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Concepts of Society in Official Statistics. Perspectives From Mobilities Research and Migration Studies on the Re-Figuration of Space and Cross-Cultural Comparison

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Key words:

society; cross-cultural comparison; sociology of space; spatial analysis; re-figuration of spaces; survey research; quantitative research; administrative data; sampling; mobile methods; migration

Abstract: Historically, the emergence of modern nation-states has been accompanied by the development of a specific understanding of the individual, population and society, spatial boundaries and affiliations. With the help of official statistics, which developed complementary to the nation states, political concepts became measurable categories and empirical realities. The relevance of official statistics for constitution of "society" lies in the fact that it forms the basis for sampling strategies in standardized social research and thus also for comparative cultural social research: As the key to generalizing research results from a few cases to larger scales, standardized research requires samples from defined populations. However, this approach has been criticized in the literature as a container approach for society because it presupposes rather than analyses congruencies between (national) territory, culture and society. The issue at stake is not a mere methodological flaw, but the effect of the sampling strategy is to affirm and naturalize the national framework of society and culture. This hides transnational social relations and identity frameworks. The critique of the outlined territorial concept of society forms the background for the analysis of specific problems and omissions in official statistics.

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1. Assumed Congruencies of Society, Culture and National Territory in Cross-Cultural Social Research

Culture and *society* are two terms commonly used in sociology to explain differences between individuals, social groups or larger collectives. For example, social behavior or practices, with regard to individuals, are understood to be shaped by such factors as subjective values and beliefs, and, with regard to society, by cultural factors (SEIPEL & RIPPL, 2008). In social research, especially in quantitative research, *culture* tends to be understood as a property of *society*, which is typically operationalized as *national population*. [1]

Territorially bound national societies represent socio-spatial figurations which historically emerged as part of modern state formations beginning in the sixteenth century, resulting in internally pacified and socio-culturally homogenized state territories (ANDERSON, 1988; ELDEN, 2009; ELIAS, 1999 [1939]; KNOBLAUCH & LÖW, 2017). In recent decades, this traditionally assumed congruence of society, culture and national territory has been criticized by scholars of the spatial turn (LÖW, 2001; SOJA, 1989), of transnational inequality research (BECK, 2007; WEISS, 2005) and of mobilities studies (MANDERSCHIED, 2009; URRY, 2000). Three significant points of *critique* emerging from these debates are put forward.

1. As part and parcel of global economic and political interdependencies as well as information and communication-based socio-cultural relations, the principle of territoriality seems to cede to translocal and networked formations. These developments have been described in terms of "network society" (CASTELLS, 2000 [1996]), the "transnational capitalist class" (SKLAIR, 2002) or relational "geographies of responsibilities" (MASSEY, 2004, p.6).
2. Mobilities scholars have prominently criticized the sedentary conceptualization of society and argued in favor of an understanding of the social based on mobilities and movement (URRY, 2000).
3. Especially scholars of migration studies highlight the non-exclusive character of personal belonging and cultural identity forming transnational spaces and cultures (AMELINA & FAIST, 2012; FUHSE, 2010; GLICK SCHILLER, BASCH & SZANTON-BLANC, 1995; NOWICKA, 2007; NOWICKA & RYAN 2015). [2]

These critiques of the nationally-framed understanding of society are widely known, yet *how to address them methodologically in empirical research has received little attention*. One typical way of handling this issue in large parts of sociological literature, is that of not using the term *society*, certainly not least to avoid accusations of an essentializing and ontologizing conception of society or of applying a container concept of the social. Often, rather than invoking society, seemingly less problematic terms like "the social," "socialities," "social formations" or "spatial re-figuration of the social world" are used instead (KNOBLAUCH & LÖW, 2017). However, as MARCHART (2013) argued, the problem of the conception of society cannot be solved by simply omitting the usage of the term.

On the contrary, thereby society is implicitly re-articulated as a "material negative casting of the void around which the social is formed" (p.335).¹ [3]

In sociology, society constitutes a foundational concept, which has always been highly contested and controversial. In a non-positivist view, the central issue is not the *true* concept of society. Rather, concepts and representations of *the social* are understood as being shaped and constituted by power relations entailing specific strategies of inclusion and exclusion. In this article, I draw on a performative understanding of social research, which posits that methods and research instruments co-constitute their objects. This approach stands in opposition to a positivist understanding of social research as observing and describing an objectively given world. The performative assumption is rooted in the so-called French epistemology of CANGUILHEM, PÊCHEUX, FOUCAULT, BOURDIEU and SERRES and has been explicitly articulated by, amongst others, DIAZ-BONE (2010). In this perspective, social scientific categories—and correspondingly their operationalization as variables for statistical data collections—represent a hegemonic view determining which features of the social bear relevance for the understanding of society and political interventions (PERCHING & TROGER, 2011). Furthermore, these variables themselves result from negotiations on what is included in each sub-category and what is seen as *the other*. These statistical categories then become elements of social discourses—first of expert discourses and, as research has shown, then of the self-reflecting discourses of society and of individuals (DIAZ-BONE, 2010; HACKING, 1999; WOBBE, 2012). [4]

In the following, I explore the constitution of the concept of *society* as carried along in many empirical "cross-cultural comparisons." In particular, I focus on the understanding of society as it is represented in *official statistics*. In particular, after a short overview over the relationship between society as an object of knowledge and the development of statistics (Section 2), using the example of official German statistics, I identify major techniques of inclusion and exclusion giving shape to *society* by analyzing the properties of statistically recorded elements within the national territory. I ask what methodological techniques are used and which categories are applied to statistically measure and constitute the society or population of the Federal Republic of Germany, and which exclusions and omissions are associated herewith. By this token, I discuss the aspects *genus equality and comparability* (Section 2.1), *addressability* (Section 2.2) and *tired citizenship* (Section 2.3). The text ends with an outlook on alternative definitions and operationalizations of society in cross-cultural research (Section 3). The relevance of official statistics in the following discussion is that they *provide the foundation for sampling strategies in standardized social research*: As the key for generalizing research findings from a small number of cases to larger scales, standardized research requires random samples from defined populations. Typically, it is registers kept by official statistics, such as residents' registration offices, which are used for this purpose (e.g., HÄDER & HÄDER, 2019). Yet, it is this approach which has been criticized in the literature as a

¹ All translations from German texts are mine.

container approach to society, because it assumes rather than analyses congruencies between (national) territory, culture and society (BECK, 2007; LÖW, 2001; URRY, 2000; WEISS, 2005). Rather than constituting a mere methodological shortcoming, the effect of this conventional sampling strategy is a more substantive affirmation and naturalization of national frames of society and culture which obscures transnational social relations and frames of integration and identity, an effect discussed as "methodological nationalism" (BECK, 2007, p.680) in the literature. This critique of the outlined territorial concept of society forms the background of the analysis of specific problems and omissions within official statistics presented in this article, drawing especially on mobilities studies and migration studies. [5]

2. Society and Statistics

The history of statistics is, as often stressed, inseparably interwoven with the development of modern nation states and a national conception of society (e.g., DESROSIÈRES, 2002; FOUCAULT, 2008 [2004]; LEIBLER & BRESLAU, 2005). In his lectures on governmentality FOUCAULT placed "the genesis of a political knowledge that put the notion of population and the mechanisms for ensuring its regulation" (2007 [2004], p.319) at the center of his concerns. By this token, he analyzed statistics as a technology of "biopolitics," as a non-disciplinary power which "is applied not to man-as-body, but to the living man, to man-as-living-being; ultimately, if you like, to man-as-species" (FOUCAULT & EWALD, 2003, p.242). FOUCAULT (2007 [2004]) located the emergence of the population as an object of governance within the context of mercantilist political economic rationalities at the beginning of the seventeenth century:

"The population can only be the basis of the state's wealth and power in this way on condition, of course, that it is framed by a regulatory apparatus (*appareil*) that prevents emigration, calls for immigrants, and promotes the birth rate, a regulatory apparatus that also defines useful and exportable products, fixes the objects to be produced, the means of their production, as well as wages, and which prevents idleness and vagrancy. In short, it requires an apparatus that will ensure that the population, which is seen as the source and the root, as it were, of the state's power and wealth, will work properly, in the right place, and on the right objects. In other words, mercantilism was concerned with the population as a productive force, in the strict sense of the term [...]" (p.97). [6]

With the decline of feudalism and its local regulation of residency and migration, a large class of "masterless men" (CRESSWELL, 2010, p.27) arose threatening the local social order (GROEBNER, 2007). The historically surrounding discourses and knowledges constitute these mobile groups as "the other" to economic prosperity. Pauperism also represents uncontrolled mobility, "it personifies the residue of a more fluid, elusive sociality, impossible either to control or to utilize: vagabondage, order's itinerant nightmare, becomes the archetype of disorder and the antisocial" (PROCACCI, 1991, p.161). On the other hand, then and now, economic production relies on the organized flow of things, goods and labor, while national states and territorially situated societies depend

on securing borders between inside and outside, citizenship and migrants: "Because these states are not self-contained, their existence as discrete political unities depends both on the maintenance of boundaries between them and on the continuing movement of people, ideas, goods and services across those boundaries" (HINDESS, 2000, p.1488). [7]

In this respect FOUCAULT (2007 [2004]) identified the "movement problem of modernity" (p.93)—the constitutive mobilization of productive entities and, at the same time, an immobilization of undesired bodies and objects. Mobilization and immobilization entail decisions about legitimate membership and belonging, which are far more ambiguous and open to contestation than commonly assumed (MANDERSCHIED, 2014). Furthermore, as ELDEN (2007, 2010) argued, the birth of the population as an object of knowledge and government was accompanied by the emergence of territory in its modern sense. In his view, the constitution of a territorially framed population appears to be an effect of inconclusive border control and surveying techniques. In this context, statistics and especially official statistics represent a power-infused technology, which contributes to the constitution of national societies as targets of governmental practices. The powerful impact of numbers and statistics has been highlighted especially by social studies of quantification, rankings and accounting. Scholars thereby showed that the impact roots in social investments, which establish references between numbers and external observations. During this step, decisions are taken on what is a countable unit, what is a property to be measured and what remains unrecorded. In a second step, these investments and mutual references are typically hidden and collectively forgotten, thereby giving numbers the aura of objective measures of naturally given attributes of the social (DESROSIÈRES, 2001, 2002; ESPELAND & STEVENS, 2008; HEINTZ, 2007; MENNICKEN & VOLLMER, 2007; ROSE, 1991; VORMBUSCH, 2007; for an overview of older literature, see BAUR, 2009). [8]

Historically, Germany became a nation state relatively late: The *Deutsches Reich* [German Empire] was founded in 1871. Yet, systematic census surveys were conducted already in the territory of its predecessor, the *Deutsche Zollverein* [German Customs Union], which was founded in 1833 and encompassed many states of the *Deutsche Bund* [German Confederation], 1815-1866). These first censuses were conducted every three years to survey the so-called *Zollabrechnungsbevölkerung* [customs population] (SCHMIDT 2005, pp.128ff.). The German Empire collected systematic census data every 5 years up until 1910. During the First World War, the census took place irregularly and also constituted the base for food allocation. During the governance of the National Socialists, the so-called *Drittes Reich* [Third Reich], census were combined with surveys of occupations and companies. Right after the Second World War, population and occupation census were conducted separately in the four occupation zones in 1945 and 1946. From 1949 until 1981 and 1987 respectively, the two German states collected separate census data. The first census data collection in the unified Germany did not take place until 2011 and is planned to be repeated in 2021 as part of an EU wide census, building and business survey. [9]

In the following, I focus on that 2011 public census and official statistics and outline some changes throughout the history of German census, which underline the social origin and the contingency of the operationalizations. Against the background of mobilities and migration studies, I argue that these operationalizations and categories are rooted in the traditional paradigm of national container societies. [10]

2.1 Genus equality and comparability

The most fundamental prerequisite for statistical recording is the assumption that the measured elements are principally comparable, that they belong to the same species, class or genus. Only the assumption of being of the same kind enables comparisons between these elements as well as identification of different groupings. In early nineteenth-century German censuses, *households* were counted and only the male heads of households surveyed. It was also the male heads of household who were treated as full citizens—having the right to vote and the duty to pay tax and do military service (ROTH & BOATCĂ, 2016). Women and children were politically and legally inferior dependents and subject to the rule of the male head of household—typically the father or husband. By now, however, the species of countable individuals included also adult women, yet, traces of their legal status as dependents prevail until today. At present, further differentiations of the survey units take place in order to account for members of the third sex, who, in Germany, gained legal recognition and representation as *divers* (third sex) in 2017. [11]

The transformation from households to gendered individuals as survey units has to be seen in the context of the development of a bourgeois-liberal understanding of state and community. Whereas traditionally, households constituted the smallest socio-economic unit, in modern, capitalist societies, it is the single individual. Thus, this change mirrors the transition from a domestic economy to paid individual employment and thus to the individualization of social inclusion (WEISCHER, 2011; WOBBE, 2012). At this point in history, the adult individual became the accountable subject to the state and counted by public statistics. These individualized subjects of the population are treated equally, independently of their social and material contexts by means of the standardized survey—their differences, insofar as they are census-relevant, are transformed into measurable, quantifiable personal characteristics. Here the bourgeois-liberal assumption of principal equality of people is re-articulated. One may see the more recent neo-liberal enhanced invocation of the individual subject as responsible for their own chances and performances (FOUCAULT, 2008 [2004]; ROSE 1991) as a further accentuation of this individualizing take on the population. [12]

A second precondition for statistical surveys is the imputed property of members of society to be self-observing and self-reflecting. Only knowing and reflecting subjects are able to provide information about their characteristics and properties. In general, individuals aged 15 and over are considered to be capable of being surveyed. Some scientific surveys draw this line at the age of 18. This means that

in official statistics and many other social surveys full membership of the species of the reflexive intelligent population is operationalized by age. The nominal age of 15, sometimes 18, thus marks the line between fully-fledged members of society and those in the status of becoming. As history of statistics, surveys or citizenship shows, there are varying and several co-existing age limits linked to full membership of society depending on the time in history, country and the issue at stake. At present, there are for example debates on lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 (CHAN & CLAYTON, 2006; KRITZINGER & ZEGLOVITS, 2016). Formerly, the voting age was set in many European countries to 21. Similarly, the legal age is set differently in many countries, with Germany allowing individual assessments for criminals between the age of 18 and 21 years. In Germany, people younger than 14 years of age are seen as not of a criminally responsible age and therefore cannot be prosecuted. The corresponding debates circle mainly around the issues of reflexivity and maturity. Interestingly, the opposite argument is made too, that the age line affects maturity (BERGH, 2013). [13]

In short, the examples from official statistics, voting rights and legal responsibility show an agreement on full membership of society being age-dependent, which defines and then excludes children from certain social, political and legal rights or responsibilities. Yet, depending on the sphere of society, these age limits vary. [14]

2.2 Addressability

Social statistics and survey sampling strategies require the existence of a register within which the elements of the population of interest are recorded. *Official population registers*, which are kept uniformly throughout the state territory by state institutions, form the bases for official statistics, censuses and many social science data collections. [15]

Historically, a uniquely located and addressable population had to be produced purposely. As LEIBLER and BRESLAU (2005) described in detail, in the case of Israel, a first recording of the population group of interest provided the foundation for further and systematic official surveys. By analyzing the first Israeli censuses in 1948, which at the same time represents the original recording of the state population, the authors excavate inclusive and exclusive mechanisms of this state act of population constitution. In the history of other countries, the introduction of standardized state addressing systems—consistent place names, postal codes, street names and house numbers, later supplemented by telephone numbers (TANTNER, 2007, 2014)—is part and parcel of official surveys. [16]

As SCHMIDT (2005) illustrated by way of the Saxon census of 1832, state surveys used to employ human counters who went from house to house in order to register the population. This method was faced with the challenge of vagabonds as a group consisting of hotel guests, students, soldiers, merchants and journeymen who resided only temporally in one place. The interminability of immobilizing society pervades the development of the registration system in Germany, as also reflected in separate registration of *Zigeuner* [Gypsies] as a basically mobile population group (MÜHLBAUER, 1995). Preceding the Nazi-

regime, already, official statistics differentiated explicitly between sedentary and (potentially) mobile elements of society. Still today, the vagrant continues to be seen as a particular suspicious mobile subject, which CRESSWELL described as the "nightmare figure for a settled society" (2011, p.240). Policies aiming to control, discipline and immobilize these people can presently be found in several Western countries (KABACHNIK, 2010; RAITHELHUBER, 2019; SHUBIN, 2011). Overall, it is especially homeless, address-less individuals, i.e., individuals without a domicile or legal documents, who remain outside the statistically represented and territorially defined society. The number of persons without registered residence—including recognized refugees—in Germany is currently estimated to be approximately 800.000 (STATISTA, 2018). Additionally, non-recognized or unregistered migrants, whose numbers are difficult to estimate, have to be considered. [17]

Furthermore, being documented in a civil register constitutes the foundation for the exercise of certain rights, such as the assignment of tax numbers as the precondition to take up a legal job, the exercise of voting rights and the right to obtain a passport as the precondition for international travel. This means that addressability within the state territory—unique localization and permanent sedentariness of individuals—forms the necessary prerequisite for participation in the economic and political community. Yet, the implicit assumption and condition of a mono-locally settled normality of an individual's life conduct results in statistical and public or political invisibility and non-representation of trans-local, trans-regional, and trans-national affiliations and belongings of individuals and households. These multi-local social formations only recently began to be articulated in mobilities and migration studies (e.g., DITTRICH-WESBUER & PLÖGER, 2013; HILTI, 2009; NOWICKA, 2007; SCHAD & DUCHÊNE-LACROIX, 2013). [18]

2.3 Tiered citizenship

However, addressability alone is not sufficient for membership and full political participation in society. In order to exercise the right to vote (on the national level), individuals must also have political citizenship. As one of the first social scientists who paid explicit attention to citizenship as a dimension and force of social inequality in a global perspective, BRUBAKER (1990) analyzed the ways in which states control and limit citizenship as a system granting access to social resources, chances and infrastructures. SHACHAR (2009) called this rather arbitrary regime of global inequality provokingly the "birthright lottery." In contrast to other dimensions of social inequality, citizenship is typically inherited rather than being the result of one's performance in a meritocratic society (ibid.). By this token, ROTH and BOATCĂ (2016) speak of citizenship as rooted in colonial, racist and ethnic constructions, which constitute powerful forces of global inequalities. [19]

Furthermore, within the territorial container of the state, the category of citizenship divides the counted elements into domestic and foreign subjects, into members of the society and foreigners, where the latter are seen as *really*

belonging to another country and thus to another society (FRELLO, 2008). This differentiation therefore reflects a specific conceptualization of trans-territorial nationality or citizenship: German citizens abroad are considered to belong to the German national society whereas citizens of other states within the German territory are considered to be part of these other national societies. [20]

Since 2005, the category *Migrationshintergrund* [migration background] has been part of German official statistics, for example the microcensus. Migration background is attributed to those who have at least one parent or grandparent of foreign origin. The introduction of this category of migration background doubled the share of foreign subjects of some kind in Germany in relation to autochthonous indigenous subjects (THORVALDSEN, 2009 made a similar argument for Norway). This introduction took place against the background of two developments:

1. the immigration of *Spätaussiedler*innen* [late repatriates] since the 1990s, who as "German citizens" constituted a statistically invisible group with different cultural attributes;
2. an amendment to the citizenship law, introduced in 2000, which grants German citizenship to children with foreign parents born in Germany. These are the so-called "*ius soli* children" [citizenship by country of birth] (WILL, 2016, p.12), who could then no longer be politically identified and statistically represented as *strangers*. [21]

Migration background is defined in the methods report of the German Federal Statistical Office in a rather fuzzy way as a set of properties, which "have always been associated with migration in the public debate and in official statistics" (DESTATIS, 2016, p.4). Thus, the aim is seemingly to represent and record something like *collectively felt foreignness*. This positivistic operationalization appears to be completely unaware of its own performative power in public discourse linking past migration and rights of belonging. [22]

Historically, a different approach to integration of migrants was taken in the early German state, when large numbers of Second World War-refugees—over 12 million displaced people from the former eastern regions of the German Empire—moved to the new German and Austrian states. Although this process of integration did not proceed smoothly—the refugees were perceived as foreign invaders by the resident population and they faced long lasting contempt (KOSSERT, 2009)—this historic migration background did not continue to play a differentiating role within the official definition of population of the two German states. In this case, public statistics refrained from marking them as foreign. Rather, in the Federal Republic of Germany, the population living within its territory in 1955 and originating from the territories of the former German Empire was understood as the indigenous German population. It can be argued that the lack of recording contributed to blurring the difference between "established" and "outsiders" (ELIAS & SCOTSON, 1965) over time not only in public statistics, but also socially, since the "stigma of migration" (signaling a lower degree of

belonging) was not transferred automatically to the next generation and it did not persist in official statistics. Similarly, after the reunification of the two German states, the different territorial origin was not essentialized, an "East German background" or a "West German background" did not become part of the census survey. Nevertheless, even one generation later, similarities between the experience of people from East Germany and the integration of *foreign* migrants are observed and discussed in public discourses (KÖPPING, 2018). Here it seems that at least for some parts of the eastern population, the official invisibility of their different backgrounds stands in contrast to their experience of disdain by members and institutions of Western Germany. [23]

Why does it seem relevant now to make a group of immigrants and their descendants statistically visible? The authors of the method report justified this category as helping to identify people "for whom at least a basic need for integration can be determined" (DESTATIS, 2019a, p.4) This line of argument runs parallel to past feminist struggles to make the discrimination of women visible by accounting for their participation in different social fields. Yet, while in the case of gender equality, the political target is to diminish discrimination by the dominant group, the hegemonic discourse around people with migration backgrounds distributes the tasks in the opposite way: It is the people with a migration background who have to actively integrate themselves into the host society. In this view, integration is achieved when population elements with migration background are statistically normal—with regard to education, housing, employment, income and jobs in the public sector, which form statistical integration indicators (DESTATIS, 2019b). The comparison suggests that it is not only the differentiating attributes that are key, but also the assumption of responsibility and an antecedent assumption of genus equality associated with those marked groups. Whereas in modern societies, women are seen as principally equal with men, citizenship, nationality and cultural origin currently witness a process of re-essentialization in political discourses. [24]

Especially in migration studies, the category "migration background" is being criticized as a dualistic category that constructs seemingly homogenous collectives of "Germans" and "migrants" respectively (NOWICKA & RYAN, 2015). In particular, for what concerns people with a "migration background," the attribution has a de-individualizing effect: Instead of individual characteristics such as educational or occupational statistical properties or citizenship, their membership of an imagined collective of *strangers* is emphasized. Whereas in the context of the UK and the US, the term "race" refers to an even more pronounced understanding of somewhat biologically defined social entities (PERCHINIG & TROGER, 2011; SUPIK, 2013), in Germany, *Rasse* [race] constitutes a concept no longer usable after the Third Reich and the National Socialist Regime. However, both concepts understand being a member or a stranger of society as a familial inherited attribute, thus a quasi-natural-biological characteristic of people drawing on a biological understanding of society. Taking this understanding further, SCHULTZ argued that "the methodological nationalism of demography is linked to the idea that a national population

reproduces itself 'naturally' via fertility and mortality while migration is only shaped as an additional factor of 'replacement'" (2019, p.648). [25]

As scholars in migration and mobilities studies have elaborated, using the category of "migration background" affirms the social normality of sedentariness with international migration constituting a problematic deviation from this societal normality (AMELINA & FAIST, 2012; DUCHÊNE-LACROIX & KOUKOUTSAKI-MONNIER, 2015; GLICK SCHILLER et al., 1995). Yet, in times of global interrelations, the forced arbitrariness of the construction of sedentary normality becomes more and more visible with movement and mobilities being part of many life courses. In order to maintain the construction of national societies, international migration must be distinguished from mobility, especially socially *desired* mobility such as residential migration, travel and longer international experience in the context of studies and gainful employment as expats (GERHARD, 2000; ROTH & BOATCĂ, 2016). Thereby, intra-national mobility, between the south and the north of Germany or the west and the east are treated as moves within one cultural and linguistic homogenous society, an assumption that obscures the lingual, regional socio-structural differences within Germany. At the same time, moving across the national border, which for many border regions does not necessarily imply major cultural or linguistic differences, but shared historic experiences and cultural similarities, is framed as international migration, as leaving one's country of origin and living amongst foreigners. In short, the normality of sedentariness and homogeneity of society stands in contrast to the lived frames of identity, social relations, opportunities and experiences, which at least for parts of the population are transnational spaces (LARSEN, URRY & AXHAUSEN, 2006). [26]

Although legally it is the category of "citizenship" that counts, the introduction of "migration background" as a relevant category in statistics as well as in public and political discourses may have manifest effects in the future. For example, facing the challenge of having to take back German citizens who were involved in Islamic State activities in the Syrian war, a tightening of citizenship law came into effect, which will permit revoking German citizenship of dual nationals, that is, of people with migration background (MASCOLO & STEINKE, 2019). People without citizenship already face a lower degree of inclusion into the legal, political and welfare system of German society (PERCHING & TROGER, 2011). Not only are they deprived of the full rights to vote, but in case of imprisonment, they may be deported to the country of their citizenship, their assumed home land. [27]

3. Society and Statistics—Now What?

In my contribution, I have excavated some problematic operationalizations of the concept of society constituted and represented in German official statistics. These operationalizations are relevant since they form the basis of many social research surveys and cross-cultural comparisons. Thereby, society is understood as consisting of intelligent adult sedentary people within a territory. Especially people without a documented, permanent address within the state territory and multiple socio-spatial belongings, remain outside representations of society. Moreover, membership of the population surveyed in the state political community is graded according to citizenship and family trajectories across borders. This means that taking the population of official statistics as the unquestioned sampling frame reproduces and affirms the therein contained exclusions. Additionally, trans-local, trans-regional and trans-national relations are hidden from view. As KNOBLAUCH and LÖW (2017) stated, the social order has been fundamentally changing since the mid-twentieth century:

"A continually growing albeit unequally distributed, hierarchically structured increase in interconnections and interdependencies between individual and collective actors and places, an increase in individual and collective systems of reference, and an ever-growing quantity of circulating objects, technologies and human beings all lead to spatial re-figuration of the social order and changing social actions" (p.16). [28]

Despite the broad acknowledgment of this observation, the national-territorial concept of society happens to be continuously re-articulated not only in official statistics, but also in quantitative cross-cultural social research, apparently largely unaffected by theoretical discussions and criticisms of methodological nationalism and the territorial concept of national society in sociology. The discrepancy between criticism and—often implicit—use of this concept may result from a *lack of proposals for alternative concepts of society and their operationalization in cross-cultural comparative research*. However, some *experimental designs* on these questions exist already. To name just a few:

- In the *ethno-survey*, cases obtained using snowball techniques are weighed with the help of representative data for districts with a high proportion of migrants (MASSEY, 1987; WIESBÖCK, VERWIEBE, REINPRECHT & HAINDORFER, 2016).
- In research on *trajectories or network geographies*, life course episodes are linked with the places where they occurred (LARSEN et al., 2006).
- Scholars of migration research use *multi-level analysis* to consider contextual local and trans-local effects (WEISS & NOHL, 2012).

- By means of *correspondence analysis* for a given residential population, the spatial scale of identification and reference can be excavated, thereby highlighting the multiplicity of different kinds of social relations (DÛCHENE-LACROIX & KOUKOUTSAKI-MONNIER, 2015).
- In approaches drawing on methodologically individualistic inequality research, *NUTS2 regions² instead of countries* are being compared (HEIDENREICH, 2003). [29]

Yet, the question of how to describe the social order cannot be reduced to a debate of capturing social reality as adequately as possible. That is, a critique of the identified elements of methodological nationalism in official statistics, which shows how *real* interconnections and interdependencies are ignored, is insufficient. Rather, *representations of the social* constitute elements within discursive disputes about relevancies, economies of attention and symbolic power. In short: *representations of the social, its inclusions and exclusions, are themselves part and parcel of the constitution of society.* [30]

Moreover, *a general rejection of the territorially-bound national society as a horizon for statistical surveys seems unhelpful.* Depending on the issue at hand, it appears justified to work with a nation-state concept of society; for example, when a forming power for specific socio-cultural processes is identified in state institutions. These include, for example, issues of social welfare policies, of education or transportation and cities, which are structured—to quite some extent—by national infrastructural policies. [31]

Alternatively, sociological and cross-cultural researchers may also focus on the social constitution and conflictual negotiation of what society is, who belongs to it and where its borders are drawn. Reconstructing statistical algorithms to reveal their historical genesis constitutes one possibility for examining the social production of society as an entity of research. Statistical categories, then, cease to be understood as reflecting a given reality. This gives way to a *constructivist view of statistical categories* as elements of reality production. The measurement and classifications used in official statistics and social research form spaces of knowledge, which in turn offer connections for political action (ESPELAND & SAUDER, 2007; HEINTZ, 2012). Yet, following the arguments of KROSSA (2018) and MARCHART (2013), even constructivist research cannot do without a concept of society: According to KROSSA societies could be productively conceived in the plural as processes that "are formed as repetitions and densifications of similar or somewhat complementary socializations and their patterns which continue to contain ambivalences, both with regard to content and above all to forms" (2018, p.166). [32]

In short, there is no place for a "neutral observation" of society as a concept; rather, social research and sociology is itself located within this political field of social understanding, concepts and representations of the social. For cross-

2 The *NUTS* classification [Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics] is a hierarchical system for dividing up the economic territory of the EU and the UK.

cultural as well as "mono"-cultural social research, in conclusion, greater attention should be paid to the population at stake, the scale of generalization and the corresponding sampling frame. [33]

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