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What is Wrong with Methodological Nationalism? An Argument About Discrimination

Abstract: Methodological nationalism is a cognitive bias that construes states as the natural and necessary form of contemporary social organisation. This gives rise to a state-centred view which naturalises national communities, exaggerates the differences between citizens and migrants, and exceptionalises international migration. In this paper, I argue that methodological nationalism is not only empirically inaccurate, but also normatively problematic, because its assumptions prevent migration ethicists from properly theorising about discrimination. I begin by briefly presenting methodological nationalism and clarifying some misconceptions. I also identify some features that would make a policy discriminatory and show that many contemporary migration policies are discriminatory. Looking at three variants of methodological nationalism (naturalisation, territorialisation, and ignorance), I argue that methodological nationalism marginalises concerns about discrimination in migration ethics and prevents migration ethicists from developing accounts that would be able to counter xenophobic arguments. Last, I consider the implications of my argument for migration ethics.

Keywords: methodological nationalism; discrimination; migration ethics; state-centrism; bias; nation-state

1 Introduction

States are contingent forms of social organisation whose emergence and preservation are the result of particular configurations of power. Yet people across the world tend to think about states as quasi-natural units whose role in shaping our understanding of the world is unquestioned. This cognitive bias, described by social scientists as *methodological nationalism* (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, 2003), has

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important implications for our understanding of migration: it gives rise to a state-centred approach that naturalises national communities, exaggerates the differences between citizens and migrants, and leads to the perception of international migration as exceptional and potentially threatening to the unity of the state (Anderson 2019; Dahinden 2016).[1]

While widely criticised in the social sciences, methodological nationalism is still dominant in other contexts. Within political philosophy, the tendency to equate society with the state is widespread – consider, for example, the assumption that people live within a shared social context with all their fellow co-citizens but not with people across state borders, which affects arguments about what it takes to achieve relations of social equality. The emergence of migration ethics can be seen as an attempt to question the methodologically nationalist perception of states as closed systems, the equation of "society" with "the state" and the assumption that the state's population is identical with the citizenry. Recently, scholars such as Alex Sager (2016, 2018, 2021), Alison Jaggar (2020), and Amy Reed Sandoval (2021) demonstrated that many arguments in migration ethics are nonetheless characterised by methodological nationalism. The conception of states as entities that contain a distinct population and have a distinct national culture, the equation of society with the state, and the implicit adoption of a state-centred perspective affect arguments about migration and its impact on both sending and receiving countries (e.g. Ferracioli 2015; Oberman 2013; Pevnick 2011; Ypi 2008). In most accounts, national culture, be it homogeneous or multicultural, appears in need of protection from migration (e.g. Carens 2013; Kymlicka 2001; Miller 2016), whereas lack of permanent settlement or naturalisation is considered as an adequate ground for the exclusion of migrants from rights enjoyed by citizens (e.g. Carens 2013; Miller 2016; Song 2018). Even supporters of open border policies, such as Joseph Carens (1987, 2013), develop their analyses in terms of a dichotomy between incoming migrants and citizens, assuming that permanent settlement is the end result of migration and justifying exclusions from rights for temporary migrants. Critics of methodological nationalism urge migration ethicists to move beyond methodological nationalism and focus on the movement of individuals, addressing the exclusions generated by borders (Sager 2018, 91).

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1 Indicative of the force of methodological nationalism is that while its conception of the state is at odds with the colonial experiences of many states in the Global South, it has been internalised by many people beyond the western societies. While some anti-colonial thinkers, such as Aimé Césaire, contested the view that national self-determination was the way to liberation (Wilder 2009), the historical prevalence of a nation-centric view foreclosed political imaginaries (Getachew 2019). Benedict Anderson (2016) also analyses the diffusion of state-centric categories not only through imperialism but also in the context of anti-colonial liberation and state-building.

I agree. However, as it stands, the exhortation to overcome methodological nationalism in migration ethics is in need of justification. Descriptively, it might be true that states are historically contingent forms of social organisation and that the perception of migrants as foreigners overemphasises national belonging. But does this mean that we should avoid methodological nationalism? After all, when we think about migration in a normative way, we are not only concerned with how the world *is*, but also, primarily, with how the world *should be.* If national belonging constitutes an important value, then why should we not adopt a state-centred perspective that prioritises the links between citizens and perceives migrants as foreigners?[2] In addition, recent research on epistemology shows that humans inevitably generalise and are subject to cognitive biases in their attempt to make sense of the world (Antony 2016; Beeghly 2015). In fact, stereotypes and generalisations play a crucial role in our cognitive processes. A given hermeneutical framework is morally problematic not simply because it is biased – any framework is inevitably biased – but because its adoption has morally problematic implications.[3] Therefore, to properly criticise methodological nationalism, it is necessary to demonstrate that it is not only an empirically inaccurate, but also a morally problematic way of looking at the world.

In this paper, I argue that methodological nationalism does have morally problematic implications. I begin by briefly explaining the notion of methodological nationalism, clarifying some common misconceptions (Section 2). I then set out to provide one moral reason for scholars to challenge methodological nationalism: its generalisations and assumptions prevent scholars from properly theorising about discrimination in the context of migration policies. Since what constitutes discrimination is a thorny issue, especially when it comes to questions of migration, I identify some minimal features that would make an act or policy wrongfully discriminatory (Section 3.1). I argue that, regardless of whether states have a right to control their borders, contemporary migration policies are wrongfully discriminatory, both towards migrants and towards members of other socially salient groups (Section 3.2). I also note that, despite this, the critique of discrimination occupies a marginal position in migration ethics. Looking at the three variants of methodological nationalism (naturalisation, ignorance, and territorialisation), I show how methodologically nationalist assumptions play a role in the neglect of discrimination in arguments about migration. I also suggest that methodological nationalism prevents

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2 Speranta Dumitru (2014) also cautions against mistaking the epistemological critique of methodological nationalism in the social sciences for a normative critique.

3 Following Louise Antony (2016, 161), I am using the term *bias* in a normatively neutral sense to refer to "a tendency; an inclination of temperament or outlook." However, my argument does not depend on this. Anyone who argues that methodological nationalism is a bias in the negative sense still needs to show why this is the case.

scholars from developing convincing normative accounts that would be able to counter xenophobic arguments (Section 4). In the concluding section, I consider the implications of my argument.

2 Clarifying Methodological Nationalism

2.1 The Three Variants of Methodological Nationalism

The term methodological nationalism was coined by the sociologist Hermínio Martins, as a side note in a paper about temporality in sociological thought. Martins remarked that, in parallel with the widely recognised bias of methodological individualism, when social theorists focus on the macrolevel, they examine reality through the lens of the state, resorting to "national predefinitions of social realities" (Martins 1974, 276), which do not adequately capture mobility and migration and which neglect transnational phenomena.[4] While the reference to methodological nationalism was almost incidental in Martins' paper, the critique became influential and was applied to migration studies by Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller (2002, 2003).

According to Wimmer and Glick Schiller, methodological nationalism comes in three distinct but intersecting variants: naturalisation, ignorance, and territorialisation. *Naturalisation* refers to the tendency to consider the emergence of states as a natural social fact, rather than as a contingent historical development that expresses a particular configuration of power dynamics and contains internal tensions (Sassen 2006). This implies a perception of states as all-encompassing units comprising a preexisting culture, polity, economy, and people. The interior of the state is conceived as unitary, regardless of internal differentiations. Even though some members of the state might have more in common with people from other states than with their fellow citizens, national differences are accentuated whereas cultural, ideological, or linguistic differences within the state tend to disappear from view.

The second variant, *ignoring,* refers to disregarding the role of states when we theorise about the world. The acceptance of the role of contemporary states with regard to social organisation becomes the invisible background assumption that shapes our view of the world and the categories that we use, without us realising it. For example, migration was not always considered as a phenomenon that undermines national belonging – in fact, the first analyses on migration did not differentiate between internal and international migration (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, 587; Stricker 2019). Most contemporary analyses ignore that this construal of migration is

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4 On methodological nationalism, see also Chernilo (2007, 2011) and Dumitru (2014).

the result of a particular mode of social organisation and take the very notion of the migrant as a given.

The third variant, *territorialisation*, refers to the equation of states with self-governing, territorial units. This leads to a conception of the world as neatly divided into territorial states and overlooks the many ways in which states might exercise their sovereignty far beyond their borders. In addition, it disregards the importance of transborder practices and the specific challenges that these practices create. People whose movement is not limited within the borders of one specific state, such as the *frontaliers*, that is, people who work in a different country than the one in which they reside, but also non-sedentary people such as nomadic Roma, tend to be absent from analyses while the transnational ties of people within the state are usually disregarded. The population of the state is construed as predominantly sedentary, and international migration is perceived as an exceptional activity, instead of one form of human mobility among many others.

2.2 Clarifying Misconceptions

In many senses, the term *methodological nationalism* is unfortunate. Both of its components might lead to misunderstandings in ways that have not been sufficiently stressed in the literature. The reference to *nationalism* might be taken to imply that the critique of methodological nationalism is limited to nation-centric conceptions of the state. This is wrong. The critique of methodological nationalism in all its variants applies not only to nation-centric, but also to multicultural conceptions of the state, as should be clear by the examples that accompanied each variant. By effacing the differences between individuals within the state and emphasising the differences between members of the state and "non-nationals", methodological nationalism renders national belonging the main factor for social identification, even in multi-cultural states.[5] While the reference to nationalism does underscore that all contemporary states appeal to some notion of a unified national identity, supposedly shared by all members of the state (Sharma 2020), it should not lead us to exclude *state*-centric approaches from the critique of methodological nationalism (Mongia 2018, 4–10). Instead, it should motivate us to consider to what extent these approaches might rely on nation-centric assumptions.

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5 In fact, the very concept of multicultural states can be considered to reflect methodological nationalism, given that appeals to multiculturalism depoliticise the demands of minorities, attributing them to quasi-natural cultural differences, confining the state's response to cultural concessions, and concealing how opposition to multiculturalism is often a cover for racist reactions to minorities (Lentin 2014).

The reference to nationalism might also lead to the conclusion that methodological nationalism constitutes a form of normative nationalism. Again, this is wrong. Methodological nationalism does not presuppose the endorsement of substantive nationalist ideals. For example, it has recently been argued that the Rawlsian theory of justice exemplifies all three variants of methodological nationalism, being state-centred, groupist, and territorial in its conception of the state (Dumitru 2021).[6] Several cosmopolitan approaches are not off the hook either. When cosmopolitans argue that our duties to distant strangers are no less stringent than our duties to our compatriots, they still construe citizens of other states as "distant strangers", ignoring the transnational ties of individuals and assuming that a shared national identity creates stronger links than other forms of identification (e.g. O'Neill 2000, ch. 10; Singer 1972). More generally, methodological nationalism refers to one's assumptions about the world, rather than one's normative ideals. These assumptions can lend support not only to nationalist, but also to cosmopolitan ideals of justice. At the same time, the critique of methodological nationalism does not imply a critique of normative nationalism – it simply calls for a conception of nationalism that does not rely on certain assumptions about the state for its justification.

Referring to methodological nationalism as *methodological* also contributes to misunderstandings. Methodological nationalism is a cognitive bias that affects our understanding of social phenomena. This means that we tend to think according to certain patterns, to make certain generalisations, and to jump to certain conclusions about the state; namely, we ignore its role in shaping reality, we naturalise it, or we reduce it to its territorial dimension. The reference to a methodology misconstrues this in two ways. First, it conflates methodological nationalism with specific methodological choices. At the crux of the critique of methodological nationalism is the idea that our understanding of the world is hampered and distorted because of our cognitive bias. In the context of the social sciences, this sometimes affects the way in which researchers design their research methodologies – hence the term *methodological*. For example, researchers who want to examine the causes of unemployment in a country disregard international factors and focus only on internal ones. This affects the validity of their analysis, since unemployment is mistakenly attributed only to internal factors. This does not mean that methodological nationalism covers *every* state-centred methodology. If our researchers *wanted* to examine the *internal* causes of unemployment, then the adoption of a state-centred perspective could be

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6 It is subject to debate whether Rawls' account is also compatible with, or necessitates, normative nationalism. In *The Law of Peoples*, Rawls (1999, 24–25) makes significant concessions towards nationalism, suggesting that peoples who do not share a common language, history, and culture constitute hard cases for his approach (even though a reasonably just liberal polity is expected to be able to accommodate them). He also cites Yael Tamir's *Liberal Nationalism* approvingly.

justified. States are, after all, powerful entities, and it makes sense that a lot of social research focuses on them. We should therefore distinguish between methodological nationalism as a *cognitive bias*, and the adoption of a perspective that naturalises, territorialises, and/or ignores the state as the result of a considered *methodological choice*. To my knowledge, this distinction has not been made clear in the literature, at the cost of mistakenly overextending the critique of methodological nationalism to cases in which the adoption of a state-centred perspective constitutes a justified (or at least deliberate) choice. A caveat here is that, to escape methodological nationalism, scholars should avoid all its variants. For example, an analysis that relies on the considered methodological choice to juxtapose citizens and migrants might still be methodologically nationalist if it unquestioningly assumes a territorial conception of the state.

Second, the reference to methodological nationalism as methodological might lead to the conclusion that its field of application is limited to research methodologies. Again, this is wrong. If we take seriously the definition of methodological nationalism as the cognitive bias of ignoring, naturalising, or territorialising the state, there is no reason why it would only affect research methodologies. A cognitive bias can manifest itself in various ways, for example in the questions that we ask or in the things that we take for granted in our answers to these questions. Understanding this is crucial if the critique of methodological nationalism is to have any bearing on our normative theorising. If the critique is to have any bite, it would have to demand more than the sole expectation that we be informed by empirical research whose methodology is not biased. To stop theorising in terms of methodological nationalism, we also have to correct our own cognitive bias. Despite the interest in the methodology of political theory (Blau 2017; Conte 2022; Erman and Möller 2015; Valentini and List 2016), it is very difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the methodology of the theorising from the theorising itself. Reframing methodological nationalism as a cognitive bias clarifies that its critique is not only relevant to social scientists, but also to migration ethicists and, more broadly, to anyone who engages in normative thinking about migration.

3 Discriminatory Migration Policies

3.1 Discrimination

My claim is that methodological nationalism prevents migration ethicists from properly theorising about discrimination in the context of migration policies. To show this, one first needs to determine what constitutes wrongful discrimination. The problem is that this is contested. Some scholars suggest that the wrongfulness of

discrimination lies in the undeserved harm it does to members of socially salient groups (Lippert-Rasmussen 2006, 2014); others argue that harmless discrimination is also wrong (Arneson 2006; Slavny and Parr 2015). It has been suggested that discrimination is wrong because it reflects a belief in the moral inferiority of discriminatees (Alexander 1992; Arneson 2006), because it is demeaning (Hellman 2014), disrespectful (Beeghly 2017; Eidelson 2015), or because it stigmatises disadvantaged social groups (Fiss 1976). Some scholars notice the multitude of discriminatory practices and propose multiple grounds for the wrongness of discrimination. They argue, for example, that wrongful discrimination expresses attitudes that stigmatise, dehumanise, infantilise, objectify, or instrumentalise members of vulnerable social groups (Sangiovanni 2017, ch. 3), or unfairly subordinates these people, infringing their deliberative freedom or denying them access to basic goods (Moreau 2020). Although the specific way in which it does so is contested, wrongful discrimination seems to prevent us from relating to each other as social equals. Wrongful discrimination is a particularly insidious form of social inequality, as it relies on entrenched hierarchies between social groups. Crucially, while arguments for social equality are commonly taken to apply *within the state* (e.g. Kolodny 2023) – arguably an effect of methodological nationalism in political theory – it is acknowledged that wrongful discrimination can take place across borders.[7] This makes critiques of discrimination particularly useful for criticising migration policies.

One way to proceed would be to follow one of the comprehensive theories of discrimination, show that migration policies are wrongfully discriminatory on the basis of that theory, and explore the role of methodological nationalism. That approach, however, would be limited to the contours of a specific theory of discrimination. A way to avoid this is to examine whether there exists some overlapping consensus over what constitutes wrongful discrimination. Despite their disagreements, scholars would agree that Jim Crow laws or the exclusion of women from the right to vote were wrongfully discriminatory. They would also agree that some practices are wrongfully discriminatory even though they are not directly targeted against the discriminatees. For example, given that in most households, women are more heavily burdened with caring responsibilities, a company that denies its employees the option of flexible working times without justifying this by the demands of the job might indirectly constitute wrongful discrimination against women, even if women are not explicitly excluded from working there. On the basis of these points of convergence, we can identify *some* migration policies as wrongfully discriminatory

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7 Desiree Lim (2023) criticises this, arguing for a general right to social equality that applies to citizens and non-citizens within the state's territory, as well as to non-citizens outside of the state's territory.

and proceed to examine whether methodological nationalism contributes to their adoption.[8]

I hold that an act or social practice is wrongfully discriminatory if, but not necessarily *only* if, it involves (a) the adverse differential treatment of (b) members of socially salient groups and (c) this differential treatment is not justifiable by a legitimate goal of the social practice. Following Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen (2014, 30), I suggest that a group is socially salient if being perceived as a member of this group significantly affects one's social interactions in a wide variety of social contexts. This is important, because it limits the uncontroversial cases of wrongful discrimination. Race, gender, nationality, or sexual orientation constitute prominent features that tend to affect one's life in a variety of ways, but which characteristics are socially salient will depend on the broader social context. For example, the refusal of an IT company to hire Muslim applicants is wrongfully discriminatory, as (a) it is a case of adverse differential treatment of Muslims in comparison to non-Muslims, (b) this is not justifiable by a legitimate goal of the company, and (c) religion is a socially salient characteristic, since it affects one's social interactions in a wide range of social contexts.

These features are by no means exclusive. For example, it might be that people can be wrongfully discriminated against even if they themselves are not members of a socially salient social group, if they are adversely affected by practices targeted against that social group. My aim is to withhold judgment on more controversial cases and identify some clear cases of wrongful discrimination. Expanding the cases that are considered wrongfully discriminatory beyond what is covered by the criteria I identify will only strengthen my argument that methodological nationalism contributes to wrongful discrimination.

3.2 Discrimination in Migration Policies

Migration policies of the past are often rejected as wrongfully discriminatory. One can think of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act that denied Chinese nationals entry to the

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8 Disagreement will persist in gray areas: is racial profiling discriminatory when it is based on accurate statistical information and, if so, why (Eidelson 2015; Lippert-Rasmussen 2014; Mogensen 2019; Risse and Zeckhauser 2004)? Are racial and gender quotas morally justified as a form of affirmative action, or do they constitute cases of wrongful discrimination (Moreau 2020; Sangiovanni 2017; Segev 2019; Suk 2017)? By focusing on consensus, my approach cannot answer these questions, which necessitate a comprehensive theory of discrimination. However, the merit of my approach is that it can identify *some* social practices as discriminatory and consider their relation to methodological nationalism in a way that does not hinge upon the adoption of controversial positions on discrimination.

United States (and was in effect until 1943), the "White Australia" policy that welcomed the settlement of Europeans while excluding Asians, and the British 1971 Immigration Act that divided the former British Empire into a predominantly white "Old Commonwealth" and a non-white "New Commonwealth", which lacked the right to migrate to Britain. All these policies are now decried for relying on ethnic and racial criteria in order to determine who is to be granted admission to the state (Kukathas 2021, ch. 4). Nevertheless, contemporary migration policies remain wrongfully discriminatory in at least three ways: by rendering racialised migrants from the Global South vulnerable to human rights violations, by disadvantaging certain groups of migrants with regard to admission, and by making certain groups of people within the state (including citizens and permanent residents) targets of unjust deportations.[9]

First, human rights organisations report the systematic violation of the human rights of (often racialised) migrants from the Global South who attempt to reach countries of the Global North irregularly. Upon their arrival, these migrants face arbitrary detention for indefinite – and often very long – periods of time, lack of access to basic healthcare, and violations of the right to due process. The externalisation of border controls means that migrants are increasingly detained in what has been described as "human-rights-free zones" (Shachar 2020, 80), where they are subjected to violence, extortion, assaults, and torture. Scholars have stressed the connection between border controls and human rights violations (e.g. Kukathas 2021; Sager 2020; Shachar 2020), but little attention has been paid to the discriminatory nature of these practices. Yet discrimination is at play: members of a particular social group (migrants from the Global South) are subjected to adverse differential treatment (human rights violations), which cannot (given the normative status of human rights) be justified by the goal of border controls. The fact that the violation of human rights is morally problematic on independent grounds that apply to everyone should not overshadow the importance of discrimination. The risk of human rights violations is not equally distributed among people; it is members of some social groups – in this case, racialised migrants from the Global South – who are subjected to a high risk of human rights violations due to certain institutional practices designed to keep them from reaching their intended destination.

Second, contemporary migration policies discriminate among different migrants in the context of admissions. While seemingly relying on neutral criteria, contemporary migration policies perpetuate discrimination on the basis of one's racialised and/or ethnic identity, gender, religion, and social class. The legacy of colonialism is particularly relevant. Recasting themselves as nation-states, formerly

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9 I focus on migratory policies of states of the Global North. The same might not apply to states of the Global South.

imperial states in the Global North introduced or reinforced restrictive migration policies that aimed to constrain the mobility of racialised migrants from the former colonies and preserve global wealth inequalities. It was in this context that former "colonial subjects", who enjoyed, at least in principle, mobility rights within the former empires, were turned into "migrants" to be excluded from the rights of citizens (Mongia 2018; Sharma 2020). Criticising contemporary migration policies, Sarah Fine (2016, 132) denounces the "clear targeting of particular groups" under the guise of supposedly legitimate goals such as national security or border controls. This targeting is informed by racialised global inequality patterns that determine which migrants are admitted to the state (Kukathas 2021; Oberman 2020; Owen 2020). One might think of the EU's attempts to prevent migrants from Africa and the Middle East from even reaching European soil through the externalisation of border controls, the so-called US "Muslim ban", which banned nationals of certain Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States even as refugees, or Australia's practice of cherry-picking refugees based on their religion and ethnicity. Nationality and social-class-based exclusions intersect in the form of visa requirements that effectively preclude the mobility of working-class people from the Global South to the extent that scholars talk about a "global mobility divide" (Mau et al. 2015). My analysis of discrimination allows us to characterise these policies as discriminatory, given that (a) they target socially salient groups which (b) undergo adverse differential treatment and (c) this treatment is not justifiable by a legitimate goal in the context of border controls.

It is worth emphasising this last point. Migration ethics scholars who stress the discriminatory aspects of migration policies often also provide strong arguments in favour of open borders, or at least in favour of limiting the state's right to control its borders (Akhtar 2022; Carens 2013, 174–175, 179; Fine 2016; Mendoza 2015). These scholars contest whether border controls serve some legitimate goal and under which conditions. For some proponents of open borders, border controls are illegitimate, as they serve to uphold a regime of entrenched social hierarchies on the basis of racialised, ethnic, gender and class inequalities. Other scholars, however, argue that border controls can serve some legitimate goal, such as the preservation of social trust or the political community's right to collective self-determination (e.g. Miller 2016; Song 2018).[10] Most agree that even if border controls can, under certain conditions, be legitimate, states cannot permissibly stop asylum seekers from applying for asylum. On that basis, some scholars argue that instead of fully open borders, states should adopt policies of "open doors". Of course, if border controls are not permissible, all migration policies that aim to control the mobility of non-citizens are discriminatory against non-citizens. But while I am sympathetic to arguments for

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[10] Of course, whether these goals are indeed legitimate and whether they presuppose closed borders is up for debate (see, for example, Anderson, Sharma, and Wright 2012; Sharma 2020).

open borders, my point stands *regardless* of one's answer to the open borders question. Proponents of closed – or relatively closed – borders argue that states have the right to control their borders, and therefore deny some migrants admission. Yet they concede that this right is not unlimited. Specifically, they argue that border controls are only legitimate insofar as they are not discriminatory, that is, insofar as states do not deny entry to some migrants on the basis of their racial identity, ethnicity, religion, or gender (e.g. Brock 2020, 52–56; Miller 2016). Furthermore, if states cannot permissibly deny admission to some migrants on these grounds, it follows that they also cannot permissibly prevent them from applying for admission, nor impose entry requirements that exclude migrants on the basis of their membership in socially salient groups.

Third, migration policies wrongfully discriminate against some permanent residents, naturalised citizens, and members of minoritised populations within the state. Recall that a policy is wrongfully discriminatory if it entails the unjustifiable adverse differential treatment of members of socially salient groups, regardless of whether these groups are the direct target of the policy. Scholars have written extensively on the ways in which bordering policies produce and perpetuate inequalities and social hierarchies not only across states but also within the state (e.g. Mongia 2018; Sharma 2020). Indeed, migration policies wrongfully discriminate not only against incoming migrants, but also against people within the state that are adversely affected by these policies due to their membership in socially salient groups. The issue is not only symbolic. Amy Reed-Sandoval's (2020) analysis of the "socially undocumented" shows the devastating effects of the US border patrols on Latina/o/x citizens of the United States, who may even be deported for being *perceived* as undocumented. These deportations are often violent, and some of their targets are children. The extent of this practice is significant: in the United States, of the two million people who were deported from the state of California in the period 1930–2005, one million were American citizens (Kukathas 2021, 51). Despite being formally full citizens or having permanent residency rights, naturalised migrants and members of ethnic minorities are subjected to adverse differential treatment on the basis of their appearance. Crucially, this is the case regardless of whether one thinks that statistical discrimination is wrong: the treatment that naturalised migrants and ethnic minorities undergo would have been wrongfully discriminatory even if they were indeed migrants, since the goal of border control does not justify violence at the borders or the forced deportation of unaccompanied children. Therefore, the statistical probability of their migratory status does not change the fact that they are wrongfully discriminated against.

Members of other minoritised groups, such as Indigenous peoples or Roma, are also wrongfully discriminated against as a result of contemporary migration policies. Indigenous peoples have long protested against the impact of borders and border

controls on their life and social practices. The militarisation of the US-Mexico border has not only exposed Indigenous people to the same racial profiling and potential deportations as Latina/o/x people, but also cut their access to ancestral lands, violating their property rights and religious freedom (Kowalski 2016). As for Roma, not only are they a direct target of wrongfully discriminatory migration policies, they also face wrongful discrimination as an indirect effect of such policies. For example, whereas in theory Roma enjoy freedom of movement within the EU as European citizens, they often lack access to national identification documents that would prove their citizenship status, thereby becoming vulnerable to expulsion (Kóczé 2018). Simultaneously, their EU citizenship has limited the ability of Roma who are persecuted in states like Hungary or the Czech Republic to seek asylum in other European states (Stefanova 2014).

4 The Role of Methodological Nationalism

In the previous section, I argued that contemporary migration policies are wrongfully discriminatory in a variety of ways, both towards incoming migrants and other social groups. One would expect migration ethicists to contend with this, denouncing contemporary migration policies as wrongfully discriminatory, suggesting ways to correct the injustice of these migration policies, or exploring ways to move forward. However, discrimination tends to be a marginal concern in analyses of migration ethics. It is only recently that some migration ethicists started to raise the issue of discrimination in migration ethics (Akhtar 2022; Fine 2016; Lim 2017; Mendoza 2017; Oberman 2020; Owen 2020), noting the discrepancy between contemporary migration policies and the states' supposed commitment to social equality and antidiscrimination. Yet, even then, there is little engagement with discrimination in positive arguments about the treatment of migrants. In what follows, I show that this neglect can be explained when one considers the presence of methodologically nationalist assumptions and generalisations in migration ethics. To be clear, I am not suggesting that the role of methodological nationalism is one of pure causation: methodological nationalism can simply be one contributing factor among many. Methodological nationalism can also (but need not) coexist with racist and xenophobic attitudes. The point is that methodological nationalism obscures crucial considerations that, had they been taken into account, would have foregrounded questions of discrimination. Focusing on the three variants of methodological nationalism, I will show how the generalisations and assumptions they consist of prevent questions of discrimination from arising as central questions in migration ethics. I will also argue that methodological nationalism prevents migration ethicists from developing arguments that could thwart xenophobic narratives.

4.1 Naturalising the State

As we saw, one variant of methodological nationalism consists of the naturalisation of the state. This leads to the drawing of a sharp distinction between citizens and foreigners, by prioritising identifications in terms of national identity over other forms of social identification. The upshot is that when these "foreigners" migrate, they are construed as a threat to the supposed unity of the state. In this context, arguments in support of the importance of restricting migration gain credibility, as they seem to offer a solution to what is already understood as a "problem".

Let us consider an example. The arrival of large numbers of migrants at the Greek islands since 2015 gave rise to a wave of solidarity, but also to concerns about the impact of migration on the everyday life of islanders. Some people on the islands complain that due to the presence of migrants public spaces and ports are over-crowded, the local hospitals are overburdened, and there are long queues in the supermarkets and at the ATMs from where asylum seekers receive their monthly allowance. The inhumane conditions in the migrant camps create a risk of a sanitary crisis, while some people fear that migrants might commit thefts or acts of violence. As a result, a part of the population of the islands has started to support arguments that migrants should be kept out at any cost. This has led people to accept migration policies that include pushbacks, so as to prevent migrants from reaching Greece and applying for asylum, and human rights violations in the camps as a way to deter potential incoming migrants from trying to reach Europe through the islands.

As I argued in the previous section, several aspects of these policies are discriminatory. Nevertheless, most analyses in migration ethics do not focus on this. Instead, scholars tend to focus on whether and under what conditions states have the right to exclude migrants (e.g. Blake 2012; Carens 1987; Miller 2016; Song 2018; Wellman 2008). In this debate, the state is naturalised, as the dichotomy between "citizens" and "migrants" is taken as a given, and citizens are perceived as a single social group, engaged in a collective project which might be endangered by the advent of migrants. Still, at first glance, questioning the state's right to exclude seems like a particularly good place to start if one cares about justice in migration. After all, if states have no right to exclude, then the state has a duty to accept all incoming migrants. However, there are two problems with methodologically nationalist approaches to the injustices that take place at the borders.

The first problem is that starting from the principled question of the state's right to exclude does not allow scholars to factor discrimination into their arguments. The discussion revolves around whether "migrants" as a general category can be excluded, and the state's right to exclude is (rightly) delimited in specific ways: at a minimum, states cannot exclude refugees if doing so would put them in danger,

cannot prevent asylum seekers from applying for asylum, and cannot discriminate against migrants who belong in specific socially salient groups. When these exceptions have been determined, the "hard" questions begin. Yet this obscures the extent to which discrimination is tied to border controls. If we take seriously the fact that access to human mobility is highly stratified – the "global mobility divide" that I mentioned in Section 3.2. – and that migration controls have been developed along colonial lines to control the mobility of people from the Global South, then we realise that the targeted exclusion of poor, racialised, and gendered migrants from the Global South is at the heart of border controls – indeed, it is the mobility of *these* migrants that is controlled, as opposed to the mobility of highly mobile global elites (e.g. Shachar 2021). By focusing on the distinction between "migrants" and "citizens" as the key distinction, the debate around the state's right to exclude loses sight of this crucial fact, since the exclusions are construed as targeted against "migrants" in general, and not against migrants who belong to specific social groups. While discrimination is in principle rejected, it is treated as an exception and not the rule, giving it a marginal position in the debate.

The second, more fundamental problem is that the dichotomy between citizens and migrants is built into the evaluation of the state's right to exclude in a way that shapes the conclusions. Avery Kolers' (2022, 589) assertion with regard to migration illustrates this: "Here we are, just trying to do our thing, and suddenly 10,000, or a million, or a billion people might appear at our doorstep needing food and shelter, health care and a job, or a set of foster parents." Scholars suggest that there is a potential conflict of interest between citizens and migrants – who are perceived as two distinct social groups – and focus on which migration policies can legitimately resolve this conflict. Relying on the assumption that we have to consider the rights and interests of two predefined social groups, citizens and migrants, they evaluate policies of migrant selection on the basis of a supposed national interest. As the critique of methodological nationalism underscores, this construes migrants – and especially racialised migrants from the Global South who might have claims to welfare support and need to work – as a problem.

How might these analyses be different, were scholars not making methodologically nationalist assumptions? A crucial concern that is taken to justify exclusionary migration policies, especially with regard to less well-off migrants from the Global South, is that citizens would have to share their state's limited resources. We can see this concern motivating popular support for exclusionary migration policies in the case of the Greek islands, where the people are worried about the impact of migration on their access to infrastructure. Methodologically nationalist analyses address this concern in different ways. Yet were scholars not already assuming a dichotomy between "insiders" and "outsiders", they might take a different point of departure. Instead of construing the issue as a conflict of interest between migrants

and citizens, they might attribute some of the problems that occur in the context of migration not to the advent of migrants, but to the state's failure to fulfil its fundamental responsibilities towards anyone within its territory (and thus, towards both islanders and migrants). This covers not only the expectation that local hospitals have sufficient doctors and nurses to care for those who need medical attention, but also the expectation that no one lives under circumstances of humanitarian crisis. When the "us" versus "them" distinction is not predetermined, it can be formed in a context-dependent way (e.g. "anyone on the island" vs. "the state") that does not target migrants. Therefore, the question of limited resources might be better addressed not through exclusionary migration policies, but through more generous policies of redistribution. Addressing it through restrictive migration controls might then appear as wrongfully scapegoating migrants while absolving the state from its responsibility to provide a minimum welfare and to respect the basic human rights of both citizens and migrants.

This is not to say that there are no conflicts of interest between migrants and citizens in any regard or under any circumstances. For example, settled residents might have some located life plans (Stilz 2011) that most newcomers would not share. While the critique of methodological nationalism alerts us to the fact that all settled residents are not necessarily citizens and some newcomers might hold citizenship, there might still be a significant overlap between settled residents and citizens on the one hand, and newcomers and migrants on the other. This overlap might suffice to justify the generalisation in certain cases and for certain purposes. My point is that this is not the case for border controls, where the construal of a dichotomy between "citizens" and "migrants" does not seem adequate to capture the complexity of conflicts that might arise between different social groups. The reason is that appeals to a "national" interest of the citizens that supposedly conflicts with the interests of migrants overlook the wide variety of social groups with conflicting interests within states, the transnational ties of members of these groups, and the ways in which conflicts of interest traverse state borders.[11]

4.2 Ignoring the State

The second variant of methodological nationalism, that is, ignoring the role of the state in how the world is organised, also marginalises questions of discrimination in

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11 To anticipate my remarks in Section 4.3, even if most permanent residents of the islands might be Greek citizens, and might have *some* shared located life plans that are not shared by migrants, these would not correspond to *national* interests, but to partial interests of a specific group within the state (and might be aligned with the interests of other groups across various states).

migration policies. Let us look again at the example of the Greek islands. First and foremost, migrants arrive at the islands due to a restrictive migration policy that leaves no "doors" through which they could otherwise attempt to seek asylum. Second, their prolonged stay on the islands in large numbers is the result of specific state policies: migrants could be allowed to move to mainland Greece (as most of them want to); they are not, because this would complicate their potential return to Turkey if their asylum application were rejected and because of fears of the reaction of mainland populations to any potential resettlement of migrants in mainland Greece. And, third, the types of migration that discriminatory migration policies seek to prevent are often the result of past and present actions of the states to which migrants seek to emigrate. This is true not only for formerly colonial states. Even Western states without a colonial past, such as Greece, are often involved in military interventions that have caused the movement of migrants from the Global South to the Global North, through their participation in international military agreements or alliances.

Again, methodological nationalism prevents theorists from considering how states are implicated in the creation of the situations that migration ethics seeks to evaluate and address. Kolers' assertion, for example, that people in destination states "are just trying to do their thing" and are suddenly confronted with large numbers of migrants reflects this ignoring of the role of states in the creation of migratory movements. On a similar note, David Miller's (2016, 117) description of migrants who attempt to enter the state irregularly as queue-jumpers overlooks the fact that, in most cases, irregular migration is the result of migration policies that leave migrants with no alternative routes (Fine 2017). Gillian Brock, who is critical of other variants of methodological nationalism,[12] also makes suggestions on how EU states could assist refugees who want to apply for asylum so that they do not endanger their lives in trying to reach Europe (Brock 2020, 124). This ignores the role of EU states in making the refugees' journeys dangerous by externalising the EU border controls, enclosing the external borders of the EU with fences, and even by engaging in pushbacks against incoming migrants. When scholars do consider these issues, they tend to consider them as marginal cases, and not as problems that lie at the heart of contemporary migration policies.

As a result, methodologically nationalist analyses are missing crucial elements that should weigh in the evaluation of migration policies. This shows the broader relevance of the critique of methodological nationalism not only for theorising about discrimination, but also for broader arguments in migration ethics. Still, it is

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[12] While Brock (2020) does not explicitly endorse the critique of methodological nationalism, she denounces ethnocentrism in normative thinking about migration (e.g. Brock 2020, 205–207) and calls for considering the role of other agents, beyond the state, in migration justice (122–123).

important to notice that wrongful discrimination is, again, at play and is, again, rendered invisible in methodologically nationalist analyses. First, states of the Global North are not seen as wrongfully seeking to exclude racialised migrants from the Global South through a series of interconnected policies, but as simply trying to prevent the violation of their entry regulations and to protect their borders, whereas the targets of this exclusion are perceived as wrongdoers. Furthermore, by taking as background conditions what is in fact the result of contingent national policies and by losing sight of the ways Western states are presently and historically involved in the creation of the circumstances that motivate racialised migrants from the Global South to move to the Global North, theorists are again less likely to attribute responsibility to states for their treatment of migrants. This, in turn, entails that destination states are not perceived as engaged in systematic injustice against certain groups of migrants. Instead of considering that states of the Global North might be semi-rogue entities that try to eschew their responsibilities towards asylum seekers, or towards other migrants to whom they might be responsible due to colonial activities or military involvement, migration ethicists rarely question state legitimacy in the context of migration. The involvement of destination states in morally repugnant practices, such as violations of the non-refoulement principle or the externalisation of border control through agreements with states that violate the migrants' basic human rights, is rarely scrutinised. Even more rarely do scholars scrutinise the fact that the targets of these practices are not migrants in general, but migrants from specific socially salient groups, in terms of their racialised and ethnic identity, their gender and their social class. Under the presumption that states are well-intended and willing to comply with their responsibilities towards migrants, national migration policies are less likely to be considered with suspicion as wrongfully discriminatory, despite the dark history of discriminatory migration policies of many western states.

4.3 Territorialising the State

The third variant of methodological nationalism, territorialisation, also prevents migration ethicists from properly theorising about discrimination. Territorialisation has an internal and an external aspect. Internally, the equation of the state with its territory means that the differential impact of various state policies on different parts of the state's territory is often disregarded, as scholars think of "the state" as a single entity as their main unit of reference. Externally, territorialisation draws a sharp line between intrastate and international human mobility, which exception-alises international migration.

Both aspects affect migration ethics. A consequence of the *internal* aspect is that scholars do not pay sufficient attention to how migration policies disproportionately affect people who reside close to the state's borders. This is illustrated again in the example of the Greek islands. Analyses that focus on the state's right to control its borders and on the effects of immigration on the state as a whole miss the fact that not everyone in the state is affected in the same way. The transformation of border zones into "human-rights-free" or "human-rights-lite" zones, where the human rights of migrants are severely violated and the living conditions of citizens and permanent residents are degraded, disproportionately affects those who live and work in these areas, regardless of their migration status. Moreover, the tightening of migration controls in border zones – which can be extended to cover large parts of the state's territory (Shachar 2020) – means that people who live in border zones are rendered particularly vulnerable to discrimination, regardless of their citizenship and residency status, especially if they can be easily perceived as migrants. Again, this is something that needs to be taken into account in analyses of migration ethics.

The *external* aspect of territorialisation also has implications for migration ethics. Let us consider how methodological nationalism might affect our evaluation of international visa requirements. I already suggested that these requirements are part of a regime that seeks to restrict the migration of middle and working-class migrants from the Global South to the Global North. In addition, the high cost and the high rejection rates of visa applications often leave migrants who seek to escape war, poverty, abuse, or environmental disasters with no alternative than irregular migration, rendering them vulnerable to human rights violations. However, visa requirements are rarely questioned in migration ethics, as they are seen as part of the state's right to control its borders.

This analysis could change if we no longer considered international mobility as fundamentally different from intrastate mobility. Many similarities between these mobilities are obscured when one interprets social reality through the lens of methodological nationalism. First of all, most people have some experience of mobility (international or intranational) at some scale.[13] Some might have moved to study, work, or be with the ones they love. Others might have moved to find a better job, to escape oppressive relationships, or to avoid unemployment.[14] People might even have experiences of forced mobility, as environmental disasters increasingly force people to move to different parts of their country, or to a different country altogether. Crucially, in all these cases, the reasons why people move and the mobility

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13 On the similarities between forms of intranational and international mobility, see also Milioni (2024).

14 See Anderson (2024) for an analysis of how states control the mobility of working-class citizens and the racial implications of this practice.

opportunities they can access are affected to a large extent by one's socioeconomic condition, as well as by one's membership in racialised or minoritised groups. In this context, visa requirements can be recast not as legitimate expressions of the state's right to control its borders, that are imposed by "our" state against incoming migrants and that might justify the differential treatment of these migrants, but as policies imposed by states across the world to hinder the international mobility of people who belong in certain (potentially multiple) disadvantaged social groups. Taking this into account might lead to a more extensive questioning of contemporary visa requirements, regardless of whether scholars believe that states have the right to control their borders.

4.4 Imagining Alternatives

So far, I have argued that three variants of methodological nationalism contribute to the marginalisation of concerns about discrimination in migration ethics. Yet by making us overlook relevant facts and assume false dichotomies, methodological nationalism does not simply distort our understanding of the world. It is also world-making: it *creates* a world in which distinctions on the basis of national belonging are accepted as quasi-natural social facts. This not only affects what is under critical scrutiny in normative thinking about migration, but also constrains our political imaginaries. Ian Hacking (1986) suggests that "labeling" does not simply affect our understanding of how the world is, it also bears on our conceptualisation of how the world might have been, might be, and ought to be. That is, it bounds the sphere of possibilities for human action. More positively, however, coming up with new ways of describing the world opens up new possibilities for action. Taking the first step is particularly important, as it can lead to a positive feedback loop where new ideas are expanded, tested, modified, and further developed.

This means that there is one more way in which methodological nationalism, in all its variants, prevents migration ethicists from addressing discrimination through their analyses: it hampers their potential to come up with alternative ways of looking at the world that would effectively counter xenophobic narratives and provide a convincing normative framework for relating to each other as equals. If they want their arguments to cut across traditional lines, those who decry discrimination should be able to provide answers to urgent and legitimate questions regarding the impact of less restrictive migration policies. While these questions are not ignored, the discussion currently taking place is, at least for the most part, within the confines of methodological nationalism: does migration have a negative or a positive impact on *national* economies? Will the *national* welfare system be sustainable if too many

migrants are admitted? Will *citizens* lose their jobs or see their wages drop? So far, this framing has not proved to be very helpful, as it seems that the answers are not definitive (Hosein 2019, 36–55). Arguably, this might lead even people who do not hold racist or xenophobic beliefs to support discriminatory migration policies, due to a concern about the impact of migration in their state.

Stepping out of the framework of methodological nationalism might allow theorists who oppose discriminatory migration policies to address these concerns in a more productive way by reframing the questions. This will potentially enable people to come up with creative solutions that can address legitimate concerns around migration without resorting to discriminatory practices. For example, given that the economic impact of migration on national economies is contested, it might be useful to ask about its impact on the most disadvantaged members of both sending and receiving societies. Instead of asking whether migrants will take the jobs of citizens, it might be helpful to examine which jobs are affected by migration, which parts of the state's population profit and which stand to lose, and how to support those most vulnerable to these changes. Or, instead of asking about the viability of national welfare systems, we could try to devise welfare systems that would be resilient to the movement of people across borders. Of course, the answers to these questions might turn out to be just as ambiguous. Yet even the reframing of the questions invites us to think beyond the "us" versus "them" dichotomy of methodological nationalism, and in that sense undermines the potency of xenophobic rhetoric.

Furthermore, the potential impact of moving beyond the dichotomy of "citizens" and "migrants" is not limited to devising new models for institutional interventions. Developing a view of the world that does not construe migrants as a problem for citizens but undermines the two categories, by *migrantising* citizens and *demigrantising* migrants (Anderson 2019), can lead to fostering political solidarities that transcend the "citizen" versus "migrant" dichotomy. This in turn can change what theorists perceive as feasibility constraints and transform what is perceived as both just and feasible. For example, minimum residence requirements are commonly required in order to access welfare benefits and establish rights to permanent residence or citizenship. Within a methodologically nationalist framework that assumes a conflict of interest between settled citizens and incoming migrants, these requirements might appear legitimate and escape critical scrutiny. But even if one is attentive to the ways in which these requirements might be unjust,[15] arguing for eliminating them might appear absurd, given the widespread popular support for these requirements. Yet, this support is due to the fact that minimum residence requirements are taken to protect working-class citizens from the impact of migration. Undermining this assumption and exploring the negative impact of these

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15 I make this argument in another work in progress.

requirements on racialised, gendered, and working-class citizens and migrants alike (Anderson 2024) can lend theoretical support to existing social movements against differentiations of rights on the basis of one's citizenship. In turn, social mobilisation against the differential treatment of people on the basis of their migration status can then tilt what appears to be feasible in normative aruments about migration.

5 What's a Migration Ethicist to do?

At this point, one might raise an objection. I described methodological nationalism as a cognitive bias. I also argued that people should avoid methodological nationalism because it marginalises questions about discrimination and has proved to be ineffective in countering xenophobic narratives. However, if methodological nationalism is different from a methodological choice, this means that scholars make its assumptions implicitly. Getting rid of methodological nationalism might be a good theoretical idea, but how can it ever be applied?

As a preliminary remark, while people might inevitably rely on *some* cognitive biases to make sense of the world, this does not mean that cognitive biases are entirely outside of our control. People should beware of the possibility that they hold morally problematic cognitive biases, and be prepared to examine their views critically, identify these biases, and try to change them (Holroyd, Scaife, and Stafford 2017; Saul 2013). In the case of migration in particular, our long history of discriminatory migration policies and the prevalence of discrimination in contemporary societies ought to make us aware of the possibility that we hold implicit biases. This is not meant to be finger-pointing. The prevalence of methodological nationalism and the breadth of its variants mean that no one is off the hook: more likely than not, our normative thinking of migration is affected by methodological nationalism in some ways. Rather, the point is that once we become aware that we might be thinking through the lens of methodological nationalism and that this is conducive to discrimination, we ought to take action to change our way of thinking.[16]

This brings us back to migration ethicists as academics. While people outside of academia might also be engaged in normative theorising about migration, migration ethicists have a special role to play. First of all, theorists are trained to think hard about concepts, question their assumptions, and challenge established ways of thinking about the world – this is part of what academics do. Migration ethicists in particular are more likely to be aware of the concept of methodological nationalism,

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16 Gender might offer an apt analogy. Living in patriarchal societies means that it is very likely that we all have internalised patriarchal norms in some ways. The point is to be alert to this and strive to eliminate the influence of these norms on our thinking.

and to be able to identify its assumptions in their own research and the research of others. In addition, through their research, migration ethicists can sustain, question, or directly undermine methodological nationalism. And while we should not over-estimate the impact of academic research, a change in the way that it addresses some issues could have spillover effects on the way that society addresses those same issues. Developing new ideas might not be sufficient, but it does bring us a step closer to changing the world.

This does not mean that migration ethicists should stop engaging with questions about the state. After all, states are powerful entities. Adopting a state-centred perspective might reflect an acknowledgement of this fact and a conscious decision to theorise about the role of states in the migratory context. However, the critique of methodological nationalism entails that migration ethicists should be very careful about the assumptions that they make in their theories. When they develop state-centred arguments, they should take into account the potential implications of their approach. One such implication is, as I have argued, that by ignoring, naturalising, or territorialising the state, researchers perpetuate a cognitive bias that obscures the problem of discrimination in analyses of migration. Those who consciously adopt the assumptions of methodological nationalism should take this into account and take measures to counter these effects. One strategy could be to make one's assumptions explicit and clarify that they are simply methodological assumptions that reflect one specific, contingent perspective. Another strategy could be to point out other potential perspectives on the issue, again making clear that one's methodological choices are contingent. Not to take any measures to correct the perspective of methodological nationalism – even when one has made a considered methodological choice to follow the assumptions that characterise methodological nationalism and is therefore not, strictly speaking, a methodological nationalist – would be to show indifference to-wards the potential consequences of one's analyses for members of socially salient groups and would therefore be wrong.

6 Conclusions

In this paper, I explore whether methodological nationalism is not only empirically false, but also normatively wrong. More specifically, I argue that migration ethicists have at least one good moral reason to avoid the perspective of methodological nationalism when they engage in normative thinking about migration: its assump-tions prevent them from properly theorising about discrimination in migration policies and from addressing narratives that support discriminatory migration policies. This does not mean that a state-centred perspective is always problematic. As I have argued, this perspective might be justified if individuals adopt it

consciously because they consider it the best way to address the normative challenges of migration. However, in that case, they should take measures to attenuate the effects of their assumptions.

I want to finish by underscoring that this paper tells only one part of the story. It provides one reason why methodological nationalism is wrong, and this reason is tied to discriminatory migration policies. The limitations of my argument are therefore twofold. First, there may be more reasons why methodological nationalism is wrong, in the context of migration and beyond. Second, moving beyond methodological nationalism does not imply that wrongful discrimination, in its current or in other forms, will disappear. This, however, does not mean that we should let methodological nationalism off the hook. Instead, the critique of methodological nationalism should be seen as part of a broader critique that aims to uncover the patterns that perpetuate the marginalisation of some people and provide alternatives. Addressing one's own methodologically nationalist assumptions is one small but necessary step in this direction.

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