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# Beyond the “National Container”: Addressing Methodological Nationalism in Higher Education Research

Riyad A. Shahjahan<sup>1</sup> and Adrianna J. Kezar<sup>2</sup>

This essay argues that there is a need for higher education researchers to become aware of methodological nationalism (MN) and take steps to reframe their scholarship in new ways. It illuminates two characteristics of MN prevalent in higher education research and suggests that although a few researchers have attempted to move beyond MN in the higher education globalization literature, most remain encapsulated in a view of nation-state equates society. The authors address this gap by arguing for the expansion of analytic approach to some of the common phenomena studied within U.S. higher education (such as college student experience, diversity, and governance) and highlight how these typical objects of study would transform once we overcome MN.

**Keywords:** conceptual change; descriptive analysis; globalization; higher education

## Introduction

In this article, we highlight how methodological<sup>1</sup> nationalism (MN) manifests in the higher education field and suggest ways to overcome it. MN refers to the assumption that the natural category or unit of analysis for society is defined by national boundaries (Chernilo, 2007).<sup>2</sup> As researchers, our assumptions underlying society<sup>3</sup> fix how we make sense of social processes including trends in higher education; hence the assumptions underlying the idea of “society” are important to unpack (Chernilo, 2008). Such assumptions determine the purposes of, and players and processes in, higher education and so far have been normatively discussed using the nation-state as a presupposition for society. For instance, when we speak of environmental influences on a U.S. higher education institution, we are often referring to an environment bound to the nation-state such as federal and state governments and/or national accreditation agencies rather than the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or European Union (there are recent exceptions within European circles, see King, 2009). Furthermore, environmental influences tend to refer to national economies rather than global economic structures (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). By acknowledging MN, researchers can extend their focus and analysis on higher education institutions (HEIs) and start to conceptualize HEIs as entities that are responding and influencing actors and a concept of society that go beyond the “national container.”

Our critique builds on recent literature on higher education globalization<sup>4</sup> (see Altbach, 2004; King, 2009; Marginson &

Rhoades, 2002; Rhoades & Liu, 2008; Rhoades & Torres, 2006; Sidhu, 2006). Marginson and Rhoades (2002), for example, note, “We see universities as increasingly global actors, extending their influence internationally” (p. 288). This literature highlights the drastic effects of globalization on higher education’s core objects of study—through technological changes, increased academic mobility, the global knowledge economy, new governance structures, international partnerships, and internationalization of curricula and students—which in turn are reshaping the functions, borders, and landscape of higher education institutions and those who work/learn in them. Hence, the social processes involving HEIs can no longer be reduced or confined to social forces exclusively within the nation-state (which is what MN focuses on), but increasingly derive from forces outside the national container.

The above globalization literature has suggested that the nation-state has become “more porous” because of global forces and imperatives and recognizes the nation as historically conditioned, fluid, variant and changing, as well as porous (e.g., Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Sidhu, 2006). However, this body of literature has not unpacked nation-boundedness to the same degree as we do here. In line with Chernilo (2007), we would further suggest that the degree of nation-state porosity is really dependent on our initial understanding of the nation-state (whether or not it is self-contained

<sup>1</sup>Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI

<sup>2</sup>University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA

to begin with, and/or our reference to nation-state history) and question the extent to which the nation-state was ever *impervious* (in varying degrees). We would argue that the nation-state was always relativized by the global much as it now is (e.g., through imperialism, colonialism, global trade circuit, and earlier forms of technology) albeit with varying degrees depending on context (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). Said differently, we would suggest that the idea of nation-boundedness itself is historically relative and politically constructed.

MN is overlooked or unnamed in the growing debate that focuses on the distinction and the interaction between local/global in higher education (e.g., Cantwell & Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009; Douglass, 2005; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). However, some of this literature provides a good bridge between the globalization higher education literature and the argument we make in this article. For instance, in their excellent higher education analysis, Marginson and Rhoades (2002) propose the interconnection of the three levels of embeddedness in which change in university systems takes place: global, national, and local-organizational—or what they call “glonacality.” The strength of this approach lies in recognizing the dynamism between universities and local, national, and global levels, and viewing universities as complex assemblages. They “emphasize the intersections, interactions, mutual determinations of these levels (global, national, and local) and domains (organizational agencies and the agency of collectivities)” and “do not see a linear flow from the global to the local; rather, we see simultaneity of flows” (p. 289). To some extent, their work anticipates the argument about MN here. Although the glonacal approach seems like a reasonable approach to moving beyond MN, it does not go far enough in terms of unpacking the national container and the power relations involved in the nation-building project. The glonacal heuristic helps us move beyond the idea of “influences” and “agency” at various levels, but it does not go far enough in problematizing the “national” category itself, and the politics of its legitimization and power relations involved. It also leaves the concept of society unpacked.

By building on the good work of the scholars above that largely anticipated the question of interconnections between various scales in higher education, our goal is to push this analysis further and connect it to the question of MN at the everyday campus level. To this end, another limitation of the globalization research in helping researchers to move beyond MN is that the discussions tend to be about macro-policies (e.g., Verger, 2010; Vidovich, 2004) rather than the impact of these interconnected forces on the everyday activities on higher education campuses.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, those U.S. researchers who do discuss globalization (particularly in its neoliberal capitalist form) and explicitly address local governance issues, campus issues, and lived experiences (e.g., Cantwell & Maldonado, 2009; Rhoades & Torres, 2006; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) have not fully extended their analyses to acknowledge and move beyond MN. In summary, the higher education globalization literature neither *explicitly* names nor problematizes MN, and these discussions tend to focus on macro-policies and structures underpinning higher education, rather than focusing on phenomena that impact the everyday activities of higher education institutions, making MN’s implications and analysis far from comprehensive.

Although some scholars have expanded their analysis or anticipated the MN problem, none of the literature systematically pinpoints the bias MN presents in higher education studies, providing the broad or overarching critique we present in this work. Therefore, higher education globalization scholars’ important work has not resulted in a broader rethinking by higher education researchers that we hope to incite. In this article, we argue for the importance of higher education scholars, particularly in the United States and elsewhere, to become aware of MN and take steps to reframe their scholarship in new ways. Our goal is to increase the cognitive complexity of research by having researchers question their assumptions, discard artificial analytic boundaries, and extend their gaze.<sup>6</sup> Our analysis is not meant to suggest that local contexts are not meaningful. We see that objects of study can be enhanced through multiple lenses.

The article will proceed with a review of what MN is, particularly focused on the way that this analytic approach frames issues in narrow, reductionist ways that hide key issues like power. The second half of the article examines several examples of how MN plays out within the framing of research on and the practice of the student experience, diversity, and governance. Our major original contribution, in addition to presenting the bias is to provide a set of examples for how micro, day-to-day campus practices and typical objects of study (like college student experience or diversity) are transformed once we overcome MN. In this section, we also describe how to re-imagine these topics without the blinders of MN. Lastly, we recommend areas of future research that emerge when the MN blinders are taken off that reframe higher education research. We provide concrete examples throughout the paper, mostly from the United States to provide some level of detail and coherence to the paper. We also provide brief examples of these phenomena from other countries (e.g., United Kingdom, Australia, and China) to demonstrate how this is not a problem that affects only U.S. conceptualization of higher education. MN is more prominent in countries with strong imperial histories where the nation-state served political ambitions. Thus, Western countries have a stronger orientation, and this is why we choose examples from these countries, though it is reflected in greater and lesser degrees in most countries

### The Two Problems With Methodological Nationalism

In this section, we will highlight two of the most significant *characteristics* of MN and how they are reflected in higher education research: (a) the assumption that social processes arise within nation-state boundaries and (b) the national container historically and currently reinforces unequal power relationships. Because of space purposes, what we cannot provide here is a full-fledged discussion of MN and all the various conceptual and methodological aspects that have been articulated (for an excellent discussion about the nuances of MN, please refer to Chernilo, 2007).

MN manifests through a narrow view of social processes. Given the national-bound outlook of society, *MN leads to the narrow, taken-for-granted view that social processes arise from within and are internal to the nation-state*. This parochial view undermines transnational and cross-border processes and promotes an internalist account of social change (Chernilo, 2008).

This self-contained image of the nation-state is evident in various academic disciplines (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). Fields of study such as international relations, economics, history, and anthropology consider “nationally bound societies” as “naturally given entities to study” (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002, p. 304). Anthropologists, for instance, assumed that the cultures were “unitary and organically related to, and fixed within territories, thus reproducing the image of the social world divided into bounded, culturally specific units typical of nationalist thinking” (p. 305). In a homologous fashion, higher education systems are studied as social processes that happen within the boundaries of the nation-state. For instance, college student experiences (e.g., student development) are based on internalist developments within the nation-state. Higher education systems are considered to be endogenously developed within the borders of the nation-state and therefore their uniqueness is attributed to the social relations within the nation-state. For instance, faculty/student issues, and/or financial systems often cross borders, yet the only relevant point of comparison are different national systems. As a critique of this endogenous approach, Marginson and Rhoades (2002) rightly noted that

in using the nation-state as the dominant unit of analysis for international comparison, global forces remain shadowy, local variations are flattened out, and issues of “street level” implementation are obscured. . . . Thus, it is often assumed that global linkages and convergence subtract from national and local dimensions. (p. 305)

Building on Marginson and Rhoades’s point above, we would also add that what is overlooked in this endogenous picture is the assumption that the nation-state is a nonporous, self-contained entity to begin with. By confining the study of higher education within the national container and the internal processes, researchers continue to perpetuate MN. Although researchers may be *aware* that the nation-state is a porous entity, their research questions continue to assume and suggest that the nation-state is self-contained as they continue to overlook the impact of cross-national influences or transnational processes on their objects of study.

On the basis of this parochial view, the invisible nation-state lies at the background while researchers make sense of social processes within higher education (e.g., students, local institutions, policies) (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). For instance, student benchmarking reports in the United Kingdom compare dimensions that are entirely internal based on national statistics and do not consider data beyond the national level, either sub or transnational (Jackson, 2000). Similarly, in U.S. higher education, this means for instance producing statistics that are usually national accounts of student enrollment (e.g., NESSE), financial aid, graduation rates, and student demographics. If we consider, for instance, how higher education research in the United States is funded (e.g., NSF, Lumina foundation, Spencer) most of this funding is directed to studying higher education policies and practices within the borders of the U.S. nation-state. Such funding mechanisms naturalize our imagination of a bounded U.S. nation-state and more importantly a U.S. version of higher education that values institutional diversity, academic freedom, etc. Hence, the measurements of social trends are usually bounded in

a national container, or comparisons made are across “national containers” (e.g., U.S. or UK student enrollment rates are compared to OECD or “rival” countries respectively by the Spelling Commission and Browne Report to justify higher education reform; Shahjahan, 2012).

We are not suggesting that these national statistics are irrelevant, but what we’re contesting is how the production of statistics tied to these categories becomes taken-for-granted *benchmarks* through which to represent and measure social trends. These benchmarks limit our imagination of higher education’s interconnections with other players or actors that are not necessarily within our socially constructed boundaries of the nation-state. For instance, the role of transnational actors and indicators that could be informing U.S., Australian, and UK higher education administration (e.g., *Times Higher Education Supplement* or Shanghai Jiao Tong rankings) is overlooked (a recent exception in the United Kingdom and Australia include King, 2009, and Hazelkorn, 2009, respectively).

This MN problem is congruent with the politics of nationalism that purports a unitary perspective that has historically and symbolically united the population within its boundaries (Alexander, 2005; Chernilo, 2008). Symbolically, nationalism “is not a flag which is constantly waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building” (Billig, 1995, p. 8). This flag hanging unnoticed also manifests in the U.S. higher education discipline, when for instance, in a national higher education conference, like the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), all U.S.-related higher education issues are discussed without the U.S. label, yet “other” or “foreign” contexts are designated as being part of “international higher education” or part of the international forum.

Symbolically, U.S.-, UK-, or Australia-based theories are used to designate, understand, and compare higher education systems around the world (Tight, 2008). To this end, theories about increasing access that are based on U.S. contexts and conditions are exported and used in other countries to develop and support financial aid policy, services, and remedies for students in other countries with very different circumstances. Similarly, UK theories about quality assurance, equity, or financial aid are used in Australia and commonwealth nations (Miller, 1995).

As noted in the introduction, methodological concerns are inherently connected to theory, ideology, and politics. Researchers, who assume nation-state equals society and focus on the national container, partake in the values and norms (e.g., privileging of national interests over the interests of people in other countries) associated with nation-building, typically unconsciously, or sometimes willingly in some contexts. By choosing to focus within the nation-state, they choose topics of study, frame their research questions, and even obtain funding from national entities that support research that supports nationalistic ambitions. For instance, in China, although research methods—data collection and analytical tools—may not come under strict surveillance, the focus or content of one’s research cannot stray too far from aligning with government interests (Rhoads & Hun, in press). Similarly, research imperatives in the United States and other countries are driven by national imperatives with varying impositions. We describe this issue of supporting nationalistic ambitions more in the following.

The “national container” historically and currently reinforces unequal power relationships among groups and also masks responsibility (i.e., responding to the needs) for social groups inside/outside the national container.<sup>8</sup> The nation-state through its projects of unity and assimilation, though liberatory for some, has in many instances oppressed (vis-a-vis exploitation, marginalization, cultural imperialism, and assimilation) those social groups that did not fit neatly into this normative face of the nation and this oppression played out differently depending on context (Alexander, 2005; Ong, 2006; Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). Such masked responsibility and power relations also play out in higher education research when we operate from an MN framework, particularly in terms of research goals and foci. As Wimmer and Schiller (2002) note, MN gets naturalized into research methodology because institutions of the nation-state organize and channel social science thinking in universities, research institutions, and government think-tanks. Furthermore, major research funding programs and HEIs linked to these programs are “directed to contribute to the solution of national problems” and favor research that are of “national relevance” (Wimmer & Schiller, p. 306).

In the global terrain, higher education continues to play an important role in the economic and political rivalry between nation-states that compete against each other and establish hierarchies of countries that are most advanced on various rankings and indicators, and secure their niche in the global knowledge economy (King, Marginson, & Naidoo, 2011; Unterhalter & Carpentier, 2010). Consequently, many nations have increased and focused research funding on certain areas in higher education, for example, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), internationalization of higher education; vocational training; and so on, but fewer of those that deal with minoritized issues.

Increasing participation rates and improving in global rankings in higher education are also tied to patriotic nationalistic imperatives. The latter discourse is prevalent in higher education funding because MN lurks behind the scenes, and our outlooks are constrained within the nation-building project; moreover, the question of responsibility is tied to those within the national container (and usually only those in privileged positions) rather than to those on the outside of the national container. To this end, regular official reports in the United States, United Kingdom, or Australia speak with alarm about the nation dropping in world rankings in STEM graduates, undergraduate graduation rates, or adult literacy (see Archer, 2007; Gildersleeve, Kuntz, Pasque, & Carducci, 2010; Rizvi & Lingard, 2011). These same national reports point to the need to reinvest in our education systems in certain areas that are globally measured but do not place emphasis on addressing the inequities for historically underrepresented minorities in the United States and abroad. Through this rhetoric, public policies often ignore the plight of minoritized bodies.<sup>9</sup> The focus shifts from improving higher education access and responsibility toward the needs of minoritized groups (i.e., advance distributive justice) and focusing on “the potential economic value of individuals from ‘underserved and nontraditional groups’ insinuates that an inability to increase higher education access and attainment for these populations will represent” a national economic disaster, rather than a failure of democracy

(Gildersleeve et al., 2010, p. 107).

In other instances, widening participation for the minoritized in higher education is a means to integrate, assimilate, and “develop” the latter group by the majority group (Mignolo, 2003). For instance, universities like Minzu University in China were developed to produce a loyal elite among China’s 55 ethnic minorities and assimilate them into the mainstream culture dominated by the Han-Chinese culture (Hennock, 2010). Tied to MN, many countries’ research funding for minoritized issues is subjugated or justified through neoliberal economic logic (e.g., widening participation for bolstering high-skilled labor) rather than social justice (redistributive) causes (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

More importantly, nation-building that pervades higher education policy discourse unproblematically uses the rhetoric of national interests to evade the question of responding to the needs for those outside the national container in higher education research. For instance, what are the consequences of U.S., U.K., or Australian student study abroad or global service experiences for host nations? What benefits do host countries get from these latter students studying and visiting their contexts? Are these study abroad experiences modern forms of imperialism (see Talburt, 2009)? What are the consequences of Western distance learning projects and offshore campuses for the plight of indigenous knowledge in the Global South (Naidoo, 2011)? To put it simply, moving beyond MN entails higher education researchers posing and answering questions that focus on the interests of those groups who belong outside the national container.

In summary, we lack the resources “to think outside the national box” as a result of MN (Beck & Sznajder, 2006). According to Chernilo (2008), to transcend this methodological bias, we need to gather empirical information “in such a way that it is possible to reflect on trends and processes that have been traditionally neglected when national categories pre-empt data collection” (p. 8). The point here is that our imagination of the social world (that includes higher education) is colonized by the categories that are structurally and discipline-wise embedded in the nation-state. Moving beyond MN is necessary so that we not only remove our blinders or blind spots about transnational forces in higher education research but to also unpack the power relations tied to the nation-state building project that often evades the question of historical oppression and difference and overlooks responsibility to those who fall outside the national container. Therefore, unbundling higher education from MN also brings forth the underlying power relations assumed in the sociopolitical arrangement of the nation-state.

We next attempt to fill these gaps in current analytic thinking by highlighting how everyday phenomena in higher education can be reimagined when we do not come from MN standpoints. Our aim is to foster exploration and analysis of types and patterns of influence and activity vis-à-vis globalization to help reconceptualize everyday campus activities in higher education.

### **Methodological Nationalism and Everyday Campus**

As we have noted earlier, the few scholars who have tried to expand the analysis of higher education beyond national boundaries focus on macro policy (e.g., policy dynamics or academic capitalism), and it is often difficult for scholars and practitioners to see the ways that these issues affect more day-to-day phenom-

ena within the field of higher education. In this section, we extend this critique and argue for an expansion of analytic approach (moving beyond MN) to some of the common phenomena (e.g., the college student experience, diversity, and governance) studied and practiced within U.S. higher education but also several other countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and/or China. These reflect groups (students), values (diversity), and processes (governance) that illustrate how these concepts can be applied to other groups—faculty, staff, administrators; values such as community, merit, and excellence; and processes such as leadership, planning, and budgeting. Although we cite a few studies, our goal is not to critique specific studies but rather to demonstrate how MN is present in the framing of these concepts and in the way they are practiced on campuses and then demonstrate a new approach to framing these groups, values, and processes. Readers can begin to see and extend these examples into their own specific contexts. Many of the examples we bring up are focused on concepts as they are articulated within U.S. institutions. We focus on the United States not to perpetuate MN as some critics may remind us but use it as a case study to tease out the implications of MN in a particular culture of higher education study as we are most familiar with this tradition. Because we do not see a distinction between theory and practice, we move back and forth between the literature and campus practices in our examples below.

### *College Student Experience*

Higher education scholars examining the college student experience can expand their understanding by directly applying the critiques of MN. Thinking about ecology or environment models of student development, the ecology imagined is quite narrow, focusing mostly on the college campus elements such as faculty, curriculum, campus support units, or peers (Arnold, 1997; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). However, with this new lens, when we think of identity development, we might now imagine how global trends are affecting students' lives, particularly as U.S. students are connected more through the Internet and they play video games with other students from Argentina, Japan, and South Africa. When they come to U.S. higher education, their experiences have been shaped by interactions with peers in varied contexts internationally and locally that we often overlook. This more expansive network of peers, influences, and interactions also suggests that we need to rethink and expand theories of involvement or engagement that primarily focus on campus-based activities that may increasingly become marginal in the lives of global students. When we speak about their peers or peer influence, we tend to think about individuals on campus in a physical community or about individuals they know from their hometown, but our reference point is typically national (or local community) in scope. Yet today's students, both growing up and while they are on campus, interact with students across myriad contexts that transcend these boundaries. We know little about the impact of friendships and interactions with students from around the world. Furthermore, we suggest raising critical questions such as the following: are these transnational student interactions occurring on a level playing field? How are these worldwide student interactions geopolitically mediated? Student experience, outcomes, or development theo-

ries are often unlikely or slow to examine these broader peer influences and their underlying power relations that are increasingly playing a role within higher education settings. Given students in most countries are technologically connected, this same phenomenon will be found in Australia, Brazil, or China. In short, the current literature on college student experiences concentrates on integration into campus community, but not into a global community, or into communities that cut across national boundaries.

The ecology of students also includes the global trend toward a market-oriented approach to education that affect students' development toward a private economic gain view instead of focusing student development on broader community goals and citizenship (Brayboy, Castagno, & Maughan, 2008; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). We need additional studies that examine the impact of a consumer orientation to students' long-term development across global contexts. Also, these consumer approaches limit students' freedom and make them subordinate to global capitalist interests (reinforcing nation-state interests and power over the individual) rather than their own desire and goals. Students have fewer options in the liberal arts and more choices in skill areas that lead to workforce development. Another worldwide trend is the war against terrorism that has created new areas of study, such as homeland security, and impacted campus life where greater security measures are in place. How does this political and social emphasis on terrorism shape and frame students' views as they move forward to be citizens? We highlight these examples and raise these questions to demonstrate how researchers who break free from MN can see new phenomena to study that are less apparent with the MN lens/bias.

There are other aspects of the college student experience that can be explored and expanded from their nationalistic biases and boundaries: How do visa issues impact foreign students and their learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom, for example, in the United Kingdom, Australia, or the United States? Should intercultural skills become more prominent and how can we do so in ways that do not reinforce national boundaries, power relations, and market-based exploitation of the "other" (Rhoads & Szelyenyi, 2011)? What does the college student experience look like for those students who encompass "third spaces" (i.e., their lives cross various national communities)? How do we understand the college student experience at the interstices of power, privilege, and oppression associated with being a "first world," "third world," and/or "fourth world" citizen? These above questions not only apply at the undergraduate level but also are important to explore at the graduate and professional school level.

As theories and research on the college student experience are increasingly transported to other parts of the world (e.g., China) from the United States, these new trends raise critical questions (that help United States move beyond MN), such as: What are the consequences of Anglo-Saxon values of identity development being transported to the Global South? How does cultural imperialism manifest as ideas flow from the Global North to the South? What college student experiences are being transported from the South to the North? If not the latter, why not? What are the mutual benefits gained? Whose interests are served and what potential power relationships might be established through such

exchanges given the uneven geopolitical relationships? Although these are only a sampling of the way MN affects college student experiences, it suggests the many areas we need to reexamine and expand in terms of our analysis that can better capture student experience, development, and outcomes within a globalized world, taking off the blinders that artificially constrain our view of influences on students.

### *Diversity*

Coming from an MN perspective, equity and diversity are predominantly conceptualized as derivatives of national processes of distribution or appraisal in diversity-based higher education research and practices. Very few scholars and practitioners define equity in higher education in relation to global processes (Carpentier & Unterhalter, 2011). Yet, “the segmentation of higher education systems within countries and between countries is an important determinant of the inequalities that stratify access, experience, achievement and the capacity to transfer a qualification socially and economically” (Carpentier & Unterhalter, p. 154).

Diversity is often an organizational concept and looks at the way that campuses are working to include groups that have been traditionally underrepresented (defined through national histories and views of marginalization) as faculty, administrators, or students. Because of the strong MN bias, issues of diversity on U.S. college campuses have long been conceptualized in terms of national allocation or assessment that reflects U.S. race relations (reflecting a national container model). For instance, “Native Americans” experienced great oppression at the hands of Europeans and though less often described (typically because the numbers are so low on college campuses) have become a part of diversity conversations on many college campuses. Yet the designation of “Native Americans” is a methodological nationalistic category as it assumes that Native Americans are in the same category as other visible minorities, which in turn delegitimizes native people’s claims to sovereign land, tribal citizenship, etc. (see Calderón, 2009). Thus, this approach to diversity discussions clearly demonstrates the power dynamics present but often not discussed on campuses. Moving beyond MN suggests that we are critical of these identity categories for what they overlook, reify, and assume in higher education research.

Diversity committees on U.S. campuses largely focus on race and particular groups—African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos/Latinas. International and non-U.S.-based students, faculty, and staff are often not part of this official diversity discourse. Consequently, because of MN, higher education scholars may overlook the national container blinders that may characterize these diversity committees and official discourses. However, if higher education were to expand beyond these nationalistic boundaries when considering issues of diversity, other categories and racial groups are likely to be conceptualized and foregrounded such as multiracial/multilingual individuals, immigrants, undocumented migrants, “foreign”-born, and religious minorities (e.g., Muslims as a racialized minority in America) (see Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Lee, Maldonado-Maldonado, & Rhoades, 2006). Furthermore, when considering the plight of international students, they typically are categorized by their national affiliations, which in turn mask their ethnic, racial, linguistic, class, sexuality, and ability identity markers (Luke, 2010).

In doing so, the notion of students coming from homogenous national containers is reproduced. Hence, an intersectional approach would take prominence in diversity discussions beyond the current MN mindset. Many historically marginalized groups are not considered when we have discussions about diversity and inclusion on campus because our definitions are bound by a national container mentality.

Also, if we examine diversity in the United Kingdom, MN is present in the way that class issues are foregrounded over issues of race. In fact, the word diversity is not used within the dialogue; instead, terminology focuses more on underrepresentation and socioeconomic status related to the long-time, largely white populations within the country. Although race is now a more salient issue, because it was not embedded with the development of the nation-state, like socioeconomic status, it is not part of the defining characteristic around inclusion and oppression. Research on inclusion continues to foreground class (Teaching, Learning and Research Programme, 2008). Also salient are the differences by regions that make up the United Kingdom—Wales, Scotland, and Ireland—that have all experienced unique histories, and when speaking about inclusion and exclusion these ethnic groups are often more salient than race. Hence, MN is perpetuated in diversity research as national imperatives drive such research, and in doing so constrain our analytical lens to observe other markers of difference that may be ignored (e.g., race in United Kingdom and class in United States).

Moving beyond MN in diversity in higher education entails raising questions that go beyond the national container. Furthermore, diversity work needs to move beyond the notion of “whose access” toward “access for what purpose” and/or “what kind of access.” Worldwide expansion of higher education has been filtered by the construction of tier systems and unequal access to higher education institutions. Given the knowledge imperialism pervading in higher education whereby Anglo-Saxon knowledge systems and values dominate HEIs around the world (Mignolo, 2003; Naidoo, 2011), we need to raise critical questions whether access to higher education actually serves the plight of the “global majority” (people of color, the working class, etc.) in the world, or instead represent tools of assimilation and/or neoimperial forms of domination and exploitation by the global minority (transnational elite and first-world nations). With MN blinders on, these questions are not raised or interrogated that are central to understanding diversity and equity in global contexts.

### *Governance*

Scholars of governance in the United States as well as other countries largely focus on internal institutional processes and influences (e.g., faculty senate, shared governance, administration, governing boards), and when external issues are examined they tend to be national in scope such as state legislatures or federal policy. There has been little examination of the way that international trends or policies affect the daily governance on campuses. Global policies such as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and OECD or World Bank policy documents (e.g., OECD’s *Education at a Glance*, or WB’s *Constructing Knowledge Societies*) shape governance and should be part of discussions on campuses across the world (Bassett & Maldonado,

2009). Yet the decisions that campus leaders face are hard to understand if we ignore these broader forces. For example, campus leaders largely cannot explain the rise of non-tenure-track faculty across college campuses (Cross & Goldenberg, 2009). Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) connect this trend to the broader phenomenon of academic capitalism and the neoliberal political approach. Also, the increase in accountability and assessment has been part of a broader worldwide trend toward greater managerialism on college campuses (Olssen & Peters, 2005).

Not only are the broader trends affecting higher education governance largely undocumented, but also opportunities to rethink higher education governance are overlooked. For example, in thinking about access and opportunity, because institutions take a largely nationalistic lens, they do not take into account underrepresented minorities in other countries worldwide and how providing them access to higher education is important to goals related to access. Another example is the discourse surrounding “public” universities, which are “no longer in any straightforward sense public universities, they are transnational, corporate, profit-oriented, and they are positioned on the boundaries between academia and business—they are hybrids” (Ball, 2010, p. 21). Consequently, from within the national container these public institutions may look like they are serving the public good, but outside the national container, they act as private service providers (selling educational services to the transnational elite) and work and operate in similar ways as private institutions (Ball, 2010). Hence, the study of academic governance of such public institutions would look quite different when we remove MN blinders.

Removing MN and rethinking governance in a transnational and porous context suggests a new set of questions and practices to be considered. For instance, in Australian universities, as higher education has become an export and international students are coming from all over the world to study, they are now questioning the acculturation model in which students have to change their identities to fit in and are provided limited support and considering expanding their approach to embrace global identities (Marginson & Sawir, 2011). Having said this, we are not suggesting that an Australian intercultural approach is a panacea for international higher education. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge and address the human right issues faced by international students and the systemic barriers (such as racism, immigration, housing, personal security, and so on) that leave such students vulnerable and exploited in Australia and elsewhere (Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, & Forbes-Mewett, 2010). This means shifting decision-making structures to consider transnational phenomena and making curriculum, pedagogy, and systems changes to reflect an intercultural approach to education, and addressing racism, personal safety, and other forms of marginalization/exploitation experienced by students crossing national boundaries.

To move beyond MN, the notion of stakeholder needs to be enlarged to include a much larger set of individuals. In a global environment, the stakeholders for any given campus may include peoples and organizations across a host of contexts and beyond national borders. Issues of accountability need to be reexamined. What stakeholders and for what issues are campus leaders accountable? Accountability may go beyond national interests of

say affirmative action toward more global human rights. Instead of fueling the U.S., UK, or Chinese economy, perhaps there is a responsibility to groups that have been historically marginalized and helping their economic development globally. Thinking about worldwide fair trade for example when considering decisions about what to buy on campus may become a priority. Another example is the recent push for campuses to become “sweatshop free” and ensure their suppliers sign a pledge that nothing they make is made in sweatshops.

The content of governance also changes when we remove the national container. Governance issues tend to focus on the more immediate national interests around economic development and human resource potential to meet national growth demands. Affirmative action, enrollment and financial aid, and curriculum decisions and the like relate to supporting those goals. Whereas if we take a broader view of governance that transcends national boundaries, we may consider transnational concerns for campuses such as sustainability, global warming, human rights, poverty, and peace that may affect people worldwide across different contexts. Given these transnational concerns, campuses can contribute to making a difference through their decision making and practices.

## Future Research

Our focus has been to offer a critique and demonstrate new analytic approaches to everyday concepts in higher education. However, we want to end by briefly mentioning a few areas of future higher education research that can extend our study of everyday campus activities and help us move beyond MN. Because of the focus on national categories, organizations and systems that operate across national boundaries have often been ignored within higher education studies. While organizations such as the World Bank, OECD or UNESCO are garnering a lot of attention in many higher education circles, they are often not part of the higher education dialogue and areas of study in the U.S. This is evident in the fact that the premier U.S. journals of higher education such as *The Review of Higher Education* or *The Journal of Higher Education* in the past decade have not published a single article focusing on these organizations.<sup>10</sup> These international organizations (IOs) are vital players in assembling a higher education global policy space by diffusing new ideas and institutional imperatives of higher education across contexts (Shahjahan, 2012). Yet there still remains a scant body of literature providing field-based empirical and/or theoretical accounts of how these institutions work in daily life in higher education (Shahjahan, 2012).

Beyond IOs, another vital player understudied in higher education is the role of transnational corporations that are shaping the inner workings of higher education across the globe, which include the publishing industries (e.g., Thomson Reuters and Elsevier); private, for-profit higher education consortia (e.g., the Lawrence group and Kaplan and so on); and transnational corporations in general (King, Marginson, & Naidoo, 2011). For instance, Thomson-Reuters provides principal funding for the Shanghai Jiao Tong Ranking and also funds the *Times Higher Education Supplement* universities ranking system, the IELTS English language proficiency test, and the Web of Science citation ranking system and is one of the largest producers of university textbooks in the world (Luke, 2011). Given how these ranking systems and measurement tools are major players in the



everyday decision making across HEIs globally (see Hazelkorn, 2009), this reality suggests that studying these institutions is important as they are major players within interconnected social processes impacting higher education. Overall, moving beyond MN means considering an examination of institutions that operate on global levels, as well as understanding how they influence everyday campus activities or are influenced by higher education institutions and stakeholders.

Although the concept of organization (i.e., campus) has long dominated organizational theory and studies focused on institutions as representatives of the state, the notion of networks and working across organizational boundaries has made it increasingly important to move beyond MN. We need greater study of networks of faculty working on research worldwide, consortium of institutions working toward shared goals, alliances of various countries toward educational policies, and student movements across national and institutional boundaries (Rhoads & Liu, 2008). In general, we need studies that are focused on networks, consortia, alliances, and various forms of boundary spanning activity. For instance, a study of the International Association of Universities would reveal a complex picture of these networking opportunities and processes. Networks, consortia, and alliances have the potential to empower groups that have traditionally been underrepresented within traditional institutions that are set up in hierarchical manners. Networks allow bottom-up leadership and individuals without formal power and authority to gain power by working collectively.

Connected to the idea of networks, HEIs are also implicated in constructing and mediating geopolitical power relations (see Luke, 2010; Sidhu, 2006). Historically, countries have used HEIs as a means to build connections between nations, advance cultural influence, and improve political capital (particularly if future foreign leaders were educated by their institutions) (Luke, 2010). In the contemporary context, the role of HEIs in economic development and public diplomacy has become increasingly salient for many countries as they try to survive in the global knowledge economy and increasingly focus on other regions of the world to advance their social, economic, and political interests. To this end, China is trying to assert its soft power vis-à-vis its setting up Confucius institutes in HEIs around the world (Naidoo, 2011). HEIs are also important agents in geopolitics as they are implicated in the production, dissemination, and subjugation of local knowledge systems. We suggest studying HEIs from this framework of geopolitics in order to unpack HEIs' roles that go beyond national containers and tease out their roles in the political games among various nation-states and their transnational imperatives (see Lane, 2012; Verger, 2010).

Future research might also explore the way MN plays out differently in varying countries and if they have different challenges in addressing this issue. For example, perhaps countries such as the United States and United Kingdom because of their recent and historic power in the global economy have more rigid boundaries than other countries that are more recently rising into power (China and India) or that have not experienced as much national power such as Belize or Ghana. Although MN affects scholars and education practitioners worldwide, it may play out in unique ways according to the strength or power of the national identity and historical hierarchies that have developed between nations.

## Conclusion

In this essay, we expand the way that higher education scholars conceptualize important long-standing phenomena in the field such as the college student experience, diversity, and governance. We add to discussions of globalization of higher education by pointing to specific problems with the national container; the bias for people to continue to see the world through this lens—its very powerful historic draw; and the connection of the national container to unequal power relationships and reduced responsibility for human suffering tied to national boundaries.

It is important to note that we are not arguing against using the nation-state as a unit of analysis, but unpacking the assumptions underlying the nation-state informed by MN—as something that is self-contained, internally developing, and part of a nation-building project. What we are trying to grapple with, borrowing from Chernilo (2007), is “how to theorise the nation-state without falling back into methodological nationalism” in higher education (p. 20). One way to move beyond MN is to not conceive higher education as exclusively associated with the nation-state or internally driven, but as constructed through the complex workings and interplays of complex social processes that are multidimensional and also geopolitical. Highlighting this “ism” is really about acknowledging that national/regional borders have always been porous. Therefore, it is important to see the world as matrixes of interconnections whereby there are many similar players, processes, and policies that we need to think about but cannot because of the social categories that we use to represent and understand higher education.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>By methodology, we are referring to not only “methods” or technical aspects of research (e.g., tools for data collection and analysis, such as sampling, interviewing, or use of variables) but also include ideas informing the way we frame research questions, purpose, and technical choices (e.g., theoretical perspectives, frameworks, axiology, and epistemology) (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Thus, in this conception of methodology, social contexts of research matter, including power relations that inform what can be researched, or what can be imagined in social phenomenon.

<sup>2</sup>Some of this debate has also occurred in education circles, particularly in relation to comparative education and K-12 education policy (please see Dale & Robertson, 2009; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

<sup>3</sup>We would suggest that “society” should not be equated with “nation” by expanding on what might constitute “global society.” Instead, we have something more in mind than multilateralism, which assumes the continuing absolute sovereignty of nation-states. We understand global space including both a space of (global) civil society and a space of governance.

<sup>4</sup>Globalization has been connected to the global phenomena of increasing interconnectedness, deterritorialization, cultural uniformity or friction, and/or institutional cosmopolitanism (Beerens, 2003). We do not believe that globalization is a new phenomenon but that it is being socially constructed in a particular way at this historical time period (Sidhu, 2006). We recognize that global forces have always been in operation but not always the focus of attention among political actors or researchers.

<sup>5</sup>We would like to acknowledge that much of the global education discussion—outside the United States—demonstrates greater awareness of fluid boundaries and less fixed understanding of the nation-state. To this end, the European and Australian literature is less parochial and more

globally aware than the U.S. or UK higher education literature (see Tight, 2007). Nevertheless, our explicit focus on methodological nationalism (MN) is also significant in other countries as well as the United States.

<sup>6</sup>Our analysis goes beyond suggesting it is important to examine sub-national differences and the impreciseness of the nation state as an analytic tool. Although that is part of the nature of the problem, it is much more extensive than this. We suggest paying attention to cross-national influences as well as the intractable nature of the nation-state category as a historical creation of significant influence on higher education research.

<sup>7</sup>In this essay, we draw extensively on the work of Daniel Chernilo, who has written comprehensively on MN across the social sciences such as sociology, nationalism studies, anthropology, and social psychology (see Chernilo, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2011). In his recent book (Chernilo, 2007), Chernilo provides excellent discussions about the debates on MN. By critically examining a social theory of the nation-state as articulated by various sociologists in its classical, modernist and contemporary moments, he argues that social theory can only escape from MN by breaking apart the equation between the nation-state and society.

<sup>8</sup>Although certain scholars have maintained that MN also reinforces the modernity project and describes the difficulties and problems, it is beyond the scope of this article to delineate this whole modernity debate (for excellent discussions in this area please refer to Alexander, 2005; Chernilo, 2007).

<sup>9</sup>We are not suggesting that the higher education literature does not pay attention to “minoritized” students due to MN. Instead, we are highlighting here, although public policy is certainly cast within a neoliberal framework, at the same time it *rhetorically speaks* to equity issues through all sorts of government programs and financial aid practices targeting lower income, minority students, and the institutions that serve them. However, these programs are either slowly diminishing and/or not cast for redistributive causes because of other national agendas tied to MN. These public policies tied to MN in turn impact higher education research funding.

<sup>10</sup>In a quick search of the Project Muse website of these two journals for the past decade, we found that most of the pieces in these journals that mention one or all of these international organizations (IOs) are either in the form of book reviews or articles that either cite these IOs’ reports or statistics, and/or refer to them as geographical entities (e.g., OECD countries). None of the journal articles have focused on either of these IOs as objects of study in higher education.

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## AUTHORS

**RIYAD A. SHAHJAHAN** is an assistant professor of the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE) program at Michigan State University, 428 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824-1034; [shahja95@msu.edu](mailto:shahja95@msu.edu). His research focuses on globalization of higher education policy, teaching and learning in higher education, equity and social justice, and anti-/postcolonial theory.

**ADRIANNA J. KEZAR** is an associate professor at University of Southern California, 3470 Trousdale Parkway, Los Angeles, CA 90089; [kezar@usc.edu](mailto:kezar@usc.edu). Her research focuses on higher education change, leadership, and equity.

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