

Working papers



Neither IR Nor Comparative: The Nationalizing Mechanism

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Abstract

This paper introduces an explanatory approach that can assist in bridging the divide between IR and comparative approaches and in resolving the level of analysis problem between national and global perspectives. Its point of departure is the unresolved metadepbate between rational choice, structuralist and culturalist paradigms and the recent formulation of a promising alternative. This alternative approach explains by identifying and modeling mechanisms that work in various social systems. The paper puts forth the nationalizing mechanism as a central change mechanism in the global system. This historical and system-specific mechanism operates in different types of systems at various levels. How the nationalizing mechanism works in economic, political, cultural, and biosocial systems at global, regional, national, subnational, and individual levels is sketched out in the body of the paper.

Introduction

This paper aims to make a small contribution to the solution of a set of large problems. One of these problems is the "great divide" (Caporaso 1997) between International Relations (IR) and comparative approaches. A second, related problem is the so-called level of analysis problem.¹ The first problem is being bridged by the increasing influence and popularity of fundamental approaches common in the discipline of political science and beyond. The three perhaps currently most important "grand theories", namely rationalism, culturalism, and structuralism (Lichbach and Zuckerman 1997), have made significant inroads into the field of IR. This has brought a somewhat isolated subfield, preoccupied with political battles between realists, idealists and radicals, closer to the approaches and debates in the discipline's mainstream. But do the new institutionalisms (i.e. rational choice and historical sociology) and culturalism (named somewhat confusingly "constructivism" in the IR literature²) provide the means to bridge the gap between the traditional concerns of IR theorists and comparativists? And can they resolve the level of analysis problem?

Opening up to approaches used in many other research fields of political science and social science in general is no doubt a crucial step in transcending the divide. The evolution of International Political Economy as a subfield has been exemplary in this respect. (Katzenstein et al. 1998) However, the "new" approaches being embraced in the IR literature have their own particular limitations. Perhaps the central one is that the major contemporary paradigms of rational choice, culturalism, and structuralism represent paradigmatic approaches, each of which claims to offer the most powerful explanatory framework (Lichbach 1997; Sil 2000). The metadebates surrounding these paradigms are legion, so there is an opportunity for IR scholars to benefit from the results of these earlier debates rather than repeat their unfruitful twists and turns. Put simply,

¹ Other fundamental problems in the transformation literature and beyond for which this contribution may have some relevance include: the division between structuralist and individualist (esp. rational choice) approaches (Appel 2000); between state and culture (Steinmetz 1999); between global and comparative political economy (Rutland 2002; Pickel/True2002); between gender studies and transformation theory (Steens 1999); between sociology and economics (Akos-Tas 1998); between the nationalism literature and the literature on economic transformation literature and globalization.

² Constructivism is the view that all facts are human constructions. This is the opposite of the positivist view that all facts are given. Both are untenable. (Further on constructivism, cf. Bunge 1996, 295-98, 335-38; Bunge 1999, Ch. 9.)

there is, I believe, a growing consensus among social scientists that each of the grand theories has something to contribute yet none is sufficient on its own.

Take, for instance, the literatures on nationalism and postcommunist transformation, two examples of vibrant multidisciplinary research fields. The fact that both macroprocesses of nationalism and postcommunist transformation straddle (transcend?) the division between internal and external, national and international, local and global makes them ideal empirical and historical objects of study in the context of the problematic at hand. Using postcommunist transformation and nationalism and the literatures devoted to their study as empirical and theoretical contexts, the purpose of this paper is to introduce a type of middle-range theorizing not committed to any particular grand theory, but at the same time seeking theoretically to go beyond rich descriptive accounts of individual cases. A fortunate byproduct of the approach to be presented here is that it offers a relatively easy way of transcending the comparative-IR divide.

The approach is not exactly new, though it has few practitioners. It has been championed recently by a group of eminent social scientists who promote it as the central part of a new research program (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001, 311-13). This mechanism-based approach to explanation is designed to strike a balance between abstract theorizing and atheoretical description: "The key to balancing the demands of both is the elucidation of robust processes in which the same or similar sets of *mechanisms* combine" (ibid., 313; emphasis added). Thus, "explanation consists of identifying crucial mechanisms and their *combinations* into transforming processes" (310; emphasis added). It is important to note that adopting this approach does not mean abandoning the attempt to explain large-scale processes -- in fact, McAdam et al. apply the mechanistic approach to elucidate such broad macrohistorical processes as revolution, nationalism, and democratization - hence its potential significance also for the study of postcommunist transformation. Various dimensions of a mechanism-based approach are examined in an edited volume entitled *Social Mechanisms. An Analytical Approach to Social Theory* (Hedström and Swedberg 1998). As Peter Hedström and Richard Swedberg point out in an earlier article (1996), a social mechanisms approach was advocated by Robert Merton (1967), but for at least three decades has played little role in the social sciences dominated by general social theories, on the one hand, and a

variable-centred mode of theorizing, on the other (Hedström and Swedberg 1996: 282-83). At roughly the same time, philosopher of science Mario Bunge (1997) published a superb treatment of the mechanistic approach in social science, on which more in a moment.

The paper will proceed as follows. First, it will flesh out the mechanistic approach in general terms, adding what in the above cited social science literature on social mechanisms has not been emphasized, namely the simultaneous need for a systemic analytical framework.³ Second, the paper will present a particular social mechanism, the nationalizing mechanism, that is important in postcommunist transformation and globalization processes in general. It is this nationalizing mechanism that, in addition to its explanatory value for transformation processes, happens to link intranational and transnational change processes.

Mechanistic Approach and Systemic Framework

A mechanism is a real process in an existing system. It is not just a concept in a theory.⁴ The mechanistic approach therefore presupposes a systemic ontology. No system, no mechanism. It does not presuppose a systems *theory*. Systems theories have failed in part because they do not capture the dynamics of real systems. The mechanistic approach can be fruitfully applied in the absence of a grand theory -- whether systems theory, rational choice, culturalist or structuralist theories. It does require an *analytical framework* that allows us to identify and model real systems. I will sketch out the systemic analytical framework first and then discuss the mechanism-based approach.

A systemic analytical framework, or *systemism* (Bunge 1996, 1998), is an alternative to both individualism (e.g. of the rational choice or situational logic variety) and holism (various forms of structuralism and functionalism). Systemism accounts for both individual agency and social structure. It postulates that everything is a system or a

³ Charles Tilly (2001) mentions systems only with respect to systems theory which the mechanisms-based approach is supposed to transcend.

⁴ "In my view -- which is that prevailing among natural scientists and engineers -- mechanisms are not pieces of reasoning but pieces of the furniture of the real world. Only the conceptual models of mechanisms belong in our scientific reasonings about the world, so much so that usually one and the same mechanism may be modeled in different ways, and that some hypothetical mechanisms, such as Divine Providence and the Hidden Hand, have no real counterparts." (Bunge 1997, 414) This is not the prevailing

component of one. Individuals are the basic components⁵ of larger systems, from families to economic organizations and ethnic groups. They are components of larger systems such as kinship groups, networks, organizations, economies and nations, all of which are contained in the world system. Systemism models every system in terms of composition, environment, and structure. It breaks down society into four major subsystems – biological or kinship system, economic system, political system, and cultural system. It can be applied at sub-national, national, and transnational levels of analysis. Above the level of societies organized within nation-states, there are regional “supersocieties” (e.g. EU), as well as an international society of states (Armstrong 1998). It is important to note that, unlike Parsonian systems theory, *systemism is not a theory but only a framework or approach*, “just a skeleton to be fleshed out with specific hypotheses and data.” (Bunge 1996, 265) It is therefore immune from standard criticisms of systems theories according to which they are “static” or blind to processes of conflict and change. (Müller 1996)

There is only one world system, but there is a plurality of other systems from regional to biosocial systems. These systems differ from other systems at the same level in their history, composition, structure, and relationship to their environment. Each systemic level - global, regional, national, subnational - and each of its subsystems - economic, political, cultural, biosocial - has its own specific *properties* and to some extent can and often must be analyzed leaving others as black boxes.⁶ (Systems theory is faced with the Herculean task of filling in this entire grid.) However, the extent to which

view among proponents of the mechanisms approach in the social sciences (cf. Hedström and Swedberg 1996, 1998; McAdam et al. 2001; Tilly 2001).

⁵ In contrast to psychology and biology, individuals are not further analyzed in social science into their components. Exceptions: Rational choice theory, whose theoretical core consists of a psychological model of the individual (*homo oeconomicus*) that in light of the contemporary state of debate in social psychology and cognitive psychology is hopelessly outdated. (Bunge 1999, Ch. 5; Gove 1994) (A more tenable simplifying assumption, i.e. satisficing rather than utility maximization, has been available for some time (March and Simon 1958). Sociobiology is an unsuccessful attempt to reduce all social behaviour to biology (cf. Bunge 1998, 35-36).

⁶ The "black boxes" are contained in the basic assumptions of models and theories. While they are of necessity simplifications, they should not be fundamentally inconsistent with the state of knowledge in those disciplines that specialize in the analysis of those particular black boxes. An alternative to "black boxes" for dealing with the level of analysis problem in IR is to postulate that the properties of one level can be reduced to those of another level of analysis. Thus proponents of the strong thesis of globalization argue that any such national level properties are now to be understood as contained in, reducible to, or suspended by global level properties. This solution remains unsatisfactory until this postulate can be

IR and comparative approaches have cultivated analysis of "their" systemic levels without explicit and systematic reference to research on other levels has been excessive, thus creating the "great divide." Much the same can be said about other disciplinary and subdisciplinary divisions in the social sciences. The systemic framework provides an explicit ontological foundation for the widely recognized general view that the various levels and dimensions of the social world are interrelated.

Diagram 1: The Systemic Framework

	Economic	political	cultural	biosocial
World system	world economy	international society (MNC)	[global culture?] of states (IO, INGO, movements) movements)	humanity (cultural org. movements)
Regional systems	regional economies	regional pol. org. (EEC; NAFTA)	civilizations (NATO)	--- (Islam)
National systems	national economies (various capitalisms)	states, regimes (polyarchy et al.)	societies (liberal, non-lib)	imagined communities
Subnational systems	various ec. inst. (firms, households)	various pol. inst. (provinces, munic., movements)	various cult. systems ethnic, educ., arts, movements	networks, families, kin groups
Individuals	homo oeconomicus	zoon politikon	homo faber	homo sapiens

The role of systemism is thus to provide the basic ontology and some analytical focus -- but it does *not* explain. Most of the explanatory work is done when specific mechanisms and combinations of mechanisms underlying major processes occurring in the systems under study (global, regional, national, subnational) can be identified and their workings modeled. The mechanistic approach differs from grand theory which is either too abstract or faced with too many exceptions. It also differs from descriptive accounts which analyze processes large and small but do not search for underlying general mechanisms. But what is a mechanism?

A social mechanism is a process in a social system. The difference between a process and a mechanism is that the mechanism explains how a particular process works.⁷ In

theoretically and empirically substantiated. The academic literature on globalization provides relatively more evidence to the contrary.

⁷ "A description of process, without reference to the underlying mechanism(s), may be said to be *kinematical*. Kinematical accounts are devoid of explanatory power. Any study of mechanisms of some kind may be said to be *dynamical*. (Regrettably, nearly all of the so-called dynamical models of social change are actually kinematical.)" (Bunge 1997, 425-26)

other words, a mechanism is a process that is well understood. The macro processes examined in the study of world politics are usually highly complex and result from a combination of mechanisms. Thus postcommunist transformation, globalization, marketization, democratization, etc. are large-scale processes that contain a number of mechanisms. It is difficult enough to provide clear descriptive accounts of such processes. But without an adequate description of the process, it is impossible to uncover the underlying mechanisms. A case in point is the postcommunist transformation debate in which, aside from the usual political and ideological disagreements, the basic nature (ontology) of the process has been contentious.⁸

Each concrete case of transformation is likely to have its own particular combination of change mechanisms.⁹ Examples of general social mechanisms are cooperation, competition, diffusion, assimilation, emulation, and cognitive reduction of dissonance (Gambetta 1998). McAdam et al. (2001) identify, among others, brokerage, opportunity/threat spirals, and category formation.¹⁰ The concept of mechanism in general usage often refers to specific institutional arrangements or policies (e.g. privatization as a mechanism of transformation). These are designed mechanisms, a special case of mechanism that is perhaps less confusingly called social technology. Social technologies such as economic policies are normative mechanisms that may or may not work the way they were intended. This will depend on how they perform as empirical mechanisms in combination with other mechanisms in a specific context. The challenge for those using a mechanistic approach to explanation (and *a fortiori* for those

⁸ In the literature on postcommunism this is reflected in a terminological and conceptual distinction between transition and transformation. Briefly, the concept of transition suggests approaching postcommunist changes as the move towards market economies and liberal democracies. The concept of transformation, by contrast, signals a sociologically richer and less teleological way of approaching analysis. Further on this see Bönker et al. 2002; Pickel 2001.

⁹ “[A mechanistic approach] shifts the search away from general models like rational choice that purport to summarize whole categories of contention and movement toward the analysis of smaller-scale causal mechanisms that recur in different combinations with different aggregate consequences in various historical settings.” (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 2001, 24) “Every major social change is likely to be biological, psychological, demographic, economic, political, and cultural -- either simultaneously or in succession. Hence, the mechanism of every major social change is likely to be a combination of mechanisms of various kinds coupled together.” (Bunge 1997, 417)

¹⁰ See also Tilly 2001 for mechanisms that are significant in processes of democratization. Bunge offers the following examples: “courtship ritual is a biosocial mechanism for mating; cooperation is a psychosocial mechanism for coordination; torture and ethnic cleansing are biopolitical mechanisms of political control; exit and voice; teaching and learning in a formal school setting are biopsychosocial mechanisms . . . such

developing and implementing social technologies) is to identify significant mechanisms and combinations of mechanisms that advance and deepen our understanding of specific processes.

The Nationalizing Mechanism (NM)

I propose that there is a central mechanism that can help us bridge the gap between national-level and supranational approaches. This is the nationalizing mechanism. As explained earlier, a mechanism is a process in a concrete system. The NM is the generic name for the actually existing, different NMs in the international society of states. Individual states and societies have their own specific NMs. The NM is a process that occurs in both global and national systems, and as such links the global level to the national level and its components. In addition to linking global and national systems, the NM occurs in political, cultural, economic, and biosocial systems and organizations of all sorts. The NM exists and functions in systems and processes as diverse as the state and political system, economic growth, industrial organizations, identities, and the family - subjects traditionally under the jurisdiction of different disciplines and subfields. The fact that a particular mechanism occurs in so many different systems does not necessarily mean that identifying it constitutes a major contribution to the explanation of particular processes. Think, for example, of cooperation and competition, basic mechanisms that work in almost all social systems, but on their own can rarely provide deep explanations of basic processes in those systems. Much the same is true for the NM. Few scholars would call into question either that nationalism has some significance in world affairs or that it plays some role in various spheres of social life. Clearly, in order to make a strong explanatory claim for the NM, much more has to be argued for. At the same time, it is important to remember that any claim for the explanatory significance of a particular mechanism in macrosocial processes is necessarily limited since such processes are the result of combinations of mechanisms (see above).

The nationalism literature is of great value for the study of NMs, but it also has some distinct limitations. The most important of these is that this literature treats

events occur in the individual/society interface: they involve interactions between individuals embedded in a social whole and are constrained or stimulated by the latter's structure. (Bunge 1997, 445)

nationalism above all as the explanatory problem (*explanandum*). Why is there nationalism, what kind of nationalism is it, how does it manifest itself, what are its prospects? These are the primary questions addressed in this literature. The potential contribution of the NM as I see it lies in its largely unrecognized explanatory function (*explanans*). True, nationalism is invoked to account for a variety of phenomena from anti-neoliberalism to parochialism (Barber 1995; Friedman 2000; Vargas Llosa 2002), but such accounts usually rest on questionable, highly normative conceptions of nationalism. If a noun were to be associated with the NM, nation, nationality, or nationness might be less misleading than nationalism. The NM is at the intersection of nation, state, and society. Some clarification of these fundamental concepts is therefore in order.

While general public discourse often conflates the meaning of nation, state, society and country, social scientists are usually clear on the distinction between nation and state. Unfortunately, the same is not true for the distinction between nation and society. The two are often used interchangeably, and even if they are kept separate, there is no agreed-upon set of definitions for them. The globalization debate has further confused things as nations, societies, and states are described as being in various states of decomposition, transnationalization, etc. For the present purposes, let me suggest the following definitions.

- A society is physically bounded by a territorial state. This does not prejudice the nature or extent of the ties that various components (both systems and individuals within that society) have with "external" systems or individuals. Nor does it prejudice whether a society is globalizing, transnationalizing, fragmenting, renationalizing, or whatever.

Functional interdependency between individuals or groups of people does not constitute a societal context, by itself. Shared understandings may be situationally or sub-group specific, so that they by themselves are not constitutive of society. But 'societal' quality is inherent to the constitution and reproduction of shared understandings across very different sub-spaces, across all the aspects of life in society. A specific phenomenon is truly societal if its meaning and origin can only be realized if it is cross-referenced to related phenomena in all the other sub-spaces of society. It is in this sense that society can be sociologically self-sufficient. This sense therefore is quite different from society being the sole provider of meaning or commodities for all those in its ambit. It has no monopoly for conveying meaning, understanding and orientations, but it does have a *quasi-monopoly for inter-linked and coherent meaning, across all the different aspects of human life in socially organized form. The monopoly price exacted, or gladly granted, tends to be a more or less intense existential allegiance, which is linked with identity.* (Sorge 1999, n.p.)

A society's degree of nationness¹¹ is determined by the extent to which it possesses, i.e. is perceived by its members, to have such interlinked and coherent meaning.

- A nation is a collective composed of individuals who see and experience themselves as members of a nation and who are so recognized by others.¹² A nation is contained in one or more societies. As students of nationalism and the state have pointed out, in addition to claiming a state for itself, it has been historically a central function of the idea of nation to serve as a bridge between the rulers (state) and the ruled (society).¹³ Extreme forms of nationalism seek to eliminate the distinction between state and society altogether (Breuilly 1994), whereas less radical nationalisms seek to bridge this gap. A state is usually dominated by one nation¹⁴ which claims to represent society as a whole and which has "cultural hegemony" in the definition and reproduction of *interlinked and coherent meaning*, i.e. its *nationness*. Every state also contains subordinate nations, defined ethnically (most common), racially (e.g. US; South Africa)¹⁵, or culturally (e.g. *Auslandsdeutsche*).¹⁶ Subordinate nations are politically, economically, and culturally integrated into society in different forms and to varying degrees.¹⁷ Examples of subordinate nations are native populations and migrant workers. Regardless of nationality, however, all members of a society more or less enthusiastically partake of its nationness - whether as insiders or outsiders, dominant or dominated groups. Thus politically, economically, and culturally, a particular society's nationness may be inclusive or exclusive, egalitarian or

¹¹ Benedict Anderson (1991, 4), for example, writes: "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time." My usage of nationness as a property rather than value of society is slightly different. For literature using nationness in my sense, see among others Chatterjee 1992, Kosher 1998, Laxer 2000, Suny 1999. It would of course be useful to establish some indicators of nationness, both in order to fill out the concept and in order to have some specific categories to work with.

¹² This definition attempts to incorporate the subjective, intersubjective and objective dimensions of nation. The statement itself is objective, recognition is intersubjective, and experience is subjective.

¹³ The separation of state and society as a fundamental political and philosophical problem was the central challenge for social contract theory since Hobbes and Bodin (Pickel 1989). The idea of the nation and national sovereignty has become the universally recognized solution to this problem.

¹⁴ In states with more than one numerically and politically strong nation, cultural hegemony may to some extent be shared (cf. Canadian case). In all other states, the dominant nation's cultural hegemony may be more or less openly contested, both from within the dominant nation and by the subordinate nations.

¹⁵ On US national identity, see Collins 2001; on South African national identity, Marx 1997.

¹⁶ The term is used primarily to refer to ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union who have emigrated to Germany.

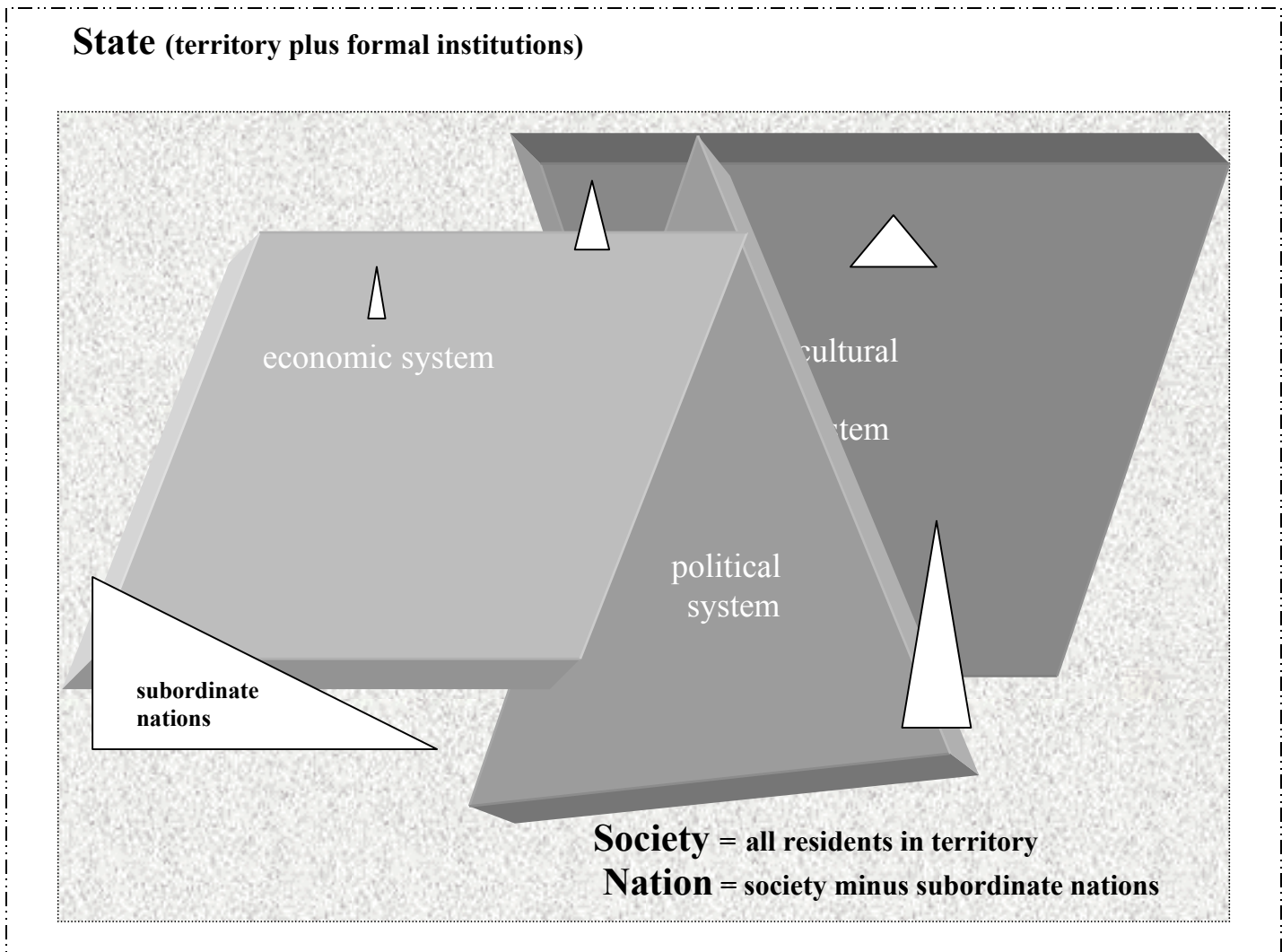
¹⁷ To take the case of Germany, *Auslandsdeutsche* are politically fully integrated as citizens, yet culturally barely integrated (therefore a "subordinate nation"). Second and third-generations Turks, on the other hand, may be fully integrated culturally but not politically if they don't have German citizenship.

inegalitarian with respect to resident members of other nations. It may also be more or less open to assimilation over time (especially for second generation members of other nationalities). Mediated by its specific nationness, a particular society will further differentiate among members of other nations by making significant distinctions in degree of inclusiveness or exclusiveness, and openness to assimilation they are granted. Thus nationness, defined as interlinked and coherent meaning in a particular society, is not the same as nation or nationality. The concrete content and defining characteristics of nationness differ from society to society and change over time.

The NM refers to the process of state actors and non-state actors consciously or unconsciously "playing out" nationness in individual and collective action in and between societies. It should be noted that I do not propose to define nation or society in terms of its meaning or symbolic structures. Rather, I have defined nationness in these terms and linked these meaning structures to concrete social (nations and societies) and political (state) systems. In other words, nationness is a property of societies organized in states. The NM operates in these concrete systems at global, regional, national (societal) and subnational levels. Since nationness is a societal property, it is played out (or in a more structuralist turn of phrase, manifests itself) in political, economic, cultural, and biosocial systems.

To this point, the paper has argued for and presented in general outline a systemic framework and a mechanistic approach to explanation. It has put forth a particular mechanism, the nationalizing mechanism, as a central mechanism in processes of postcommunist transformation and globalization. It has further attempted to clarify the nature of some of the most important systems in which the NM works, i.e. state, society, and nation. It is now possible to flesh out this particular change mechanism and the systemic framework in somewhat more concrete terms.

Diagram 2: Major Social Systems in the Nationalizing Mechanism: State, Society, Nation



Note: this is a highly simplified model of state, society, and nation. Unlike the real systems which it depicts, the model is static. Moreover, the model does not depict any of the innumerable ties these social systems and subsystems have with others situated in other states and societies. Some of these ties may be so strong that it makes sense to speak of supranational systems (e.g. MNCs, INGOs, transnational migrant communities). However, whatever the strength of these ties, all the parts of such supranational systems are always situated in particular states and societies and composed of nationals from specific societies. The textured background depicts the nation, defined as society minus subordinate nations (the latter are represented by the white triangles). Thus members of subordinate nations, in the case of migrant communities, residing in this state and society may have very strong ties (and individuals, groups, and subordinate nations) with their "home countries" (i.e. their nations), and may therefore be considered transnational communities. To a large extent, however, their living conditions and life chances are determined by their host state and society. This is most obvious in the case of migrant workers employed at the lowest

level of economic activity who are integrated neither politically nor culturally. The different positions of the triangles depicting subordinate nations refer to the fact that at least some members of subordinate nations may hold high positions in one or two subsystems of society, but not in another. Take, for example, highly paid professionals in the cultural system such as musicians or scientists or in the economic systems such as managers in MNCs) without citizenship rights and possibly also lacking language and societal competence and recognition.

Members of subordinate nations with few or no ties outside the state and society in which they live are likely to be excluded in some fashion from society's economic, political and/or cultural systems, such as when race or ethnicity overlap with class distinctions, or when native populations are in effect economically, politically and culturally disenfranchised.

Note also that members of the dominant nation may belong to socially otherwise marginalized groups. Right wing extremism is closely related to this particular combination of de facto social exclusion and nominal membership in the dominant nation.

The NM as a historical mechanism

The NM, like all social mechanisms, has evolved historically. It has originated with the emergence of a global system based on nation-states. (Mann 1993; Tilly 1990) There is an ongoing debate in the nationalism literature whether nations are a result of the formation of modern states (modernists) or significantly predate them (primordialists). (Özkirimli 2000) Since both sides of the dispute agree that nations and states have been central social systems in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we can leave this theoretical and historical problem safely aside. Whether, to what extent, and how fast their centrality is on the decline in the twentyfirst century is a major question in the globalization debate. The significance of the NM, however, is not affected by the outcome of this debate. Even if the proponents of the most radical views of globalization turned out to be right, the processes of dissolution, decline, and fragmentation of the nation-state system, as well as the formation of a successor system, would be strongly influenced by the NM. Think of the continuing significance of premodern social systems and mechanisms in the modern world. The NM has achieved its contemporary significance by penetrating social systems from the world system all the way to the individual. Let us look at how the NM works at various levels of social systems. For the structure of this presentation, the reader is referred back to Diagram 1.

The NM at the world system and regional system level

The world system as a biosocial system consists of humanity, as well as all of other species of social animals. The relationship of human systems with other species and the natural environment in general is now widely recognized as politically, economically, culturally, and morally important, if only because the survival of the human species depends on the sustainability of this relationship.¹⁸ In this sense, there is an emerging global awareness of the precarious existence of the human species. Of course local awareness of humankind's dependence on other animals and the natural environment long predates the emergence of the modern world system, in fact various traditional forms

¹⁸ See however Goodin et al. 1997, who explore the wider claim for "sovereignty" for the nonhuman great apes, in light of some debates in political theory and of contemporary developments in the theory and practice of sovereignty.

serve as models or sources of inspiration for current attempts to redress an imbalance that is very much a product of modernity. The NM is both centrally implicated in the historical evolution of global ecological problems and is certain to be an important mechanism in attempts at coping with them. This is because, while many economic processes that cause serious ecological damage are of global scope, cultural and political systems are currently not up to the task of dealing with them globally. In sum, humanity is a world biosocial system that with other social animals shares one natural environment.

The great world religions are universalist at least in their fundamental principles and often in their missionary aspirations. Even though they share a set of core values, as social systems they are, often sharply, divided. More important, they are closely linked up with political processes in states and societies, and as such are affected by and involved in the NM. While the search is on for new forms of non-Eurocentric universal value systems and "epistemologies" that might provide a doctrinal basis for one global culture (Lewis and Aikenhead 2001; Miyoshi 2001), there is in this sense no world culture but rather several world cultures (see also below).¹⁹ However, if we include modern science and technology into our conception of culture, then it is quite possible to speak of one specific world cultural system composed of the globally interconnected scientific and educational systems that produce and reproduce this system.

Is there a world political system? The answer must be affirmative if we refer to the "international society" of states as represented in the UN and its many organizations as a system. This world political system is composed of nominally sovereign nation-states that collectively control the entire territory of the planet. The nation-state as a social system is thus the global rule to which there are no exceptions. (Meyer et al. 1997) The world political system is also composed of international, global-level political organizations and movements that however have only limited political authority even in their narrow fields of activity. As the IR literature attests, the nature of the world political system is further complicated by the fact that nominal political sovereignty translates into anything approaching real sovereignty only for a small number of states. The whole idea of political sovereignty in the international system is further compromised by the interrelationships between these political systems and various

¹⁹ I'm using culture here in its anthropological sense of symbolic or meaning systems.

cultural and economic systems at national and supranational levels that are at the same time political actors. It is therefore exceedingly difficult to get a reliable description of the world political system's components and structure (cf. different approaches), let alone theories that could explain the dynamics of change. The NM (in conjunction with other mechanisms) promises to be useful in capturing crucial dimensions of how the world political system works since it operates in all the social systems of which it is composed.

Talk of the "global economy" is of course all the rage in the globalization debate. Discursively in any case, it certainly does exist. However, if we apply the stricter standards of the systemic framework, a different kind of world economic system emerges. It is far from the imagined "new economy" in which national economic systems have all but vanished. Since economic systems are embedded in political and cultural systems, it is not enough to point to trends in global flows or to economic actors operating globally. The academic literature on globalization has produced relatively fine-grained descriptions of the continuing fundamental significance of national political-cultural economies [cf. lit on nat ec cultures], as well as of the asymmetrical relations between groups of economic actors both between and within national economies. In addition to transnationally operating economic organizations, the world economic system is composed of national political-cultural economies. Hence the significance of the NM for the global economy. It is also composed of regional systems, to which we turn next.

The world biosocial system of humanity has its counterpart in the "imagined community" of national biosocial systems (on which more below). There does not seem to exist an imagined regional counterpart of biosocial system, unless we interpret "civilizations" and world religions to this effect. I propose to use the term civilization to refer to regional cultural systems. While a recent political treatise (Huntington 1994) has widely and negatively affected the connotations of this term, I believe this is not a sufficient reason to abandon it. The term civilization has a long and distinguished history and arguably is a fundamental reality, underlying the very *raison d'être* of area studies in the social sciences and humanities. Civilizations have a long historical genealogy predating the history of the nation-state by centuries or even millenia. Their significance is relativized by the fact that world civilizations have dissolved into, or perhaps more accurately, have given rise to different national cultures. Thus while the importance of

civilizations as regional cultural systems is not called into question, the relative importance of national cultures puts them into context. Hence the significance of the NM.

Probably the major reason why regional cultures are relatively less important is that, in contrast to national cultures, they do not have strong political counterparts. Regional political systems have hegemons, i.e. national political systems exerting control over other national systems. The major exception here of course is Western and Central Europe, which has the by far most institutionalized and law-based regional political system in the world. However, as students of European integration have shown, this regional system is composed of states that, monetary union notwithstanding, continue to be the most important systems in many other respects. Thus taking our cue from the EU, the prospects of the NM remaining central at the regional level are good.

Regional economic systems have been studied increasingly over the last few years in attempts to investigate the realities underlying globalization discourse. (Breslin and Higgott 2000) Much the same is true here that applies to the regional political systems just discussed. Most regional economic systems have national hegemons, with the partial exception again of the EU in which raw national economic power is tempered by supranational political institutions. What is perhaps most important to note about regional economies as components of the world system is that there are highly asymmetrical relations between them, with three or four dominant regions accounting for the bulk of activity, on the one hand, and vast (in terms of territory and population) regions of the globe that remain precariously integrated into the global economy. In sum, the overriding reality in regional economies as political-cultural economic systems is that of the national level.

Before taking the analysis to the national level, it may be useful to point out that the above emphasis on the central importance of the NM at regional and world levels does not prejudice overall trends or eventual outcomes of current transformation processes. It does mean, however, that globalizing and regionalizing processes must be placed in the context of the NM, certainly in order to be able to gauge their relative importance, but also for constructing powerful explanations of the change processes themselves occurring at regional and global levels.

The NM at the level of state and society

The national level of state, society and economy is considered by many contributors to the globalization debate still the most important level of analysis (Kitschelt et al. 1999; Krasner 1999; Streeck and Crouch 1997; Weiss 1998). While the centrality of the NM for the argument of this paper might suggest that it sides with such authors, this is not necessarily or a priori the case. The NM is a process working at supranational and subnational levels as well as at national levels. More precisely, it works in virtually all biosocial, cultural, political and economic systems at global, regional, national, and subnational levels. But it is only one crucial change mechanism among others. Moreover, the way it combines with other basic change mechanisms may differ from case to case. Thus the claim of this paper is at the same time modest and ambitious. It is modest in claiming for the NM significance always in the context of specific systems and only in conjunction with other social mechanisms. But the NM is not presented here as a variable that has greater significance than other variables. Mechanismic explanation is the explanation of processes in concrete social systems. This approach is ambitious in its claim to provide deeper explanations of how change processes actually work, thus going beyond approaches that seek to establish the relative causal importance of certain variables.²⁰ Let us look at the major national-level social systems in which the NM occurs.

In nationalist rhetoric and to some extent in common sense understandings, a nation appears as a biosocial unit, which in reality it is of course not. In this view the nation is like one large family or community that is related by blood, kinship, culture and a common history. We know from the nationalism literature that such ethnic-cultural conceptions of a biosocial community are an act of collective imagination (Anderson) that historically has depended on technological (printing press, mass education), cultural ("high culture"), and political (modern state) preconditions. It is Plato's "noble myth" in its modern guise. The sociological and psychological literature on nationalism has examined the mechanisms that make such collective imaginings of a quasi-biosocial

²⁰ See further on this Bunge 1997.

community possible (on which more below) -- mechanisms that are at work in all modern nations, regardless of whether their nationalism is more ethnic or more civic.

The collective representations of a nation as a biosocial system tend to support and reinforce ideas of the nation as a cultural system. As explained earlier, nation and society tend to be used interchangeably. In most modern states, the term nation has positive connotations so that state representatives will call on the nation when addressing society as a whole. In some modern states, the term nation has problematic or negative connotations so that in political discourse society and country may take its place. Regardless of linguistic conventions in specific cases, I have proposed earlier a general definition according to which a state is usually dominated by one nation which claims to represent society as a whole and which has "cultural hegemony" in the definition and reproduction of *interlinked and coherent meaning across all the different aspects of human life in socially organized form*, which I referred to as the society's *nationness*. It is in this sense that the nation is (claimed to be) the people as a whole. The boundaries of a nation are more difficult to determine than those of society which has physical boundaries (territorial state), since the existence of a nation depends fundamentally on individual experience and social recognition, both of which are diverse and much more "fluid." Both nation and society correspond to the entire social system at the national level -- though both are at the same time less -- the nation since it does not include members of subordinate nations residing in the state; and the society since it is defined in contradistinction to the state. The need for these somewhat complicated distinctions is unfortunate but unavoidable. The working of the NM in fact, and the possibility of modeling it adequately in theory, depend very much on these distinctions.

The political system at the national level includes the state and civil society.²¹ The distinction between state and non-state actors is at times problematic (e.g. with respect to political parties or neocorporatist institutions), but sufficiently sharp for our purposes. The NM is crucial in structuring and mediating relationships between these

²¹ This is a distinction that in its narrow form applies only to modern liberal societies that are functionally highly differentiated and in which society and economy are systems with a significant degree of autonomy from the state. In other words, economy and civil society are formally empowered to be actors in the political system. Non-liberal civil societies do not have the same degree of functional differentiation and autonomy from the state as liberal civil societies. On the distinction between Civil Society (i.e. in its Western liberal sense) and civil society in a general sense, see Gellner 1994.

two sets of actors. It is through the NM that the state seeks to justify and implement its authoritative decisions by appealing to the nation for its support (*legitimation function*²²). Non-state actors, whether cultural, political, or economic, in turn work with or through the NM in order to pursue their respective goals. It is particularly important at this point to emphasize the non-intentional dimension of the NM. Thus the *explicit* functions and effects of the NM stem from social actors consciously using the mechanism in pursuit of their interests. By contrast, the *implicit* functions and unintended effects of the NM stem from its close linkage with society's symbolic system of interlinked and coherent meaning, i.e its nationness (see above). These are in part constitutive of perception, identity, and rational action. In both senses, the NM has a crucial *coordinating function* for social action. It is the pervasiveness of this coordinating function of the NM that makes it so important for national-level political systems. Successful coordination of political action is a precondition for meaningful cooperation and conflict.²³ This holds for political action of national state and non-state actors at both subnational and supranational levels. Thus the NM has an *integration function* for systems at various levels. Intranational systems seek to integrate themselves into the larger national system. National systems seek to integrate themselves into the larger regional and global systems.

The integration of national economies, including often their creation in the first place, has been a major part of modern state and nation building. With the accelerating internationalization and globalization of economic activity in the past three decades, the nature of economic systems at national level has become the subject of intense controversy. Both in terms of its composition (e.g. MNCs, migrant workers) and in terms of its relationship with the environment (global flows of trade, capital, technology, information and labour), the "identity" of national economies has become more uncertain.²⁴ It is the dynamics of economic change, driven in part by key technological innovations, that are said to pose the major threat to the integrity of all national level systems. As pointed out earlier, the NM does not prejudge the outcome of these change

²² Speaking of functions does not make this analysis functionalist in a general sense. One can replace "function" with "effect" without altering the argument. On functions and functionalism, see Mahner and Bunge 2001.

²³ This is why the NM is also particularly relevant for the extensive literature on democratic consolidation. See Linz and Stepan 1996.

²⁴ Economic nationalism, however, is alive and well. See Helleiner 2002; Pickel (forthcoming).

processes. However, it does allow us to see more clearly the connection between economic activity as represented in the models of mainstream economics, on the one hand, and its actual embeddedness in cultural and political systems, on the other. The national economic system as subject and object of *political* action is part of the NM and its legitimation, coordination and integration functions, both externally (regionally, globally) and internally (economically, politically, and culturally). As theorists of nationalism (see esp. Gellner 1983) have recognized, the coherence of a national economy is also, and perhaps above all, a cultural achievement. In the absence of a society's symbolic system of interlinked and coherent meaning, there would be no national economies. (Challenge: find a contemporary society low in nationness that is economically successful.)

The NM at subnational levels

The creation of a relatively unified societal space integrating a national state, economy and culture is one of the major achievements of Western modernity. It is at the same time implicated in a whole range of social problems that are extensively described in postmodern and anticolonial literatures. Euro-centrism, ethno-centrism, social homogenization and the repression of minorities are some of the undisputed effects of the NM at global and subnational levels. Perhaps nowhere else does the Janus-faced character of the NM reveal itself as clearly as in the enormous diversity of effects with which it can be associated in cultural, political, and economic terms. The same general mechanism is co-responsible for some of humanity's greatest social achievements and some of its darkest moments. This once again underlines a methodological point raised earlier, i.e. that the NM usually comes in a bundle along with other social mechanisms that jointly produce a particular outcome.

The working of the NM at subnational levels is relatively well mapped, though rarely in explicitly mechanistic terms. The most obvious effect of the NM at this level is that it integrates cultural, political, and economic systems existing at lower-than-national level into the national systems. The globalization debate has raised a spectre for the most developed countries that in much of the rest of the world has been widespread reality for a while: national disintegration. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and

Czechoslovakia are occasionally presented as recent instances of national disintegration. However, those who argue that these cases are better understood as cases of national separation and reintegration tend to have a better grasp of the NM.²⁵ Individual states cum societies differ enormously in the degree to which they are nationally integrated. From a Western perspective, we tend to take a high degree of integration for granted so that the NM is barely if at all visible in social systems contained in and bounded by a particular society.²⁶ For explaining the working of some subnational systems, the NM may be of minor significance or so patently obvious (i.e. well understood) that it hardly needs to be spelled out. The NM tends to be, to quote Michael Billig's (1995) memorable term in this context, banal in so many ways that it works very often not through the intentions and conscious calculations of individual and collective actors but rather through their unconscious minds. From the national family (cf. felt by and reinforced for billions of people during the Olympic Games) to the nuclear family in which new members of society are socialized, the NM works in a myriad of different ways.

The integration of subnational biosocial systems, such as kinship and ethnic groups, social networks, and families, is a task that many contemporary states have not accomplished, and perhaps never will. How much integration is possible, desirable, and necessary poses a set of complex questions to which there are probably no generally applicable answers. Historical evidence suggests that the integration of such subnational biosocial systems into a national system requires a functioning state and a minimally unified and coherent society (see discussions of nation and society above). Since all biosocial systems today are organized in nation-states, the NM is (almost by definition) at work globally, though given the varying degrees of nationness in the world's societies, it is clear that it will have widely divergent effects.

The integration of cultural systems at the subnational level follows a number of basic patterns. The liberal model integrates through pluralism, individual rights, and implicit hierarchies, a strategy that has more recently been criticized as inadequate for the integration of certain ethnically based and other cultural groups (Taylor 1992; Kymlicka

²⁵ These cases of state dissolution and national reformation are probably best understood by combining the NM with change mechanisms based on the existence of federal state institutions in those multinational states. For an argument to this effect, see Roeder 2001.

²⁶ Major exceptions include Canada, Northern Ireland, and Spain.

1995). Non-liberal models of integration create explicit religious, racial, and/or ethnoculturally based hierarchies, sanctioned by the state and usually reflected in the structure of their economic systems. Subnational political systems are integrated nationally through a number of basic regime types, such as polyarchy, federalism, and authoritarianism. For the most part, subnational cultural and political systems are integrated into their national system. However, as a large and growing literature shows, numerous subnational systems from social movements and ethnic groups to professional associations and international political organizations also and at the same time integrate regionally and globally.²⁷ In any event, the NM is important for their analysis since these subnational cultural and political organizations remain firmly anchored in their national systems.

The same does not seem to hold true for certain economic subsystems. Some descriptions go so far as to portray multinational corporations (MNCs) as suspended in a transnational space. What is perhaps more plausible is to confine oneself to the observation that the economic size and scope of operation of many MNCs make them into economic subsystems of a special kind. Their subsidiaries are several economic subsystems of national systems, while the MNC as a whole is an economic subsystems of regional economic systems or even the global economy. The academic literature has produced strong evidence in favour of the assumption that, whatever the degree of footlooseness, national economies and national cultures, not to forget states, continue to be crucial resources for the operations of MNCs. Thus the relevance of the NM in this context.

The NM at the individual level

There are at least two reasons that make it imperative to discuss the NM at the level of the individual. The first is that the systemic framework proposed in this paper is claimed to build a bridge between individualism and holism. We therefore need to get some idea how the NM works at the level of the individual. The second reason is that globalization and postmodern discourses suggest that the national is becoming increasingly irrelevant for individual identities. Here we need to consult literature from anthropology and social

²⁷ The argument that regions are able to bypass the national level is at best partially true.

psychology to get a general idea of how the NM is anchored in the individual. More widely known, suggestive and useful concepts that can serve as a point of departure are ideology (Marx), hegemony and common sense (Gramsci), and habitus and doxa (Bourdieu) (Foster 1991, 237). We are interested here in how societies achieve their quasi-monopoly for interlinked and coherent meaning across all the different aspects of human life in socially organized form, i.e. their nationness (see above). How are national cultures made?²⁸

The short answer is that the main processes connecting national culture and the individual are the production of collective memory, the state's application of specific political technologies, and the individual's self-constitution as a subject through specific practices. The NM in each case combines with other social mechanisms in the production and reproduction of a national culture. Collective memory is created through such mechanisms as historiography (writing the nation) and rituals (living the nation).

One of the major effects of a collective memory is that it provides substance to the "imagined community": it demarcates the nation in time and space. (on collective memory, see also) The state's political technologies rely on such mechanisms as classification, knowledge, and regulation. For example, the classification of residents into nationals and foreigners, citizens and non-citizens; the dissemination of knowledge through national curricula; and the regulation of morality and gender (Foucault 1995; Nagel 1998; Scott 1998; True forthcoming)

The legitimizing of the nation-state proceeds not only in the public enactment of its self-defined traditions, but by constant reiteration of its power through what have become accepted as natural (rational and normal) state functions, of certifying, counting, reporting, registering, classifying, and identifying. (Cohn and Dirks 1988, 205; quoted in Foster 1991, 244)

The individual's self-constitution as a national subject also occurs through mechanisms of commodification, diffusion, and consumption. Practices such as taking part in the consumption of heritage (e.g. by visiting museums) and national sports to reading the same ads and watching the same movies are instances of those mechanisms that, in

²⁸ This section relies strongly on an excellent review of the relevant anthropological literature by Foster (1991).

combination with the NM, contribute to the production of a national culture. These same mechanisms of commodification, diffusion, and consumption can also combine with regionalizing and globalizing mechanisms, and as such provide alternatives or supplements to individual national identities. Once again, the outcome should not be prejudged. But, as at global, regional, national and subnational levels, the NM should be carefully accounted for also at the individual level.

Finally, the literature in social psychology has produced insights into some additional relevant mechanisms. The guiding question here is how individuals develop feelings about and attachments and loyalty to large groups such as the nation. One general psychological mechanism at play is that individuals see groups as providing them with security and status in return for their loyalty and commitment.

Nations, in particular, achieve personal relevance for individuals when they become sentimentally attached to the homeland (affectively involved), motivated to help their country (goal-oriented), and gain a sense of identity and self-esteem through their national identification (ego involved). [. . .] The feelings transfer across from smaller to ever larger groups as people perceive themselves to represent and be accountable to these larger entities. (Druckman 1994, 63)

Conclusion

This paper has introduced an explanatory approach that can assist in bridging the divide between IR and comparative approaches and in resolving the level of analysis problem between national and global perspectives. Its point of departure is the unresolved metadepbate between rational choice, structuralist and culturalist paradigms and the recent formulation of a promising alternative. This alternative approach explains by identifying and modeling mechanisms that work in various social systems. The paper puts forth the nationalizing mechanism as a central change mechanism in the global system. This historical and system-specific mechanism operates in different types of systems at various levels in combination with other mechanisms. How the nationalizing mechanism works in economic, political, cultural, and biosocial systems at global, regional, national, subnational, and individual levels has been discussed in the body of the paper. The resulting model of systems and nationalizing mechanisms is crude but hopefully

suggestive of the potential explanatory power of this mechanism in particular and of mechanism-based explanation in general.

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