planet, geography's advantage is that it is much less automatically wedded to methodological nationalism than sociology, whose master concept of "society" is almost impossible to extricate from the historical context of the nation-state (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002).

As the volume's introduction makes clear, however, when read in juxtaposition, the chapters can be viewed in an eminently interdisciplinary way, by thinking about where and how the distinct available conceptualizations or objects of study in each discipline overlap and interrelate. There are limits to this binary interdisciplinarity for sure, but learning about a foreign discipline is just like learning a foreign language. One is a start, and it makes it easier to learn more, as well as teaching you to look at the world in a different way. There is in fact, in this sense, any amount of interdisciplinarity out there, in the grey areas that disciplinary approaches find themselves wandering into through unusually imaginative or lateral thinking. For example, despite what Hasia Diner argues, it is hard not to imagine that the best historians, for all their sensitivity to context and the unique complexity of specific migration experiences, never pose themselves theoretical questions about the generalization of their observations. In doing so, they will inevitably reach out to political science theories of the state, sociological theories about immigrant integration processes, or anthropological insights about the interactional workings

of ethnicity. Some of the most erudite intellectual heavyweights in the social sciences have come out of the nexus of the Social Science Historical Association; for example, one thinks of the essential work in comparative historical studies of Leslie Page Moch or Ewa Morawska, which has struggled to open the U.S.-centric bias of so much historical production on immigration. There are parallels to this in the intersection of demography, economics, and sociology. Where would migration theory be today without the work of Douglas Massey, Alejandro Portes, or Saskia Sassen, or the very fruitful ethnography and theory dialogue going on in contemporary cultural approaches in anthropology or geography, exemplified in the work of a writer such as Aihwa Ong? There will be no problem with interdisciplinarity in migration studies if these are the inspirations in the future.

GLOBALITY IN MIGRATION STUDIES

That said, certain dimensions of interdisciplinarity are curtailed by the all-enveloping national focus of study in the United States. For sure, navel gazing is a pastime of academics in every major and minor national tradition. It is often at its worse in small, self-regarding nations (as I write this, I am sitting in Denmark, a perfect example) but Americans have a particular propensity for a lack of awareness of how so much of what they take to be “canonical” or “universal” to their respective disciplines is *nothing but* the view from within this particular nation–state, however large and powerful it is in the intellectual landscape. “We are the world,” Americans like to think. No you are not.

In her contribution, Barbara Schmitter Heisler in fact offers a very sharp diagnosis of methodological nationalism in (American) sociology that I need not repeat here. I have in the past offered similar diagnoses, critiquing the European (or Europe-focused) literature on integration and citizenship (Favell 2001a, 2005). The biggest problem is that academic studies that reflect most of all the political concerns of national debates always turn discussion of international migration and global mobility into debates about the ethics of immigration, which inevitably prioritizes the view from the receiving society, and the variable transformation of foreigners into nationalized citizens.

It is particularly tiresome that leaders in the field in the United States make frequent calls for more cross-national comparativism in migration studies to help advance the American debates—one thinks of Portes’s very sharp manifesto (1997)—but that the occasional openings and dialogues rarely go anywhere. One looks in vain for evidence of progress, for example, in the update of the absurdly U.S.-centric *Handbook of International Migration* (Hirschman, Kasinitz, and De Wind 1999)—an essential reference in other senses—when it was redone as a conference and published as an *International Migration Review* special issue a couple of years later (Portes and De Wind 2004). A set of familiar European figures were brought in to broaden the scope, but it is

painfully apparent that the discussions, which are described repeatedly by the editors as “fruitful,” are also admitted to “once again [display] the wide differences in perspective arising from diverse national contexts and intellectual traditions” (843). Most transatlantic dialogue in fact has rarely got any further than “discovering” this. American international conferences suffer from the fact that they often do not get visits from some of the very best European scholars, who are too busy in their local struggles and commitments to take time out for a sabbatical year in the United States, and often do not publish much in English. Americans weaned on the U.S. canon, meanwhile, can pop over to Europe during the summer recess or an occasional international conference, and they might try to build in a comparative agenda, but they rarely stick around long enough to develop a plausible local knowledge. A typical problem they run into is that after a little dialogue in a complex political European setting, they realize that doing comparative work is going to necessitate thoroughly rethinking the theoretical assumptions and data reflexes on which the American canon is based. Faced with this, they often withdraw to familiar territory, and debates that advance theory as if America was the standard to which everything should be measured. One has grown tired of archetypal American observations that compared to the more universal track record of the United States, Germany is a more ethnic nation, or that French republicanism masks cultural particularism (e.g., Alba 2005). What is missing is a realization that U.S. tools and theories have to be completely rethought in the European context. The scale of these societies, the historical nature of nation-building and migration, and the transnational context of the European Union are all factors that ensure European national cases are not directly comparable or amenable to the habits of analysis that work so well in the United States. Comparativism is a wonderful thing, but it also has to be tempered by an awareness of the complete asymmetry in the U.S.–Europe relationship, and the power relations that distort it (Favell 1999). The one area where it might be argued that there has been a fruitful cross-Atlantic comparativism is in studies of the political sociology of citizenship, which is discussed in depth elsewhere in this volume by Hollifield and Schmitter Heisler. Here, the deep methodological nationalism of homegrown European research *was* successfully challenged by a new field of comparative work by American or American-trained scholars.³ However, the resultant boom in citizenship studies has been highly fertile for new comparative efforts but less helpful in its reproduction of the state- and therefore nation–state-centered optic that talk of citizenship inevitably encourages. Again, I have discussed this in much detail elsewhere (Favell 2001a).⁴

The explosion of political sociology work was a fruitful example of a genuine internationalization of a research field—a case where a far more sophisticated comparative social science was able to cut through the parochial concerns that dominated the debates of national scholars. For example, the *terribly* British postcolonial “race relations” perspective, wholly defined by a generation of

famous cultural theory scholars in Britain (the new canon of Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Homi Bhabha, Heidi Mirza, Avtar Brah et al.) looks quite provincial when set against the recent comparative literature on citizenship and immigration (Favell 2001b; Hansen 2000). So many of these debates were defined not by scientific agendas but by the (understandable) activist frustrations of minority scholars in relation to dominant British policy structures. Even then, it can hardly be claimed that it was outsider views of Britain that changed the nature of the debate. Much more influential has been a decade of new immigration on the ground, that has now begun to pry open this set of distinctly British concepts. The “race relations” paradigm simply falls flat in trying to capture the issues involving asylum seekers or new Polish migrants.

Even in such a closely interrelated continent such as Europe, the most basic cross-national awareness is often lacking. European scholars often hold highly stereotypical views of near neighbors—the French see English race relations as “racist,” the English see French republicanism as “homogenizing,” and so on—which are linked to the usefulness of stereotypes in political debates within the country. This points to a distinctively politicized aspect of migration studies in Europe that in fact has its weaknesses and strengths. With the exception of George Borjas, and some of the scholars circling around the Washington-based think tanks, such as Susan Martin or Phil Martin, American academic production about immigration, as on any other subject, takes place with splendid, Olympian distance from the dirt of everyday politics. Given just how dirty American politics is, this is perhaps a good thing for the academics concerned. It certainly helps academic production establish a credible power of autonomy, by not playing the journalistic game (Bourdieu 1996). At their best, American institutions *are* formidable institutions of independent science, which Europeans could only dream about matching. Now, it is true that it is getting harder to escape the pressures of the Department of State on international studies, which are funded according to shifting U.S. foreign policy criteria, and there is always suspicion that rich U.S. universities headhunt foreign scholars less for their outside knowledge and more as trophies to put on the wall. But social science in the United States is clearly much cleaner and therefore more scientific, in the positivist sense, than in Europe.

European research could hardly be described as politically clean, in continental Europe especially, and even more so in the smaller countries or ones—such as Spain, France, or Denmark, for example—where academics, opinion makers, and policy makers are concentrated on top of each other in the metropolitan centre and capital city. In these contexts, leading academics are almost always also highly politically engaged, and their careers and appointments are themselves often political. When you are constantly running after ministry money or trying to catch the eye of a newspaper editor, the danger again is navel gazing. Work gets framed exclusively in terms of the national political debates of the day, and you certainly do not have time to waste flying to inter-

national conferences in the United States. For example, being an internationally recognized studies expert in Denmark does not principally mean doing international work or being part of an international network; it means being an international expert who observes the world outside and translates it to users involved in furiously inward-looking debates about Danish society and national identity. Yet the academic production on a topic such as immigration or international migration can have a political relevance and impact in shaping debates here of which Americans could only dream. Leading academics are routinely invited to appear on TV as experts or write op eds in leading newspapers. They have a status and visibility in the local society that is only ever matched in the United States by academics who have renounced the scientific academic game and become despised “public intellectuals.”

One upshot of this is that there might be different criteria for evaluating the value of scientific production in different contexts. Pure research is different than policy situated research: those Danish scholars are not necessarily mistaken in their assessment of what counts most in their research. It might also lead to different theories. The situation means that European research is less naively positivistic. Europeans generally have no problem seeing that the difference between facts and values is very blurred or that political interests lie behind the production of most scientific knowledge. There can be found, then, a more sophisticated *reflexive* consciousness about the way in which power and knowledge-interests shape academic production. Roughly speaking, the Habermasian, Foucauldian, and Bourdieusian approaches in social science are the three main paradigms for understanding this process. The upshot of this is not so much that everyone becomes postmodern. This is actually a bigger problem in the United States, where the rejection of positivism has often led to a naïve (qualitative) postmodernism that mirrors the naive (quantitative) positivism advanced by others. Rather, arguably, there is a more sophisticated awareness, especially in continental Europe, that you do not just throw out good empiricist instincts with the dogmatic positivist bathwater. In other words, that an empirical post-postpositivism is possible (on this, see especially Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Even more obviously, the fact/value distinction is routinely crossed in the very large body of normative theorizing in the social science of migration and immigration in Europe. One thinks of quite important figures such as Tariq Modood and Rainer Bauböck, whose academic work, ironically influenced most of all by North American Rawlsian philosophers such as Will Kymlicka or Ronald Dworkin, is very hard to evaluate or place in terms of advancing disciplinary theories.

Beyond Europe, of course, there is an even bigger question about the ethnocentrism of much migration theory in *both* Europe and North America. Decentering America in migration studies in the name of globality would be a process that should also decenter Europe. It would be fair to say that this volume offers very slim pickings in this respect. With the partial exception

of Caroline Brettell's chapter, there is remarkably little reflection here about migration studies from the bottom of the heap up, as it were, from the sending side—the “rest” of the world. This is very much the view from the top of the pile. This point ought to be leading us to conceive of migration as a global topic embedded in regional and development studies. We ought to be encouraging the production of far more work about migrations in all the regions of the world, not just those in the West, looking far more at how sending country contexts influence and shape migration trends.⁵ It is perhaps surprising that the study of international migration today has lost so much of the world systems or global development perspective that was much more present in the earlier work of Michael Piore (1979), Castles and Kosack (1973), or Portes and Walton (1981), for example, work that stressed relations of power and of economic dependency between the West and the Rest.

Part of the problem, again, is epistemological. We are right to want to foreground the role of power in knowledge construction. But the road to decentering the social sciences can also be a road out of social science entirely. The call to transcend ethnocentrism has often gone hand in hand with a broader philosophical agenda critiquing the whole modernist, developmental paradigm that privileges the view from the West: the old school views that evaluate development in terms of its benefits for the (Western) global economy, and/or the performance of developing economies and political cultures in western terms. The disciplinary mentality of the sciences can certainly be diagnosed as part of this problem: that the notion of knowledge and the techniques for establishing it always rely on and mask the influence of power and dominant ideology. This broadly Foucauldian view of science and modernity, of the disciplining power of bureaucratic systematization and technical specialization—richly illustrated by the technical training components of postgraduate professionalization in the United States—can be a very effective macrohistory of the scientific West and its evaluative relations to “backward” others. Given the relatively uncontroversial acceptance that the developmentalist paradigm and the science it was built on was in part a self-deluding cover for Western self-justification, ethnocentrism, and exploitation, the postcolonial inversion of the Western perspective seems to make good sense. We all want and need a truly global social science that speaks with and for the multitude, not only the global elites, and not one embedded in discredited Western political means of planetary control and dominance. Disciplines such as geography and anthropology have gone through revolutionary change in this sense, when previous paradigms used for mastering and dominating the colonies became discredited. Departments were closed and heads rolled. We might await a similar realization that, say, the highly Americanized and U.S.-centric disciplines of economics and political science, with their often brittle scientific self-presentation, might go through a similar self-critique as their embedded relation to

American political and economic hegemony is revealed. But this call has to be made in the name of better science and truth itself.

Unfortunately, however, the pessimistic currents of postmodernism that raised these doubts, and began to creep across all the social sciences and humanities from the 1980s onward, have also tended to mean that amongst practitioners of “critique” there has developed a thoroughgoing skepticism and deconstructive attitude toward *all* the procedures and goals of the now despised “enlightenment project,” not only those that were perverted in the name of Western hegemony. The victim of this revolution, then, has more often not been power, but truth itself (Hollis 1994). Relativism all the way down is not an option for social science—we really might as well give up altogether if that is the conclusion from reading Foucault, Latour, Lyotard, Bourdieu, and company.⁶

The collection does not much reflect these meta-theoretical concerns. Aside from some cautious references in the chapters on geography and anthropology, there is not much here that reflects the enormous and highly creative growth of postcolonial cultural studies in the humanities. In disciplines that begin with novels, theater, or television as windows to the social world, but very soon move to claiming that the whole world is a text to be deconstructed, there is in fact an alternate social analysis of the world being made that often extends far beyond the realm of literary studies *per se*. The influence of textual and critical discourse analysis techniques can certainly be seen in work to good effect on the representations of migrants in newspapers, public debates and governmental policy documents, and so on. The poststructuralist and postcolonial methodology that cutting-edge literary studies now embrace as a kind of orthodoxy has indeed gone hand in hand with a huge outpouring of work on transnationalism, hybridity, cultural resistance, and the empowerment of subordinate and minority voices through representing the experiential dimension of migrant life. To not reflect more on this kind of postdisciplinary work in this volume is an oversight for sure (good examples are Lionnet and Shih 2005; Papastergiadis 1999).

POSTDISCIPLINARITY IN MIGRATION STUDIES

The postdisciplinary path being blazed by contemporary humanities and literary studies is, however, not the one I want to follow here. A different notion of postdisciplinarity can I think be retrieved for research approaches to migration other than the textual or wholly idealistic in epistemological terms (see also Sayer 1999, 2000). On some level, I would argue, the social scientific enterprise, perhaps in distinction to cultural and literary studies, relies in the end on an underlying possibility of realism in its methods and representations of the world. Realism is often opposed in epistemological terms to constructivism, but this is in fact an unsophisticated view. On some very basic level, *all* social sciences since at least Durkheim have or at least should be constructivist

in their self-understanding (see also Hacking 2000). That is, accept the idea that the social world is a humanly constructed (i.e., not naturally or essentially given) reality, that our very methods of data gathering, categorization, and representation themselves construct in a certain way. It accepts that social scientists are a part of the social world they are constructing knowledge—and techniques of knowledge gathering—about. But it is no less *real* for that, and no less *true* when successful, especially if these techniques are embedded in a socially shared habitus of scientific practice (as opposed to literary, journalistic, political practice, etc.), that sustain the autonomous social power of recognized academic work (see Bourdieu et al. 1977).⁷

What a constructivist empiricism might enable is a rethinking of migration theory that helps us rebuild a more politically autonomous and scientific form of studying the subject, while not letting go of the incontrovertible need for a less disciplinary and more global approach. The point here is that we do not want to endorse procedures or methods that remove for us the very material “fact” that migration is something that happens when a real (physical) person moves in real (physical) space. While one can accept the point that Susan Hardwick might make, that all geographies in the end are collective social representations of space, which are thus socially relative and mental in nature, it would go too far to suggest that space itself is a wholly subjective or mentally constructed fiction. People move, and the material physical distance of those moves matter, as do the physical borders that separate different social units in space and define what counts as spatial movement. The postmodern cultural turn in population geography, in rejecting the “objectivist” or “positivist” old geography, unfortunately has tended to want to collapse all material space into socially constructed space, thus in a sense negating geography’s most interesting and valuable contribution to the social sciences.

The approach to migration studies suggested by the postdisciplinary approach here is one that begins to question and dismantle some of the fixed points and conceptualizations provided by our standard definitions of international migration in the international state system. These, clearly, are political constructions of the modern world, exhaustively carved up as it is into distinct nation–state units. This world should, in our migration theory, be subject to political and historical deconstruction. Yet nearly all the chapters assume that we know what migration is, and that we can accept the units—from which people move to which they move—given by the political world we live in. But these are only conventions that happen to be the case here and now. The basic definition they assume is the standard one. Citizens or (at least) residents of one nation–state are migrants or have migrated, first when they leave that nation–state and cross an international border to set foot in another; and second, when their move has a time dimension—decided by convention (one year in the statistics)—after which they can be considered to have moved residency. It is only a short step to fall into the full immigration optic by accepting the third

assumption that the move creates a particular relationship with the receiving society, defined by the new residence: that the migrant is an outside, foreign body that has to be absorbed in some way into the receiving, given “society.” Other movers, who are not staying and whose presence is indifferent to the receiving society, cross borders—such as tourists, business people, international lorry drivers—but they remain wholly indifferent and largely invisible forms of movement from the migration/immigration perspective. The literature on transnationalism, it is true, questioned the one-way assumptions of these migration definitions, stressing the interplay or interrelations of the two places, and the migrant networks between. But it did not enlarge or question much the notion of migration itself as a form of mobility. The second generation of this literature, responding to the accusation that it was ignoring the state by stressing only flows and networks has, with the notion of “simultaneity,” in fact fallen back into describing the binary interaction of migrants in sending and receiving contexts, and hence retains a focus on essentially the same kind of movers as immigration scholars (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004). In all these approaches, no one examines whether migration is in fact something only defined and derived from the state’s need to classify and carve up spatial mobility in a certain way, and that it could be defined in another way.

What might happen if we shut down the disciplinary canons for a moment, and reboot our computer? The filing system in the computer has collapsed and we are forced to redescribe our object of study out there in the real world. Nothing appears natural any more: certainly not our definition of what constitutes a migrant or an event/action of migration in the world. We would have to draw new lines and new conventions.

Would sending and receiving “societies” today still automatically appear as units coterminous with the borders of actually existing, politically defined, nation–states? Or would this historical convention now appear a redundant, or certainly a questionable starting point for building a science of spatial movement? We take it for granted, but it wholly defines our idea of who is a citizen and a resident, and who therefore is a foreigner and a migrant, in relation to specific territories and space. But the world is not only one of nation–state units. Some aspects of society are aggregated in very different units, in which social relations, networks, transactions, and events, spanning both physical and virtual spaces, have local, regional, or global patterns that do not correspond in any way to the container that the nation–state view might wish to impose on them. Biologists studying pollination or meteorologists studying the patterns of hurricane formation would never think that the phenomena they describe were in any way defined by the given nation–state borders and definitions of the everyday political world. Should we continue to describe and file human spatial mobility in the same way?

The issue, in a sense, is a reverse of what is argued in the political science and history chapters in this volume. The problem for a rebooted migration

theory is not to bring the state back into a scientific field in which the political view was missing. In fact, the political (that is, the conventional) mode of carving up the world into nation–states is utterly pervasive and ever present in *all* the existing disciplines and their debates. A similar thing might be said about history. To be able to theorize freely, we need to *remove* our understanding of migration away from the urge to account for everything in terms of time- and place-specific narratives; that is, the way the world looks to us conventionally because of our history and our inherited political modes of understanding. History and political science almost always end up reproducing the conventional nation–state point of view of spatial mobility, because it is (still) the dominant conventional view of the world. Sociology, as we are told here by Schmitter Heisler, is also deeply embedded in the nation–state view of the world—not least because nearly all the statistics that it and demography uses are generated by nation–states classifying territorially fixed populations in relation to collectivities imagined as national “societies.” We might hope or expect economics, which claims to be methodologically individualistic in its approach, to challenge the convention that the world is divided up only into macro units called nation–states, but in fact nearly all economic theories of migration, including the chapter here by Barry Chiswick, take the conventional definition of international migration from nation A to nation B as their starting point for discussing economic differentials between spatial units, or the costs and benefits of migration to societies. Geography and anthropology, it is true, have a less automatic reliance on methodological nationalism in their modes of analyses. But they are prey to a different problem, of reifying a culturalist view of the world, which then often falls in line with the idea of a world divided up into national “ethnic” cultures, languages, institutions, and so forth.

The point here is that in foregrounding the pervasiveness of the nation–state in our conventional understanding of migration, we might in fact reverse the relationship and show how the nation–state gets constructed and reproduced in and through these conventional understandings. Instead of telling a story about how foreign objects (migrants) fit into or challenge the given (nation–state) narrative and institutional structures by which we recognize the world, we might instead look at how the very process by which collectivities manage movers by naming and counting them, and thereby distinguishing them from nonmovers or residents, is the fundamental way in which the territorial nation–state society constitutes itself in the first place. Physical movement across space is the natural, normal given of human social life; what is abnormal, changeable, and historically constructed is the idea that human societies need to construct political borders and institutions that define and constrain spatial mobility in particular, regularized ways, such that immobility becomes the norm.

The step I am advocating here is essentially to expand and redefine migration studies as a subset of (spatial) mobility studies. This is a project that has been advocated by several social theorists in recent times (Castells 2000; Urry

2000). Unlike them, however, my concern is also with preserving the focus, uppermost to migration studies, on real people moving in real space—not virtual and nonhuman forms of mobility. The issue, in fact, is quite simple. What is it that makes the “illegal” migrant crossing a given border different than the “legal” immigrant, the foreigner on a holiday visa, the lorry driver, or the shopper over for the day? The mobility of goods and services, and even sometimes capital, also involves the physical movement of persons across borders. Minus the nation–state, we might very easily see the fruit pickers on the other side of the sea, who pick the bananas we enjoy at breakfast, as part of our society; they are certainly an essential part of our economy, that is, our market for fruit. Similarly, there is a deep truth for the Mexicans in California who complain, when accused of illegality, that they did not cross any borders; the borders crossed them. What makes the “illegal migrant” different is that a nation–state has decided to name the movement that way—as a way of asserting its own sovereign existence.

Just taking the border at Tijuana would make this point very clear. A very small proportion of the cross-border mobility found at this junction of the political world—that is, the starkest political dividing line between the West and the Rest—is actually “migration”—illegal or otherwise. As well as the fun-loving tourists, the commuters, and the shoppers looking for cheap goods, there is a vast number of goods-related crossings that never count, and would never be recognized as migration. These open, mostly economic transactions, in fact dwarf movements counted as migrations. Yet some people have rights to physically move over the border while others do not; an even smaller number have a right to migrate. Some movements are counted as immigration, others illegal migration, still others asylum seeking, and so on. All these distinctions are more or less arbitrary and defined wholly by conventions imposed by the nation–states in question. As citizens we have to recognize the legality of nation–states, but there is no reason why we have to take this power for granted as autonomous scholars, who should be free from such political blinkers. These conventions, we can see, can change or vary over time and space. The border itself only exists because it is the place where all these classifications are made; it is being made and remade every time the state (or one of its representatives) puts into action criteria in its name that classifies a movement as migration or not. In other words, minus the border, there would be no state, or state governance, here. The (American) nation–state in fact constitutes itself in the very act of recognizing, classifying, and then sanctioning or not (that is, governing) the physical movements that are going across its self-declared borders.

Conventional views of governance, sovereignty, and control entirely reproduce the taken-for-granted convention of state power. To think of this power as continually constructed and enacted also brings into sharp focus the absurdity of many of the discussions on incorporation or integration, especially since

academic discussions in these subfields so tamely follow political ones. Spatial movements can be highly integrated in social networks and relations—whether familial, communal, political or economic—regardless of whether they are organized or even fall within the receiving society’s political perception of incorporation and integration. But again, by recognizing, classifying, and then reshaping the social interactions that follow from movement as “incorporation” or “integration,” the receiving society itself is constituted. America is, we know, the sum of all immigrants; that is the very story of the nation. But look again—it might be possible to see there really is no society here other than the controlled, hierarchical system that calls itself a nation because enough “Americans,” who were once foreigners and immigrants, at the same time believe it is the primary social and political entity of which they are a part. The historical emergence of the nation–state is one by which collectivities have found ways to cage and penetrate social and economic interactions that would otherwise be unbounded. One of the key historical ways that the state has constituted its powers over society has been to classify movement as migration, and thereby invent a fixed immobile territorial population that can call itself a nation.⁸ That, in a globally porous world, this process still works so effectively for nations like America—which feels very little ontological insecurity at a political level—is a remarkable fact.

The effect of understanding how the state works to create itself and society in its own image need not be one that belittles its basic power. We simply see this power for what it is. In a basic social theoretical sense, some collective entity such as a state may well be necessary to the functioning of society. This is the old Hobbesian argument about a leviathan as basic to the nondestructive functioning of social order. But historically, and even in the modern age, there is a range of possible social orders other than the modern nation–state society (see Sassen 2006). Putting it this way in fact underlines just how remarkably dominant and powerful is our taken-for-granted carving up of the world into nation–states. The modern nation–state’s sharp ability to designate and recognize which spatial movers are foreigners is a remarkable political achievement—so effective that scholars of migration rarely question who are migrants or not by this definition.

What is of interest in the current global age is the extent to which this conventional patterning and defining of populations, distinguishing citizens, residents, migrants and movers, is or has been changing because of the changing relationship of the global and regional economy to nation–state sovereignty. The subject matter of international political economy, in fact, is principally concerned with the politics of this shifting relationship, and the governance of the mobility on which it turns: of *all* forms of movement—capital, goods, services, and persons. Among these, the global economy is of course challenging the preeminent power of nation–states themselves to define who is and who is not a citizen or a migrant; who is an immobile resident and who

is a mover who has crossed some border. The rebooted approach to migration theory I present here may help us recognize the empirical significance of work focusing on these changes, which might otherwise look like fringe questions in migration studies.

Two brief examples will have to suffice here. The GATS Mode 4 (General Agreement on Trade in Services), in which service workers are able to move free of typical migrant visa restrictions, is one channel of movement that has been much discussed by migration scholars as a potentially progressive recognition of the manifold new forms of global mobility that escape conventional classifications (Lavenex 2006). This is in effect an interesting example of how a new form of governance, pushed by global economic cooperation, changes the effectiveness with which states delineated some movers as migrants. A posted service worker is no longer a temporary migrant or potential immigrant. Yet to move across borders they certainly must—services nearly always require a physical movement—and it is quite possible that they might relocate and work for several years in another society under these regulations, with all the social implications this entails. The space they live in is a space carved out and largely ungoverned within the receiving society. The all-integrating nation-state has many such holes, like a giant Swiss cheese. Nobody sees this issue as migration, and it might not even be clear which social unit, if any, absorbs the externalities generated by the service mover's life and work, other than the multinational corporation that made the move possible in the first place. Enough actions of this kind and we might start seeing multinational corporate social structures, which call themselves incorporated "legal" firms in the national world, but which often function like entire surrogate state authorities, offering their own cultures, welfare structures, and sources of identity for their employees, as alternatives to the nations they once lived in (Bozkurt 2006).

The European Union (EU) is a second example. Uniquely on the planet, the building of a regionally defined internal market, based on the freedom of movement of goods, capital, services, and persons across political borders, creates a space that has dramatically redefined the European nation-state's sovereign need to define and categorize certain movements as migrations. Now when EU citizens move it is a politically unrecognized and invisible act. European nation-states can no longer constitute themselves as they once might have done by legally and politically designating French or German movers as "foreigners." Any EU citizen can "migrate" (move and stay) with none of the usual means by which states recognize the movement as migration applying. They need no visa, no passport; there is no need to commit oneself to becoming a citizen one day, and in many cases they need not even show up as official residents. They do not think of themselves as migrants; they may or may not show up somewhere on state statistics, and they have lives functionally organized across a quite complicated European space that corresponds to no national or cultural lines. For all the talk of unfettered transnationalism else-

where in the world—at either the high (corporate) or low (“ethnic,” diasporic) level—these European free movers are much less constrained and much better endowed to engage in social forms and networks unclassified and unobserved by nation–states, and not in a way captured or contained by national societies. If one was to go looking for a possible new cosmopolitan or transnational society order in our given world of nation–states, the EU is one of the best places to look (Favell 2007).⁹

These thoughts suggest that while the nation–state remains the modern world’s great disciplining device, we ought to be able to devise through migration studies a way of seeing how and why it happens. This perhaps ought to be the biggest challenge to a volume with rethinking migration theory as its goal. The nation–state has created the world in its own image, and science for centuries has also been harnessed to these goals. Migration is one of the key anomalies of a world divided up into more or less fixed population containers, which is why the state politically takes its challenge so seriously, and why migration is, by most observers, so conventionally understood. Power is at work here; it is pervasive in our social science of migration. It is perhaps disappointing that social science disciplines today still seem so wedded to these given conventions for understanding migration. Breaking with the disciplinary nature of the social sciences, and developing a postdisciplinary view may well help scholars think, for once, outside of the box. The theory this generates need not be anything other than a straightforwardly empirical, historical, and comparative enterprise, but it will have to recast the subject of migration in a thoroughly decentered, global perspective. We need to renew the conceptual tools with which we think of and recognize migration. The ones we have inherited from scientific disciplines are not sensitive to this need. Disciplines themselves think and see like a (nation) state, to borrow James C. Scott’s famous phrase (1999). To really talk across disciplines would also mean finding a way to escape the nation–state-dominated conceptions that conventionally make sense of the world and the migration that takes place within it.

NOTES

1. I owe this lovely agricultural metaphor to Irene Bloemraad, University of California, Berkeley. Thanks are due to her, to the editors, and to Roger Waldinger and Russell King for comments during the development of this chapter.
2. As a member of faculty I have at Sussex and Utrecht experienced the dismantling of two innovative interdisciplinary structures because of outside funding pressures structured by research assessment imperatives, in both cases against the will of those who worked there.
3. See the work of Rogers Brubaker, James Hollifield, Gary Freeman, Yasemin Soysal, and Christian Joppke et al. See Joppke (1998) for the best synthetic collection.

4. A better example of transatlantic cooperation was the Carnegie Endowment's Comparative Citizenship Project, which worked because it strictly focused on formal aspects of citizenship and naturalization rights; see Aleinikoff and Klusmeyer (2000, 2001).
5. Again, we can thank the Castles and Miller volume (1998), which is the leading textbook of the field, for at least very overtly rethinking international migration in a global sense. The work of Massey et al. (1998), although very much driven by the Mexico-U.S. scenario, which is so close to home, can similarly be congratulated.
6. This dominant anglophone reading of French theory has typically been caused by the overenthusiastic *mis*-reading of poor English-language translations. The same scholars are read and understood very differently in France (see Cusset 2003).
7. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) speak of this as transcending the false opposition of "social physics" and "social phenomenology." They offer perhaps the most successful and sophisticated paradigm for empirical social science research based on a kind of constructivist realism.
8. Here the story becomes something more familiar to comparative historical sociologists: the rise of classes and nation-states, the invention of the passport, and the containing of otherwise mobile or ambiguously defined populations in the late nineteenth century—a core moment in the formation of the modern nation-state system (Mann 1993; Torpey 2000).
9. *Eurostars and Eurocities* (Favell 2008) takes this as its core subject. In fact, the social closure necessary to preserve European nation-states' sovereign reign over society gets preserved by other informal means, as I show in this book.

REFERENCES

- Alba, Richard. 2005. "Bright versus Blurred Boundaries: Second Generation Assimilation and Exclusion in France, Germany and the United States," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28(1): 20–49.
- Aleinikoff, Alex, and Doug Klusmeyer, eds. 2000. *From Migrants to Citizens: Membership in a Changing World*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute/Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- . eds. 2001. *Citizenship Today: Global Perspectives and Practices*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute/Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Homo academicus*. Paris: Les éditions de minuit.
- . 1996. *Sur la télévision*. Paris: Liber.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, J.-C. Chamboredon, and J.-C. Passeron. 1977. *Le métier du sociologue: préalables épistémologiques*. Paris: Mouton.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loïc Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bozkurt, Ödül. 2006. "Wired for Work: Highly Skilled Employment and Global Mobility in Mobile Telecommunications Multinationals," in Michael Peter Smith and Adrian Favell, eds., *The Human Face of Global Mobility*, pp. 213–48. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Press.
- Castells, Manuel. 2000. *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Castles, Stephen, and Godula Kosack. 1973. *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Castles, Stephen, and Mark Miller. 1998. *The Age of Migration*. London: Macmillan.
- Cusset, François. 2003. *French Theory: Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux États-Unis*. Paris: La Découverte.

- Favell, Adrian. 1999. "Comments on Glazer, Schain and Fassin: How Can We Be European?" in Christian Joppke and Steven Lukes, eds., *Multicultural Questions*, pp. 242–57. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2001a. "Integration Policy and Integration Research in Europe: A Review and Critique," in Alex Aleinikoff and Doug Klusmeyer, eds., *Citizenship Today: Global Perspectives and Practices*, pp. 249–99. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute/Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- . 2001b. "Multi-Ethnic Britain: An Exception in Europe?" *Patterns of Prejudice* 35(1): 35–57.
- . 2005. "Integration Nations: The Nation–State and Research on Immigrants in Western Europe," in Michael Bommes and Ewa Morawska, eds., *International Migration Research: Constructions, Omissions and the Promise of Interdisciplinarity*, pp. 41–67. London: Ashgate.
- . 2008. *Eurostars and Eurocities: Free Moving Urban Professionals in an Integrating Europe*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hacking, Ian. 2000. *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hammar, Tomas, et al. 1997. *International Migration, Immobility and Development*. Oxford: Berg.
- Hansen, Randall. 2000. *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-War Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hirschman, Charles, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh De Wind, eds. 1999. *Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Hollis, Martin. 1994. *The Philosophy of Social Science: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Joppke, Christian. 1998. *Challenge to the Nation State: Immigration in Western Europe and the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- King, Russell. 2002. "Towards a New Map of European Migration," *International Journal of Population Geography* 8(2): 89–106.
- Lavanex, Sandra. 2006. "The Competition State and the Multilateral Liberalization of Highly Skilled Migration," in Michael Peter Smith and Adrian Favell, eds., *The Human Face of Global Mobility*, pp. 29–52. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Press.
- Levitt, Peggy, and Nina Glick-Schiller. 2004. "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society," *International Migration Review* 38(3): 885–912.
- Lionnet, Françoise, and Shu-Mei Shih, eds., 2005. *Minor Transnationalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mann, Michael. 1993. *The Sources of Social Power. Vol II: The Rise of Classes and Nation–States 1760–1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Massey, Douglas S. et al. 1998. *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Papastergiadis, Nikos. 1999. *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Piore, Michael. 1979. *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labor in Industrial Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Portes, Alejandro. 1997. "Immigration Theory for a New Century: Some Problems and Opportunities," *International Migration Review* 31(4): 799–825.
- Portes, Alejandro, and Josh De Wind. 2004. "A Cross-Atlantic Dialogue: The Progress of Research and Theory in the Study of International Migration," *International Migration Review* 38(3): 828–51.

- Portes, Alejandro, and John Walton. 1981. *Labor, Class, and the International System*. New York: Academic Press.
- Sassen, Saskia. 2006. *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sayer, Andrew. 1999. "Long Live Postdisciplinary Studies! Sociology and the Curse of Disciplinary Parochialism/Imperialism," paper presented to the British Sociological Association conference, Glasgow, April 1999. Available as a University of Lancaster Sociology Department working paper at: <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/sociology/papers/sayer-long-live-postdisciplinary-studies.pdf>.
- Sayer, Andrew. 2000. *Realism and Social Science*. London: Sage.
- Scott, James C. 1999. *Seeing Like a State*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Torpey, John. 2000. *The Invention of the Passport*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Urry, John. 2000. *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the 21st Century*. London: Routledge.
- Wimmer, Andreas, and Nina Glick Schiller. 2002. "Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences," *Global Networks* 2(4): 301–34.