

**Steffen Mau, *Social Transnationalism: Lifeworlds Beyond the Nation-State*,
London: Routledge 2010, pp.xiv+201.**

No critical slogan in contemporary sociology is more frequently used, yet so inadequately substantiated, than the charge of “methodological nationalism”. Where are the empirical studies that show how to do a systematic, data driven sociology beyond the nation-state, of the kind preached by contemporary social theory? Steffen Mau's recent work is one of the most convincing attempts yet to synthesise social theory and comparative empirical sociology while transcending the limitations of both sides.

For sure, comparative sociology has for decades been locked into modes of data collection and analysis that simply reproduce the fiction that societies are bounded nations with vital statistics that can be compared one to the other. For example, there is the mainstream comparative welfare state sociology, unable to think outside the cliché of distinctive national systems, indeed national “worlds” of welfare capitalism. Migrant labourers don't even appear in the post-industrial models of Esping-Andersen, romanticising the de-commodified flexisecure social system of a fictional Denmark. Yet it would be hard to imagine a world in which the economy -- in all its factors of mobility -- was not predominantly transnational.

This defining question of our time -- of how to study a world in which the political societies we live in are not coterminous with the social and economic systems that constitute them -- has not been dealt with at all well by contemporary social science.

Certainly, there has been a lot of reflection about law and institutions beyond the nation-state: for example, by Michael Zürn, a colleague of Mau in Bremen and a big influence at work here. But the horizontal, rather than vertical, transnationalism that most interest scholars concerned with social phenomena beyond formal institutional politics, are much harder to identify and measure. The sociological analysis of individual, micro-level data about the presumed transactions, networks, flows and connections of modern advanced liberal capitalist society(ies), has gotten little further than the slogans of the now senior generation of contemporary “global” sociologists (notably Giddens, Beck, Bauman and Urry) who imagined a world beyond the nation state, but then -- for reasons peculiar to the post-60s anti-positivist turn of parts of the sociological profession -- abdicated any responsible attempt to provide empirical operationalisations of their claims.

Part one of Mau's book offers a generous synthesis of the ideas inspired by these authors and others. Yet, clearly his work goes a long way beyond their citation-monopolising manufacture of new terminology (in fact, nothing but metaphors) to describe putative new trends. Mau seeks to operationalise the hypothetical trends, and test which of them might actually bear some reality in a world still organised in many other ways along national lines. Mau's contribution is thus critical in opening a path to a genuine empirical sociology beyond the nation state, albeit one that might be equally attuned to places where de-nationalisation, integration, or globalisation is not happening. Contemporary geography -- better equipped to study this world of mobilities -- is also a strong influence here: it is good to see the work of Loughborough University's Globalisation and World Cities project integrated into a sociological work; anthropologists such as Aihwa Ong and Nina Glick-Schiller also

provide inspiration. The opening discussion offers a streamlined foundation for the empirical findings that come thick and fast in the remaining three quarters of this short and sometimes overly terse work.

The book is a synthesis of an unprecedented survey in 2006 of the physical and virtual connections beyond Germany of the average German population. Two points already are crucial here. Despite the political obsession in Europe with immigrants, migrants actually only constitute a tiny fraction of people moving across borders in the modern world. And second, substantial physical mobilities are probably much less significant in building transnationalism than fleeting virtual ones: whether forms of communication, financial transactions, or new modes of family organisation. In terms of cross-border connections on a local level, the fate of the European project is obviously uppermost in Mau's mind -- the powerful normative agenda established in Germany by Habermas and Beck -- but on the whole the work eschews the tedious terrain of looking for European identity, dominated as this is by European Union funding networks trying to produce evidence to halt the EU's apparently terminal decline. Rather, Mau seeks to map out the patterns of transnationalism viewed from a fixed point: that of the German population today in comparison to how it looked at the high point of the "container" nation-state-society in the 1960s.

Chapter by chapter, Mau rolls out the kind of evidence to answer questions hitherto suggested by social theory but never before answered. It maps out the range of German transnational networks; the degree of mobility that ordinary people have experienced; the effects of studying abroad or tourism. It also looks at the political beliefs and attitudes to which these experiences lead, and to what extent mobilities

might be indexing new forms of social distinction or inequality. On the whole, the results are not so surprising. Quantitativists will not be entirely satisfied either with the brevity of the data presented or the apparent simplicity of some of the variable analysis. There is also precious little information here about the original survey and the data it generated. This may be a fault of the publisher not allowing a more substantial volume. As it is, we still learn a great deal about the transnational, highly Europeanised Germany, of the early 2000s. Yes, at all levels of society, Germany is much more transnational than it was in the past. People with higher levels of contact across borders are indeed more cosmopolitan; there is a certain stratification effect linking mobility and social position; and globalisation is really anything but, with the cross-border networks and connections of Germans much stronger locally, much closer within their language range, extended often to obvious North American links, but rarely displaying many connections with the rest of the world. It appears that Germany's substantial migrant populations do not make a lot of difference to the findings. Yet there are interesting nuances about the distinctions across West and East Germany, and in terms of gender; although these disappear more among younger respondents.

Clearly Mau's work is but a first step. The book will very usefully plug into other recent innovative empirical work -- led by Mike Savage, Jürgen Gerhards, Jan Delhey, Juan Díez Medrano, Ettore Recchi or Patrick Le Galès and their respective associates, which are exploring very similar terrain -- and we must await empirical validation with data from other countries, which may be less enthusiastic about post-national identity than the Germans. The book may also be a bit dated by its timing: post-financial crash, the world of 2012 looks quite a bit different from the world of

2006. Globalisation, regional integration, even good old fashioned open mindedness and tolerance, seems to be in retreat, not least in Europe.

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