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Who is Lying on the Procrustean Bed?:
Current Historians of the World, Denationalize Ourselves!

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1. Introduction: Summarizing *Writing the Nation* series

This paper aims to analyze and evaluate the arguments presented in the *Writing the Nation* series (hereinafter *WtN*), targeting particularly its Vol.2 entitled *Setting the Standard* (hereinafter *StS*).[1] *WtN* is a product of the European Science Foundation program "Representations of the Past: Writing the National Histories in the 19th and 20th Century Europe" (hereinafter NHIST), run from 2008 to 2013. It was organized and headed by Stefan Berger, and almost 100 historians participated: Truly a huge program.

We start by summarizing the content of *WtN* in general. Its fundamental interests, hypotheses, arguments, and findings are very clearly stated in its Volume 6, written by Stefan Berger and Christoph Conrad.

Today, we are living in the age of globalization. Since the end of the last century, we have seen almost everything, that is, money, information, people, goods, policies, etc., circulating almost freely all over the world. Among the biggest developments are the following:

- the fall of the Berlin wall (1989);
- the opening of the Internet to commercial use (1989–1990) and the launch of MS Windows 95 (1995);
- the metamorphosis of GATT into WTO (1995); and
- the establishment of the EU (1993) and generalization of Schengen Agreement (1997).

All of the above and many other phenomena have been making the globe into a unit of economic, political, social, cultural, and sentimental layers.

In this situation, do we historians still need to talk about national history, that is, the practice of writing the history of nation? If the answer is "yes," why so? Should we not instead seek to produce historical works suitable for the globalized world, including global histories, for example?

According to Stefan Berger, it is not correct to shift our understanding and approach to history from the national to the global level in this way (Stefan Berger, Vol.6, chap.7).[2] Whilst globalization is surely under way, this does not mean that national history writing has become unnecessary. Berger contends that there are three reasons for this. First, national history has functioned and continues to function as an ideological basis of the nation-state in many countries. It legitimizes the existence and the *status quo* of the nation-state, telling a story of its birth, growth, marriage, and childbirth. Second, the progress of the globalization of our lives and the reinforcement, resurgence, or

[1] Stefan Berger, Christoph Conrad, and Guy Marchal, eds., *Writing the Nation* series (eight vols., Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008–2015). Ilaria Porciani and Jo Tollebeek, eds., *Setting the Standard* (*WtN*, Vol.2, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[2] For quotations and references from *WtN*, we show only the author's name, volumes, and chapters or pages.

remaking of the nation-state are proceeding concomitantly. Today the nation-state concept remains strong and, in some regions, has grown stronger. It is easy to understand why the two phenomena are able to co-exist: globalization destabilizes the daily lives of many people, who, frustrated by feeling themselves deracinated, tend to cling to certain “natural” identities which remain as their *raison-d’être*. Needless to say, "nation” is one of them. Third, the nation-state is surrounded by an insurmountable border that distinguishes the “Inners” and “Outers,” tending to exclude the latter: Inners are called “nationals” and national community members, whereas Outers are regarded as aliens, foreigners, or non-nationals, and thus non-members. The nation-state is, in itself, exclusive, behaving as a main player of the so-called “Politics of Identity.” For example, consider the current situation in France or Germany: we could easily find that some of their nationals are standing against the influx of Middle-Eastern refugees, saying in an exclusivist tone that these refugees are not members of the French or German national communities.

Reflecting upon these three points, we historians must overcome a tendency to take the nation-state as a frame-of-reference, a predisposition which Matthias Middell and Llouis Roura call “methodological nationalism.” We must find other ways of writing history in order to fight against exclusivism inherent in the nation-state.[3]

How could we achieve this?

One solution is to shun methodological nationalism and to look for and adopt other frameworks of historical research. They could be distinguished into two kinds. One is a history based on non-spatial identities: gender history, class history, ethnicity history, for example. The other is based on non-national spatial identities: area history, local history, regional history, global history, for example. Since the end of WWII, many historians have tried to write these histories: for example:

- labor history, that is, working class history, by British Marxist historians led by E. P. Thompson and others in the 1960s and 1970s;
- gender history, advocated by Joan W. Scott in the 1970s and 1980s; and
- global history spread at the turn of this century.

Stefan Berger, however, calls our attention to “the sheer power and longevity of national histories and their influence on national identity formation,” and warns “against underestimating the power of national pasts” (Stefan Berger, Vol.6, p.373). Almost all of above-cited efforts to promote alternative frameworks of history have resulted in failure. In Britain, for example, “from the 1980s, some historians were controversially returning to national history as a possible response to a

[3] According to them, methodological nationalism “includes not only those studies which have the nation-state as the central actor. It also encompasses all those studies which understand the nation-state or the nationalizing society as the focal point of all national events and consider it as a quasi-natural framework for historical actions.” (Matthias Middell and Llouis Roura, Vol.4, p.9).

deep-seated feeling of crisis of national identity" (Stefan Berger, Vol.6, p.324). A successful exception to this trend is a theory of global history based on the so-called "cultural transfer."[4]

What could we do?

Stefan Berger chose a strategy of following and surveying the European national historiography, that is, history of national histories in European countries, because, as a Japanese proverb says, "knowing the enemy is the first step to victory." The main purpose of NHIST and *WtN* is to identify potential means to cast off the nation-state straitjacket by making clear how its ideological basis, that is, national history has been and continues to be constructed by historians and others. It is hoped that, in so doing, we could contribute to relativizing, dereifying, and demythicizing the nation-state.

2. Institutions as a Link between Scientificity and Nationalism

StS, Vol.2 of *WtN* tackles the origin of the power of methodological nationalism: harmonious co-existence of scientificity and nationalism.

National history was established as it is today between the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, mainly by German historians, of whom Leopold von Ranke was the pioneer. Rankean school historians, and many historians in European and other countries under their influence, claimed to be scientific and nationalistic. History had to be considered a science in order to establish itself as an academic discipline of equivalent status to others. At the same time, it had to be equipped with some national or nationalistic character, for history as an academic discipline was born in the age of colonialism, when nation-state building was regarded as an indispensable precondition of colonial empire. Although not all the historians of this era overtly preached nationalism as a political ideology, most of them were captive to methodological nationalism, accepting the primacy of national history.

However, how could it be scientific and nationalistic at the same time?

The main contribution of *StS* lies in its successful delivery of a persuasive answer to this question. Keywords of the answer it presents are: the institutionalization, standardization, and professionalization mainly led by various official or academic institutions. They set the scientific standards, which were framed by methodological nationalism, of historians' practice in each country. Institutions functioned as a link between scientificity and nationalism in the field of historical research at logical and practical levels.

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[4] See Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, « Penser l'histoire croisée: entre empirie et réflexivité.» (*Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 58–1, 2003).

Focusing on the specific contents of *StS*, it contains 19 contributions that describe the history of and analyze the function of various institutions in Europe. We could classify them into three categories along two axes: national vs. non-national, and official vs. non-official. First, national and official institutions:

- national archives (Tom Verschaffel, Chap.2);
- history museum (Ilaria Porciani, Chap.7);
- national academy of science (Frank Hadler and Attila Pok, Chap.10);
- research institute (Emmanual Picard and Gabriele Lingelbach, Chap.12); and
- university professor chair (Mauro Moretti, Chap.15).

Second, national and non-official institutions:

- source publication (Daniela Saxer, Chap.3);
- historical journal (Claus Jorgensen, Chap.4);
- biographical dictionary (Marcello Verga, Chap.5);
- synthetic national history collection publication (Jo Tollebeek, Chap.6);
- competition organized by Academy (Monica Baar, Chap.9);
- historians' association (Gabriele Lingelbach and Michael Vössing, Chap.11); and
- research institute run by political party or church (Lutz Raphael, Chap.13).

Although most of these are not official, they are academic institutions authorized by state-sponsored, professional historians and financed by the state in many cases. We could thus regard them as semi-official institutions.

Third, non-national and non-official institutions:

- local learned society (Jean-Pierre Chaline, Chap.8);
- international association of historians (Jan Eivind Myhre, Chap.14); and
- community of various amateur historians:
    - clergy (Irene Herrmann and Franziska Metzger, Chap.16);
    - nobles (Gabriele Clemens, Chap.17);
    - popular writers, mainly composed of women (Mary O'Dowd, Chap.18); and
    - nationalists (Ernst Bruckmuller, Neil Evans and Llouis Roura, Chap.19).

The first two categories of these institutions, which have some official character, are important as a link between the scientificity and nationalism of historical research. History became an academic discipline, and thus a science, in the 19th and 20th centuries by standardization of historical knowledge, professionalization of its producers, and institutionalization of their activity field. Almost all of this process was driven by the state through such institutions. As official or semi-official institutions functioned as an infrastructure of historical "science," its knowledge, producers, and activity fields were intentionally or unintentionally confined in "the state." History as a science and historians as scientists pursued nationalized historiography, seized by

methodological nationalism. In this way, scientificity and nationalism began to harmoniously co-exist.

Furthermore, *StS* found that these two trends reinforced each other at the practical level (Jo Tollebeek and Ilaria Porciani, Vol.2, Chap.1). National history, with a nationalistic tendency, is legitimized by that fact that it is scientific. History as a science could demand financial, political, or moral support from the state provided it functions as an ideological basis of nation-state.

One further contribution of *StS* is its emphasis of the importance of infrastructure for science, including history. We have focused too much on the supra-structure of science: discourse, image, representation, positionality, etc. However, science is, at the same time, a practice and activity carried out by scientists, which needs material basis, that is, infrastructure. It is thus perverse that "the external conditions of the historian's practice are neglected" (Lutz Raphael, Vol.2, p.240).

3. A little more Self-Reflexivity, People!

Reading the comprehensive eight volumes of *WtN*, in addition to its companion publication that analyze the historiographies outside Europe to enable us to compare Europe with other regions and relativize its experience,[5] we were impressed by the extraordinarily overwhelming power, at academic, ideological, material, or practical levels in the field of historical research, of the nationalistic in general: nation-state, national history as a paradigm, methodological nationalism, national master narrative, etc. Each and every output, action and practice of historians embody nationalized historiography. Of course, there have been some attempts to invent an alternative frame-of-reference of historical research or to overcome methodological nationalism, but almost all of these have ultimately failed to denationalize historiography, thus reverting to the normal tendency.[6]

Surely the power of the nationalistic must have been universal and strong in the field of historical research since its academic beginnings in the 19th century, but we doubt whether it has been as absolute as is depicted in *WtN*. In other words, its power seems to us (a little, at least) to have been overestimated there.

Consider the following two case studies as examples here.

First, local history in France.

Jean-Pierre Chaline, in his contribution to *StS*, points out that local history in France has mainly been pursued by local *sociétés savantes* (learned societies). With the specialization,

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[5] Stefan Berger, ed., *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[6] See Vol.3 of *WtN* in general on this point. Its Chap.20 (Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz) is particularly suggestive.

professionalization, and institutionalization of historical research, however, local learned societies came to be regarded as amateurish, and local history recorded by them was gradually downgraded. Of course, it continued to exist, but "was thereafter regarded as a mere embellishment on national history deemed devoid of danger to French unity." Local history is allowed to exist only if it accepts methodological nationalism and contributes to the trend that "the love of one's *petite patrie* or 'little homeland' prepared one for the love of the greater homeland" (Jean-Pierre Chaline, Vol.2, pp.154, 161). The same is true of the German case. According to Stefan Berger, the 18th century Saxon historian Justus Möser claimed that German national history could be achieved by gathering various local or regional histories. Local history has some meaning only when it pursues nationalized historiography, constituting a part of national history (Stefan Berger, Vol.6, p.67). Throughout *WtN*, local history and local learned societies are overlooked against national history and universities or research institutions, being ranked lower than the latter.[7]

However, when we peruse Chaline's famous book on French local learned societies, we do find some facts that cast doubt on the above-mentioned dichotomy.[8] In France today, we find many local history journals published in regional capital cities such as Rennes, Toulouse, Lille, and Dijon: *Annales de Bretagne* founded in 1886, *Annales du Midi* (f. 1889), *Revue du Nord* (f. 1910), and *Annales de Bourgogne* (f. 1929). What must be emphasized here is that these journals have published many genuinely local and sufficiently academic and scientific articles, written by amateur or professional historians. They are still highly regarded today in the field of historical research. This means that, at least in France, there has been and remains a certain institution that has both academic and local characteristics simultaneously: local history journals. Therefore, not all the academic and scientific institutions pursue nationalized historiography.

The second case study concerns conflicts over the framing of scientific and national history in *Meiji* Japan.

Edward Q. Wang points out that sharp tension between scientificity and nationalism existed in the public sphere, including academia and the government, during the early *Meiji* era in Japan. For example, three professors of history at the University of Tokyo—Shigeno, Yasumatsu, Kume, Hisatake, and Hoshino, Wataru—who had all been trained as professional and academic historians in the Rankean manner, had to resign from their posts after colliding with the government. Each of them made public their arguments over Japanese history, which were constructed using historical sources and through scientific methods, but which went against the government's intentions that the role of historical research must be "promoting national pride and esteem."[9] This case teaches us

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[7] See also Vol.2, p.214 (Gabriele Lingelbach and Michael Vössing) and Vol.4, p.11 (Mathias Middell and Llouis Roura).

[8] Jean-Pierre Chaline, *Sociabilité et érudition* (Paris: Editions du C.T.H.S, 1998), pp.69, 272, 324–7, 342–4.

[9] Edward Q. Wang, "Between Myth and History" (in Berger, ed., *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective*, op.cit.), pp.132–4.

that scientificity and nationalism do not always go hand-in-hand.

Another Japanese case to be mentioned here is the continued debate over defining the borders of the Japanese nation prior to WWII.[10] It deserves our attention because it discussed whether the nation-state and the colonial empire are compatible. The *Meiji* government's most important political aim was to construct the Japanese nation-state as rapidly as possible so that their country could avoid colonization by European powers. With some success in this ambition, Japan began to forge a colonial empire after the first Sino-Japan war (1894–5) by colonizing Taiwan (1895) and Korea (1910) in particular. It was during this course of events that a simultaneously academic and political question was raised among academics, politicians, and officials: who comprised the Japanese nation in this newly created and developing colonial empire? The main point at issue was, inevitably, whether Taiwanese and Korean people were Japanese nation-state members. Two camps confronted each other. The first distinguished between the *Naichi-jin* (mainlanders) as members of the Japanese nation, and the Taiwanese and Korean people as non-members. According to this perspective, Japan was not a pure nation-state comprised entirely of homogeneous members, but rather a colonial empire where the nation as colonizer dominates the non-nation as colonized. Conversely, the second camp, emphasizing the composite character of the Japanese nation, regarded all inhabitants, that is, *Naichi-jin*, Taiwanese people, and Koreans, as its members. This perspective postulates Japan as a concurrent nation-state and a colonial empire. This debate teaches us that the nation-state and the colonial empire do not always go hand-in-hand.

Considering the position of local history in France and surveying the intellectual history of scientificity, nationalism, nation-state, and colonial empire in pre-WWII Japan, we are forced to contend that *WtN* goes too far by depicting the nationalistic as something omnipotent. In reality, there has been a space for non-national, but nonetheless academic and scientific, history. Scientificity and nationalism have not always coincided; nation-state could be contradictory to colonial empire.

Why, therefore, do *WtN* and its contributors overestimate the power of the nationalistic? In our view, it is because "we see only what we would like to see." In the case of *WtN*, we find nationalized historiographies because they are written by current historians who are themselves nationalized. The tendency towards the national and nationalistic is not limited to historical researches as objects of past historians' practice and of historiography as argued in *WtN*; nor is it restricted to past historians as subjects of historical research and the objects of historiography. We contend that the it applies first and foremost to current historians as subjects of historiography.

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[10] The arguments in this case are detailed in Oguma, Eiji, *A Genealogy of Japanese Self-Images* (Melbourne, Australia: Trans Pacific Press, 2002, original Japanese version, 1995) and Id., *The Boundaries of "the Japanese"* (Melbourne, Australia: Trans Pacific Press, 2014, original Japanese version, 1998). In these works, Oguma distinguishes two arguments in contraposition with each other, i.e., "homogeneous Japanese nation" and "composite nation" theses.

To paraphrase: who is lying on the Procrustean bed of the nation-state? Past event actors? Past historians? Or us current historians?

Consider the case of Maciej Janowski's argument over 19th century Czech historians as an example of current historians' nationalized historiographical approach to the subject. He claims that some 19th century historians "believed that a critical stance towards national history is a patriotic requirement if history is to have an educational value" (Maciej Janowski, Vol.3, p.443). For Janowski, even taking a critical stance towards national history is a nationalistic practice. This kind of argument seems to us illogical, perhaps borne out of his intentional or unintentional nationalized historiographic viewpoint.

The tendency towards nationalized historiography of current historians participating in the NHIST project reflects their lack or insufficiency of self-reflexivity. If they are sufficiently self-reflexive and check ceaselessly whether they themselves are pursuing nationalized historiography, they could avoid being totally captive to the nationalistic trend. Unfortunately, though, this is not the case.

Our critical evaluation of the NHIST project or *WtN* could sound strange, for Stefan Berger repeatedly calls our attention to the importance of self-reflexivity for historians. To quote one of his phrases, "since both history writing and the writing of historiography have lost their 'epistemological innocence,' we shall be as self-reflexive as possible" (Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz, Vol.3, p.10).[11] However, his opinion is not shared by all the NHIST contributors in a completely comprehensive manner. Many *WtN* contributors seek self-reflexivity from past historians, who are claimed to be and blamed for pursuing nationalized historiography because of their lack of sufficient self-reflexivity. Yet, what about current historians, beginning with the *WtN* contributors? Are they always sufficiently self-reflexive when they analyze historiography? We do not think that they are.[12]

In order to be self-reflexive, we must correctly understand the actual prevailing situation. In what age are we living? The age of globalization? That of the resurgence of the nation-state? Of EU-style regional integration? The breaking down of nation-state? Or labor movement stagnation?[13]

Historians must ground their professional practice on the current everyday situation, for all history is contemporary history (Benedetto Croce).

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[11] See also Stefan Berger, Vol.6, Chap.7.

[12] Chris Lorenz points out that studying historiography contains two layers: "national histories" and "history of national histories" (Chris Lorenz, Vol.7, p.52). We contend that it actually contains three layers: national histories, history of national histories, and current historians studying history of national histories.

[13] Here too Stefan Berger is exemplary in clarifying his comprehension of the current situation (Stefan Berger, Vol.6. Chaps 6 and 7).

4. Conclusion: Toward an Interest-based Sympathization

Although we have sought to indicate some shortcomings of *WtN*, we totally share its belief in the necessity of looking for certain ways to overcome the nationalistic, methodological nationalism in particular, in the field of historical research. It is a challenging and socially necessary task for us current historians.

The next problem is: how?

Many historians participating in *WtN* seem to us to have high expectations much of historical research on the supranational scale, for example, global history. It seems to us, however, that adopting a supra-national framework of history risks the ultimate invention of certain brand-new collective identities: “global citizen,” “world city dwellers,” “human beings,” etc. If so, we would simply be playing a “Scale Game of Identity,” when what truly matters is the Politics of Identity in general. The nation is problematic as it functions as an identity that distinguishes Inners and Outers, and the nation-state is problematic in giving a border to the nation as an identity. We have to abandon the Politics of Identity by any means. Could the Scale Game of Identity really contribute to this task? We doubt that it could.

What, then, can we historians do if we have to renounce the Scale Game of Identity?

Although we too are not sure on this, it is our duty to present a hypothetical alternative idea. Consider, for example, writing history from the viewpoint and in the framework of what we could call “Interest-based Sympathization?”

Here we may risk exceeding the boundaries of history as a discipline, but let us explore this further. Adopting Interest-based Sympathization means a shift of framework “from identity to interest” and simultaneously “from collective action of defining borders to a personal one of sympathization” at the same time. We would justify this rationale as follows. First, identity has an exclusive tendency: identities, including national identities, are thus mutually exclusive. That is why conflict between identities takes on the aspect of a winner-takes-all game. On the contrary, interest could function as a basis of negotiation, which often ends through a compromise in which the “winner” does not take all. Second, any kind of collective action needs certain coercion against the personal will of some Inners or Outers. On the contrary, sympathization is a personal action with no coercion: we sympathize because we would like to do so.[14] Of course, this is just an idea.

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[14] See Odanaka, Naoki, “From Responsibility to Compassion: Lessons from the controversy over ‘Comfort Women’ in Japan” (*Zeitschrift fur Japanisches Recht/Journal of Japanese Law* 16(31), 2011, pp.49–60). Regarding the importance of the personal dimension, see Stefan Berger, Vo.6, Chap.7.

We current historians are historicized, being contextualized in the historical comprehension of the present and at the same time in the contemporary comprehension of the past. That is why we have to be as self-reflexive as possible and to continue seeking new theoretical methodologies.

Current historians of the world, denationalize ourselves !