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PROPOSAL ABSTRACT

IDENTIFICATION

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PAPER

Title: Beyond methodological nationalism: The contribution of Robert E. Park to the history of intercultural communication

The legacy of nineteenth century social theory followed a “nationalist” model of society, assuming that analysis of social realities depends upon national boundaries, taking the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis, and developing the concept of methodological nationalism. This perspective regarded the nation-state as the natural - and even necessary - form of society in modernity. Thus, the constitution of large cities, at the end of the 19th century, through the intense flows of immigrants coming from diverse political and linguistic communities posed an enormous challenge to all social research. One of the most significant studies responding to this set of issues was *The Immigrant Press and its Control*, by Robert E. Park, one of the most prominent American sociologists of the first half of the 20th century. *The Immigrant Press and its Control* was part of a larger project entitled *Americanization Studies: The Acculturation of Immigrant Group into American Society*, funded by the Carnegie Corporation following World War I, taking as its goal to study the so-called “Americanization methods” during the 1920s.

This paper revisits that particular work by Park to reveal how his detailed analysis of the role of the immigrant press overcame the limitations of methodological nationalism. By granting importance to language as a tool uniting each community and by showing how the strength of foreign languages expressed itself through the immigrant press, Park demonstrated that the latter produces a more ambivalent phenomenon than simply the assimilation of immigrants. On the one hand, the immigrant press served as a connecting force, driven by the desire to preserve the mother tongue and culture while at the same time awakening national sentiments that had, until then, remained diffuse. Yet, on the other hand, it facilitated the adjustment of immigrants to the

American context. As a result, Park's work contributes to our understanding of a particular liminal moment inherent within many intercultural contexts, the space between emigrant identity (emphasizing the country of origin) and immigrant identity (emphasizing the newly adopted country). His focus on the role played by media in the socialization of immigrant groups presaged later work on this subject by communication scholars.

Focusing attention on Park's research leads to other studies of the immigrant experience from the same period (e.g., Thomas & Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*), and also to insights on multi-presence and interculturality as significant but often overlooked phenomena in the study of immigrant socialization.